

Talking population geographies and a 'love letter' to the journal

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Abstract

Various significant anniversaries for population geography as a recognisable subdiscipline fall round about now, in 2023, serving as fitting prompts for reflecting upon its character, history and possible futures. This paper offers such a reflection, taking an interview transcript between the two authors as its basis, the format here offering a directness of address not always possible in standard academic papers. Arguments are advanced about widening the focus of the subdiscipline, centring on the complexity of what is taken to constitute a 'population' and its 'demographics'—asking about who and what is being counted, how and why—and considering the many ways in which matters of geography, space and place enter into the 'biopolitics' of life and death, nurturance and eradication, survival and abandonment, inclusion and exclusion. Concurrently, claims are made about the value of being outward-looking, drawing on diverse philosophies, theories, literatures and insights only fleetingly represented in the subdiscipline to date. More specifically, the paper is rooted in one author's intensive use of the present journal, *Population, Space and Place*, for undergraduate teaching, with commentary and scholarly endnotes (cross-referencing past contributions to the journal) demonstrating the journal generative role in the past, present and future of population geography.

KEYWORDS

International Journal of Population Geography; knowledge; *Population, Space and Place*; population geography; subdiscipline

1 | CONTEXT

By one reckoning, the subdisciplinary field of population geography is 70 years old this year, 2023, if it is dated to the influential paper published by Trewartha (1953), while the UK's Population Geography Research Group (PGRG) celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation two years ago (in 2021) and the current journal, *Population, Space and Place*, will enjoy its 30th anniversary two years hence (in 2025). These anniversaries can be occasions prompting reflection on what population geography has been, what it currently entails and what it might become (Finney et al., [in press](#)),

in which regard the journal itself is a wonderful 'archive', an easily accessible and searchable documentary record of contributions to—and statements about—the subdiscipline.¹ An appreciative partial appraisal of the journal's back-catalogue in this respect—our 'love letter' to the journal—underpins claims made in the present paper, where our purpose is to 'take the temperature' of the subdiscipline at the present moment, and to circle around a range of concerns pressing on its possible trajectories from the past into the future. Such concerns touch on the identity of

¹Back issues are available online at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15448452>.

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population geography, its history and transitions, its politics, its concepts and methods, its objects of inquiry, the forms of knowledge that it produces about these objects, the applications of this knowledge, the activities that might be pursued to promote, diffuse and rework the subdiscipline, and more.

The paper arises from a PGRG archiving initiative tied to the 50th anniversary mentioned above,² in the course of which members of the PGRG Committee interviewed individual academics who, at least in some respects, position themselves as population geographers (Finney et al., *in press*). One of these interviews took place in 2019 between colleagues at the University of Glasgow in Scotland: Kate Botterill, the interviewer, and Chris Philo, the interviewee. The interview covered the sorts of concerns indicated above, to do with the subdiscipline's current landscape and future prospects, and, on reviewing the initial transcript, we perceived that a tidied-up version might be a useful addition to the task of ongoing subdisciplinary self-reflection. We could have redrafted it as a conventional paper, but felt there to be a directness of argumentation in the transcript—given by the immediacy and rhetorical performance of speech—that would be lost if turned into the circumlocutions of a conventional 'review and theory' paper. There are also precedents for advancing scholarly-conceptual work through the interview form, including in the literature of academic geography.³

What follows is inevitably shaped by our own scholarly backgrounds, interests and preferences. In terms of academic identities, Kate positions herself as a feminist political geographer and critical migration researcher who regularly engages with population geography, while Chris positions himself as a historical and social geographer with interests leaning into population geography. We are both eclectic and open-minded in our borrowings across disciplines and from diverse conceptual and methodological sources, and we share a critical sensibility in favouring inquiries that address problems of injustice, exclusion and suffering in 'real' human contexts. As such, and to anticipate, our vision here is one that *does* see a continuing role for something called 'population geography'—retaining a distinctive identity complete with institutional supports, a dedicated journal included—but that it must never settle within comfortable, pre-set parameters. Rather, it must be continually adapting as the world around it changes, welcoming in new and challenging subject-matters, and constantly engaging a wider universe of intellectual endeavour (philosophical, scientific, cultural, legal and technological) and methodological innovation (quantitative, qualitative and all points in-between). That is precisely not a demand to rip up older scholarship by population geographers, but instead a call always to be drawing inspiration from the foundations laid by past work in the process of fostering forms of inquiry appropriate for confronting uncertain futures. Cryptically, it is to embrace a stance of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or', to be inclusive and expansive, critical but generous.

²An initial report-back on this interview project was given at the virtual '50 Years of the Population Geography Research Group' celebration event, convened by Nissa Finney (University of St Andrews), November, 2021. See also the 'Commentary' in Buyuklieva et al. (2021) reviewing past contributions to journals published under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, as well as the virtual issue of selected contributions found at [http://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)9999-0017.50yrs-pop-geography](http://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)9999-0017.50yrs-pop-geography).

³Examples include, in chronological order, Harvey and Haraway (1995), Lees, (2012), Cooper and Noxolo (2020), and Dekeyser, (2020).

A specific horizon for the interview is two interlinked undergraduate courses run by Chris: 'Population Geographies 1: Past and Present', an explicitly subdisciplinary survey centred on papers published in the current journal, *Population, Space and Place (PSP)*, and its predecessor, the *International Journal of Population Geography (IJPG)*; and 'Population Geographies 2: Space, Sex and Death', a conceptually informed investigation into worldly articulations of population, power and socio-spatial relations.⁴ Figure 1 shows the titles of lectures given in the two courses, capturing Chris's interests with regard to the history, foci and theory of Population Geography (as named subdiscipline, here with upper-case 'P' and 'G') and what he terms multiple 'applied population geographies' debated and enacted in the world. These interests resonate throughout the interview, while much of the scholarly underwiring of the interview reflects Chris's deep immersion in the back-catalogue of *PSP/IJPG*, often here simply called 'the journal'. This underwiring is captured in lengthy 'annotations' to the interview text, both scholarly citations and more substantial endnotes offering short discursive elaborations and further cross-referencing of papers published chiefly, if not entirely, in the journal. The interview text itself has been abridged, removing passages where discussion shifted too far from the theme of population geography in the horizon of the journal. It has also been edited, removing the ephemera of hesitations, false starts and the like, while seeking to improve grammar and clarity but retaining the rhythms and constructions of speech. **KB** denotes questions and comments from Kate; **CP** denotes responses from Chris.

2 | INTERVIEW

KB: So, Chris, have you memories or associations with the PGRG? Have you ever had any activity within the group?

CP: I think that I've been part of two events which fell under the PGRG umbrella. The first was 'Rethorising Population Geography' back in 2000,⁵ that led to the 2001 special issue of the journal, where I did the 'Accumulating populations' piece (Philo, 2001). And that was a really intriguing day in all kinds of ways; and one of my favourite papers ever is the one that was given by Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2001a, 2001b), which is in that theme issue: it's one that I constantly return to and indeed I use it extensively in the course that I'm teaching at the moment.⁶ And I think there was also another event,

⁴The courses were delivered as Honours options to a combined third and fourth year undergraduate class (Scottish Honours degrees last four years) as a sequential pair in academic sessions 2017–2018 and 2019–2020 and then combined together by Olivia Mason in academic session 2021–2022. Chris thanks Olivia for the insightful manner in which she adapted the courses.

⁵(Re)thorising Population Geography', PGRG symposium held at the University of St Andrews, September 2000. Papers from this symposium were published in the journal together with an editorial introduction (Graham & Boyle, 2001).

⁶The title of her paper, 'Maternities in 'out-of-the-way' places: epistemological possibilities for rethorising population geography', immediately signals its significance: exploring knowledges and practices about pregnancy, child-birth and mothering that clearly depart, substantively and geographically, from the Global-Northern 'mainstream' of thinking about population dynamics and life-events. Illuminating deep-ethnographical inquiry with attentiveness to feminist, indigenous and (what would now be termed) postcolonial framings, Underhill-Sem also directly engages the subdisciplinary field of population geography.

POPULATION GEOGRAPHIES 1: PAST AND PRESENT	
<i>Lectures</i>	
(L1)	Uncertain and contested knowledge: introducing Population Geography
(L2)	Malthus and Ravenstein: a pre-history of Population Geography
(L3)	Trewartha's big idea: a manifesto for Population Geography
(L4)	'Whizz for atoms': the science, numbers, graphs and models of Population Geography
(L5)	'Long on fact and short on theory': the reluctant theorisation of Population Geography
(L6)	Hearing 'life stories': towards Population Geography as witnessing
(L7)	Recovering 'surplus populations': towards Population Geography as social critique
(L8)	Revising 'the body count': Population Geography and beyond discounting
(L9)	Maternities and indigenities: Population Geographies from the margins?
(L10)	Anthropocentric or Anthropocenic: political-ecological Population Geographies?
POPULATION GEOGRAPHIES 2: SPACE, SEX AND DEATH	
<i>Lectures</i>	
(L1)	Dangerous and hurtful knowledge: introducing 'applied' population geographies
(L2)	Foucault, disciplinary power and an 'anatomy-politics' of individual bodies
(L3)	Accumulating populations: the 'anatomy-politics' of prisons and other institutions
(L4)	Foucault, biopower and a 'biopolitics' of collective bodies
(L5)	Governing populations: the 'biopolitics' of cities, colonies and other collectivities
(L6)	Agamben, <i>homo sacer</i> , 'spaces of exception' and the camp
(L7)	Breeding populations: eugenic geographies and 'the deaf'
(L8)	(Un)sexing populations: of prostitutes, promiscuity and pervers
(L9)	Killing populations: genocidal geographies and the Red Famine
(L10)	Controlling populations: 'make kin, not babies?' and a return to Malthus?

FIGURE 1 Lecture outlines for CP's courses at the University of Glasgow.

although I'm not sure if that was under the umbrella of the PGRG or not: that was something Allan Findlay ran in Dundee which was on 'Vulnerability'.⁷ That too became a special issue in the journal, and that was where my 'Wounding Geographies' piece (Philo, 2005) was included.

KB: What prompted you to take part in those events initially?

CP: I was sent a book to review by the journal, which was that Nathan Kantrowitz book, called *Close Control* (Katrowitz, 1996), which is actually about Statesville, a US maximum security prison. And I was interested in the book and in how you might run it alongside Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1976), effectively standard Foucault, the stuff that's now more familiar to geographers on 'disciplinary power'. And suddenly, it became clear to me that there is an argument to be made about 'accumulating populations' (Philo, 2001), which was essential to Foucault and *Discipline and Punish*; and I thought this could actually be a longer contribution, and it went from there.⁸

Indeed, elsewhere she underlines what she draws, positively, from the work of population geographers of the Pacific such as Murray Chapman (e.g., Chapman & Prothero, 1985) and also the anthropologist-geographer Joël Bonnemaison (e.g., Bonnemaison, 1985; also Waddell, 1999). Her 2001a paper should be read alongside several others by her (e.g., Underhill-Sem, 1999, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2015). It would also be compelling to run Underhill-Sem's writings alongside investigations of 'placental geographies', 'uterine geographies' and 'menopausal geographies' (DeLyser & Shaw, 2013; Fannin, 2014; Lewis, 2018).

⁷'Making Sense of Vulnerability', conference co-sponsored by the IGU Commission on Population Geography and the Department of Geography, University of Dundee. Papers from this conference were published in the journal together with an editorial introduction (Findlay, 2005). The PGRG was not directly involved in this event, even if numerous PGRG members definitely were.

That was my first, if you like, brush with population geography in terms of an active engagement and a publication. Because of preparing the paper for the conference and then publication, I did then think I should have a little look at population geography, so I could position my paper a little bit more. Population geography as a subdisciplinary field, whilst I was aware of it, was, for much of my earlier research and scholarship, not on my radar as one that was very relevant to the work that I was doing, which was the stuff on historical geography, 'madness', asylums (e.g., Philo, 2004). I mean I look back and of course I can now see that work through a population geography lens, or what I now consider to be my version of a population geography lens.⁹

⁸Foucault discussed institutional spaces such as prisons, workhouses and factories that, echoing Marx, depended upon 'accumulating' populations to 'accumulate' profit (Philo, 2001). He stressed the extent to which prisoners and workhouse inmates were supposed to engage in productive labour, both to earn income for the institutions and to be disciplined into being productive citizens when returned into capitalist society. It was this move, where Foucault gave a 'population' twist to his inquiries into societal treatments of what have cryptically been termed 'the mad, the bad and the sad', that decisively lit a spark in Chris's mind for looking again at population geography: for pondering the connections between his prior work, usually framed as historical and social geography, and population geography. More narrowly, it occurred to Chris that, in the simplest of senses, the mere fact that institutional spaces are almost always peaks on the surface of population density— anomalies, as it were, in the population trend-surface—means that there *should* be good reason to explore them through a population geography lens. A reviewer of Philo (2001) thought that this was banal reasoning on Chris's part: it is curious what strikes some as a profound insight but others as trivially obvious.

⁹Asylums, alongside so many other carceral or 'closed' spaces of so many stripes, have always been, in Foucauldian terms, sites for the exertion of both 'disciplinary power' and 'biopower' (variably balancing the imperatives of each different power 'series', thereby scrambling any simple chronological reading of Foucault's accounts of power). These notions are central to the first half of Chris's 'Space, Sex and Death' option (lectures PG2, L2-5). Seen

KB: So moving on to the next part then, which is much more about population geography as a subdiscipline of human geography or geography more broadly, where do you sit within that space intellectually?

CP: Well it obviously depends how you draw your map of the discipline and those various subdisciplinary fields. Do I self-identify as a population geographer? I probably would now, on certain occasions, in certain places. If someone asks what are your subdisciplinary affiliations, I would mention population geography, but I'd first of all say historical and social [geography]

KB: What would then distinguish population geography from those other subdisciplines, theoretically, methodologically?

CP: Well at one very simple level, my answer is population! I mean obviously that's a deceptive question, it can be answered in many different ways, but you've got a subdisciplinary field that takes as its object—and it's recognised in all kinds of ways, particularly in more critical versions of population geography, that this object is constructed¹⁰—the object of population. Human population? There's an intriguing little debate to be had about whether population geography should also sometimes wonder about non-human populations.¹¹

I think that the subdiscipline's object is nonetheless population, the idea of a mass of human beings, the idea of how that mass of human beings is collectively identified and, of course, in a classical population geography sense, how it's counted, how it's measured, how its characteristics are delimited. And a very obvious schism within population geography is between those people who simply take these things as somehow essential—they're essentially given in the real world, we simply see them, note them, put a number to them, put them in a table, put them in a graph—and those people who see them as always very much contested categories in the making. So that even things as apparently stable as 'man' or 'woman' population geography should be addressing, questioning, and hence there should also be a 'trans population geography' out there or a 'gender non-binary population geography'.¹²

through the lens of Philo (2001), a wealth of geographical inquiries into asylums, prisons, detention centres, secure units, orphanages and more—indeed, 'camps' of all kinds, to use an Agambenian construction—can be seen as central to population geography.

¹⁰Population is hence never something solely 'natural', simply a phenomenon and attendant processes waiting there in the world to be named, counted and mapped. Of course, there are 'things'—bodies, babies, deaths, being sick, being hungry—that comprise the raw materials out of which human thinking (and policies-practices) about 'population' and 'demography' emerge, but exactly *what* that thinking entails (the terms, the assumptions, the implications) cannot but be discursively—socially, culturally, economically, politically—constructed. A key paper in the journal by White and Jackson (1995) tellingly underscores this claim, emphasising the extent to which demographic categories are always shot through with complex, power-laden issues of identity, hierarchies, exclusions and more (so often gendered, racialised, classed, sexed and otherwise forcing different population cohorts into visibility or invisibility).

¹¹What would a 'more-than-human' population geography look like? Does it just become a biogeography of non-human species distributions and migrations? Of course, human-population geography is intimately shaped by the geographies of non-human populations (plants, animals, organisms, pathogens), which suggests countless linkages to current work on the geographies of biohazards, anti-biotics, pro-biotics and much more.

¹²We have yet to locate anything approximating a 'trans population geography', but there is a small body of work on trans demographics (e.g., Meier & Labuski, 2013). In the complex arena of sexual rather than (or entangled with) gender identity, there are intimations of a gay and lesbian population geography in the journal (Brown & Knopp, 2006; Cooke, 2005; Fortes

I'm elaborating, I'm over-elaborating. The point is there's population as this object, how it is understood, how it's effectively managed, disciplined, how it becomes an object that's available for operations to be conducted upon it. This is indeed a Foucauldian way of talking about population: the way in which it becomes something that can be operated upon for all kinds of reasons, for all kinds of purposes and in all kinds of times and places; and how, in the process of it being operated upon, the chances are it's going to be spatially manipulated, it's going to be partitioned in your mind, it's going to be partitioned on the ground, it's going to be partitioned in categories which appear in official documentation, it may well get segmented on the ground in all kinds of ways with real consequences, both positive for some peoples of a population and deleterious for others.¹³

KB: Yeah. Absolutely, great answer! And so in terms of epistemological differences in how population is understood first of all, what perspectives in the subdiscipline do you think have been dominant, what perspectives have been less visible, and has that got anything to do with the success or failure of population geography as a discipline?

CP: That's a very difficult question. The subdiscipline has typically been quite straightforward in its understanding of what this thing called population is; and, going back to what I said a moment ago, it risks essentialising the categories. And then there is maybe too much of an emphasis on a quantitative modelling of population as object, and not enough attention to the assemblage of population as object of knowledge; or not enough attention to the ways in which the classic demographic events of fertility, morbidity and mortality, and all sorts of life-events in-between, are actually felt and experienced from within. I would want to be careful about over-caricaturing a certain kind of population geography, but I am talking about a population geography that's more empirical—I hesitate to call it positivist because I think that's a misunderstanding of positivism, but more empirical, leaning towards positivism—believing that there are fundamental laws of population dynamics that are ultimately invariant across time and space.¹⁴

de Lena, 2022; Wimark & Fortes de Lena, 2022; Wimark & Östh, 2014), although a more deep-seated 'queering' of the subdiscipline is arguably still awaited.

¹³For all that, explicitly Foucauldian treatments in the journal remain limited. The most sustained are Legg (2005; also Legg, 2006, 2007, 2008) and Philo (2001, 2005), but also: Brown and Knopp (2006), couched as an effort in 'Foucauldian population geography'; Raghuram (2008), speaking of 'governmentality'; Metcalfe et al. (2011), referencing 'Foucault's population geographies'; Holt and Costello (2011), indexing 'a focus on power' in the journal as initiated by the Legg and Philo papers; Hoang (2018), discussing 'governmentality' through both institutions and self-regulation of labour migration in Asia; and Radziwinowiczówna and Morgan (2023), conducting a Foucauldian inquiry into 'racist biopolitical practice' and the deportation of 'rough sleepers'. Findlay and Mulder (2015, p. 689) explicitly mention "Foucaultian population geography" as one key move in the journal that responded to the call by Graham and Boyle (2001) to 'retheorise' the subdiscipline.

¹⁴Graham (1999), frequent contributor to the population geography literature, clarifies that much work in this subdisciplinary field is best cast as 'data-driven' and 'pragmatic', whether deploying quantitative or qualitative 'data'. Such a designation is still apt for many, maybe the majority of, papers carried by the journal through to the present. Relatively few are wholeheartedly positivist, let alone logical positivist, in searching for iron laws of spatial-demographic cause-and-effect relations, although more arguably aspire in that direction. Much hinges on whether persistent use of (multiple) regression analyses is merely empiricist, offering advanced numerical data-crunching but still ultimately just characterising patterns within data-sets, or is regarded as incipiently positive, decisively testing hypotheses in either pursuit or application of 'law-like statements'.

Indeed, I think there's this empirical kind of population geography, and I suppose I would want to critique it from a more structural, critical vein of thought, one which becomes potentially for me Foucauldian, but also from a more humanistic, interpretative angle, so that questions of living as a population, being a population that has stuff done to it, being a population on the move, also becomes about experience and values. It's something that needs to be voiced: there needs to be a biographical interest¹⁵; something that needs to be considered in terms of the values that are both felt from within (for instance, about moving)¹⁶ and those which are imposed from without ("well we don't want that population here as part of our state, so leave!").¹⁷

So, you've got an empiricist, positivist population geography, probably one that has been pretty much dominant, but I think that even a lot of those papers in that tradition, once you start looking at them more carefully, you can still see subtle inferences about questions of meaning or questions about politics. But, broadly speaking, you've got that kind of tradition and then there are other kinds of traditions which are more critical, more structural, and then there are other kinds of traditions again which are more humanistic, more experiential, and many, many shades in-between.¹⁸ And then those other traditions start discussing things

like feminism or postcolonialism,¹⁹ and all those other 'isms' and 'ologies', that I think do enliven and enrich and complicate population geography (and see King, 2012).

But what I would also say is that, in line with the way I often do things historiographically, I'm quite intrigued to go back to older statements because often they're not quite what you think they are. And so a case that we deconstruct in the Glasgow course is Trewartha (1953), the 1953 founding document²⁰: there are few subdisciplinary fields within geography that have such an obvious first reference-point. Glenn Trewartha himself is often presented as the person who establishes this subdisciplinary field. Well, that's not what he wanted to do at all; he wanted to establish a 'trinitarian' approach to geography as a whole, which had 'physical earth', 'cultural earth' and 'population' as the three pivots of a triangle which effectively was specifying the terrain for academic geography as a whole. People look back and say, "oh, he established a systematic subfield;" well he didn't do that and that was not what he wanted to do at all: it's the opposite, he wanted to establish something that was much more holistic.

And people also look back and they say, well, he also talked about "we need to be quantitative;" and Trewartha was in all kinds of ways quantitative; and of course remember he was a climate scientist, which is intriguing. He was in some ways more of a physical geographer, and as such he was one of the first people to talk about 'greenhouse gases'. But for me, several things stand out in the 1953 paper, one of which is he's basically saying that geographers have tended to ignore people; that even human geographers have tended to ignore people because they are these weirdly transient small bits of landscape. In a classic geographical tradition whereby you observe landscape, human beings per se don't feature very much, they are virtually immaterial. So he says, no, I want to put population, meaning human beings, back into the picture. But also, he says, I'm interested in 'qualities'. So what's often not remembered about his paper is the extent to which Trewartha talks about 'qualities': he talks about the qualities of individuals, their values. He's not talking about

¹⁵Particularly emblematic of a humanistic manoeuvre in population geography has been advocacy of 'biographical' attentiveness to the experiences—set within the narrated life-stories, especially migration stories—as told by individuals effectively bearing witness to their own (moving) life-worlds. Lawson (1993; also Lawson, 2000) provides a pioneering statement in this respect. Examples in the journal include: Li and Findlay (1996) deploying interviews to hear the stories of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants; Ni Laoire (2000) explicitly naming as 'biographical' her approach to working with Irish young migrants; Halfacree (2004) using migrants' voices to recover 'non-economic' reasons for peoples' 'counter-urbanisation' moves; Gladkova and Mazzucato (2015) searching migration stories for the role of ad hoc social interactions; and Luo (2023) also explicitly naming as 'biographical' her work based on taking the 'life histories' of 'irregular' Chinese immigrants to the UK.

¹⁶Subsequently the journal has carried numerous papers where the values—the perceptions, conceptions and imaginings—of migration have been evoked, including: giving a poignant personal narrative introducing a special issue on America as a 'land of migrants' (Shrestha, 2003; also Shrestha, 1995); quarrying archived oral histories to convey the horrors of 'forced migration' imposed on a Native American 'tribe' being removed to a 'reservation' (Berry & Rinehart, 2003); reconstructing the 'imaginative geographies' held in the minds of British migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand (Higgins, 2018); and, paralleling the Higgins paper, reconstructing how some 'victimised' young women British migrants to Australia end up substituting a 'spatial imaginary' of 'paradise' with a 'disruptive' one that revisits a brutalising 'convict' and 'prison' portrayal (Ridgway, 2021). Experiential and values-attuned studies may be situated within a broader arc of so-called 'reflexive' migration research, alert to how meanings of migration, place, borders and more are co-constituted by researchers and researched; and this reflexive approach can itself be set alongside a 'doing migration' approach concerned with the many ways in which individuals perform—or are cajoled into performing—the identity of 'migrant' (even if actually immobile, never having moved and not intending to do so). A fulsome statement along these latter lines is brought to the journal by Amelina (2021).

¹⁷Many papers in the journal obviously deal with 'forced' migrations, displacements and disposals, sometimes fuelled or at least inflected by ethnocentric, maybe overtly racist, hostilities displayed by (what should be) 'host' populations and thereby seriously impacting immigrants', refugees' and asylum-seekers' senses of belonging, well-being and safety (e.g., Botterill & Hancock, 2018; Constable, 2021; Montange, 2021; Newbold et al., 2022; Parreñas et al., 2021; Ranta & Nancheva, 2018; Schiltz et al., 2019; Shubin, 2012; Wren, 2003). Related work on deportations and detentions of refugees and asylum-seekers, the latter with elements of a Foucauldian concern for disciplinary institutions, is also present in the journal (e.g., Griffiths, 2012; Kaufman, 2012; Klein & Williams, 2012). Encapsulated here are arguably the predominant critical population geography themes now peppering PSP.

¹⁸Online searches for both 'structural' and 'experiential' in the journal each return substantial numbers of papers, although they rarely reflect theoretical ties back to overtly stated philosophical or social-theoretical positions. Interestingly, several papers do explicitly seek to

address the simultaneities of structure and agency (or experience), notably Esson (2019) and Healey (2006: the latter being positioned as a 'structurationist' exercise after Giddens; also see parts of Hugo, 1996).

¹⁹Overt statements about a feminist population geography are quite rare in the journal, although Silvey (2004a, 2004b) expressly introduces the insights of 'critical and feminist geographers', but numerous papers on diverse matters of women, gender, power and inequality—notably in relation to migration—can easily be identified (e.g., Raghuram, 2008, 2021; also Chattopadhyay, 2010; Elmhirst, 2007). An explicitly postcolonial line is also not all that foregrounded in the journal, although studies that speak of 'dispossession' of indigenous peoples surface (e.g., Berry & Rinehart, 2003; Gifford & Dunne, 2014; Whitmore, 1996), while a large number of inquiries into the population dynamics of regions in the Global South (including China) are more-or-less explicit in querying the extent to which Global-Northern knowledges, models and theories are entirely relevant (comprising a kind of low-level postcolonial 'questioning back').

²⁰This paper was originally a Presidential Address given in Spring 1953 to the Association of American Geographers Annual Conference held in Cleveland, Ohio. Bailey (2005), when narrating the history of the subdiscipline, writes of 'Cleveland and beyond', centralising not just Trewartha's address/paper but where he actually delivered it. The journal devoted a special issue to reassessing Trewartha (1953) 50 years on, although that issue actually appeared in 2004 with an editorial by Pandit (2004). Several authors in the latter persist in suggesting that Trewartha intended to found a subdiscipline, but that really was not the case, although he did at the outset suggest that "a serious and sustained effort should be made to develop a working concept of population geography" (Trewartha, 1953, p. 71).

experiences as such, but he's talking about values, by which he means more cultural values, traditions and customs, the sort of things that you can now easily recover in a different sort of mode, but they're intriguingly in there (in Trewartha, 1953).

And also in the absolute margins of his paper, he says something about Pierre George, the French geographer, and indicates that he doesn't want to critique George's "Maxian slant" (Trewartha, 1953, p. 76). So, in the Trewartha paper there's actually a reference to Marxism; and of course he's writing at the time of the McCarthyite (anti-communist) clamp-downs in the US, and McCarthy is apparently his Senator (Weeks, 2004, p. 280). So, intriguingly, he has little subversive moments, what I would regard as part of the counter-history of our subdiscipline actually dotted throughout. I like to trace an alternative lineage for population geography, back to Trewartha, rather than the obvious lineage, which is why, to circle back to your question, my answer is a little bit more complicated. It's, yes, you can have a certain caricatured account of a certain type of population geography which someone like me, with more critical sensibilities, wants to poke away at, but you can also trace elements of that more critical sensibility even in older works. And our so-called founding document (Trewartha, 1953) is hence itself not quite what people seem to think it is.

KB: Absolutely, that's really interesting actually. A recent population geography textbook (Barcus & Halfacree, 2018, Section 1.4), talks about moving towards a 'relational population geography'. What do you think about that in relation to what you've just talked about with Trewartha?

CP: Yeah, I've seen that, where the authors talk about 'relational population geography', which of course ties in with all sorts of relational moves that are made elsewhere, as in the recent paper in the journal by Duffy and Stokanovic (2017; also Wainwright et al., 2019), an 'assemblage'-thinking piece which is also explicitly calling for a 'relational population geography'. They don't call it an Einsteinian move as such, but it's this notion that you don't have a pre-fixed spatial grid upon which these little objects (people), also somehow securely pre-formed, move around like atoms obeying invariant laws of motion. Rather, the objects and the grid are constantly changing each other; which I would indeed present as an Einsteinian version of the 'physics' that could underlie population geography, as opposed to the Newtonian physics that underlies population geography in the guise of Ravensteinian 'gravity modelling'.²¹ The latter is where you take Newtonian arguments about gravity, and how gravity is something that is a product of the size of the objects which are involved and the distances between them—

these are usually settlements for population geographers—and you start to operationalise that picture.

In the course, what I do is spend time on somebody who isn't mentioned much in the history of population geography, but surely should be there: William Warntz. He does these amazing things in the late-1950s and early-1960s about 'population potential' and has this extraordinary big vision of population studies within human geography.²² He's not really talking about population geography per se, but it's population studies within human geography as again (like with Trewartha) the lynchpin of everything we should do; as an absolutely fundamental, transformational version of what geography should be in relationship to the wider social sciences. He works with this individual, John Stewart, who is a physicist and has talked a lot about 'social physics', and effectively creates this argument about 'demographic gravitational fields', which is an explicitly (Newtonian) physics-based model of population geography. It is one really standing in interesting contrast to a relational model which—and again people aren't using the phrase, but you could put it this way—is an Einsteinian version of physics that has a profoundly different understanding of the objects and the grids involved: the spatial-temporal grids which are being transformed by the objects that are on that grid—like a 'black hole' will actually influence the coordinates of time-space around it. So this is a really intriguing way, I think, of refiguring the subdiscipline's relationship with physics.

KB: Having looked at the course that you do, it really does draw out a very different understanding of population geography, and that's why we wanted to include you in the project. What do you think then are the most important intellectual challenges facing population geography as a subdiscipline?

CP: It depends whether people consider it to be a worthwhile project, but possibly the challenge here is to accommodate some of the things—or things similar to what—I've been sketching out. It's perhaps to be able to tell a different kind of story about where this subdiscipline comes from, and perhaps to anchor it in what you might refer to as bigger trajectories in the horizons of science and philosophy—and not just Western science and philosophy too. So I think a challenge is better to contextualise a changing subdiscipline, and a challenge is also to be more subtle in how we revisit our own histories and not simply, if you like, rely on that caricatured history that I basically spelled out a moment ago—I was already introducing some nuances, but basically that empiricist, positivist, structuralist, critical, humanist, 'blah blah blah' (paradigm-based) history—because there are so many different shades and currents; and I think one should enjoy the textures in there but also learn from them.

²¹E.G. Ravenstein (1834–1931) is sometimes regarded as one of the subdiscipline's older founding figures, predating Trewartha. He served on Council of the Royal Geographical Society, received the society's Victoria Medal for 'geographical research' (in 1902), and wrote on 'The field of geography' (Ravenstein, 1891). Seeking to establish 'laws of migration' using statistical and cartographical means (Ravenstein, 1885; see Grigg, 1977), he has been taken as a forerunner of a quantitative, spatial-scientific geography. As quantitative population geographer Plane (2004, p. 287) mused, "I do ... hope that there will always be room for a few good Ravensteins within our subfield." Although none of his 'laws', taken individually, quite stated 'gravity model' principles, several of them in tandem effectively do so.

²²Key references are Stewart and Warntz (1958) and Warntz (1964); and for commentaries, see Barnes (2015) and Barnes and Wilson (2014). 'Population potential', a concept modelled on physics understandings of 'potential', essentially measured the potential for population to migrate—to move across space—from one place to another: e.g., there is a much greater potential for such movement to occur between proximate large settlements than between distant small settlements. A Warntz-type Newtonian population geography peeps through some papers in the journal, notably in ones calling for a 'spatial demography' (Raymer et al., 2019).

I think a specific intellectual challenge lies in capturing what a Foucauldian population geography looks like, and in a sense that's something that I'm much more involved in, with my own research, and I guess there's already quite a lot of good work in this respect that could be easily drawn upon. I don't think you need a 'mainstream' of anything, so I am not advocating some Foucauldian party line, but what you do need perhaps is a stronger Foucauldian awareness of 'biopolitics' – of 'biopower' and 'biopolitics'—and I think that would assist quite a few of the projects that are ongoing.²³ But I think it's kind of there anyway, I think it's sort of there in the *Zeitgeist*, even if it's not directly being referenced; I think that sense of biopolitics, of making live but also potentially letting die, is sort of there already, swirling around population geography.

I mean there's loads of people—I think this does really get to the heart of the other things you're asking—loads and loads of people within contemporary geography, and on the borders of it with other disciplines, who are talking about exactly these issues. I mean here's a 'for instance': the absolutely fantastic 2011 *Antipode* theme issue on 'surplus populations' edited by Heidi Nast and Michael McIntyre; my guess is that none of the authors in the theme issue will regard themselves as population geographers.²⁴ Now is that a problem? I don't think it necessarily is, but what you've got there is an extraordinary account of what could be deemed radical-critical population geography. I would also return to Marx; I would return to the very early David Harvey paper in 1974, 'Population Ideology and Resources', which came out in *Economic Geography* (Harvey, 1974), which is talking about surplus populations, and hence reconstructing the Marxist argument about surplus value, surplus labour, surplus populations²⁵; and also here there's a continuing critique of Malthus.²⁶ And I think a lot of what we do in

population geography should be in some ways still referring back to Malthus, as in rooting out that closet Malthusianism that seems to arrive in so many odd places (and see below).

My point about that *Antipode* theme issue is that it talks about the racism and the classism of populations; it talks about relationships between human populations and animal populations (what does it mean to talk about species and species surviving?); it talks about waste, the whole idea of waste, garbage and the excess, certain population cohorts included, seemingly just not needed any more. All of the papers in that theme issue are, for me, population geography, not just *writ small* but *writ large*. They could easily be regarded as fundamental statements in our subdisciplinary field, but I don't see them mentioned very often in the journal. There's oddly little discussion of 'surplus populations' in the journal, in the literature of the subdiscipline.²⁷ James Tyner is the obvious exception who draws those connections because he does see himself sometimes as a population geographer and his book, the *Body Count* (Tyner, 2009a), does some of that work.²⁸

A challenge here is to ask about the relationship between population geography as a subdisciplinary field, which has all kinds of people who identify themselves as population geographers, and all this exciting work that's also being done about population elsewhere within our discipline and at its borders. And I suppose the challenge is also about the extent to which the people who identify as population geographers are going to be excited by that or threatened by it. Are they excited there's all that stuff out there or do they feel threatened by it, as in, "oh maybe that's a challenge to what we do and maybe we don't want to engage."

KB: I think that's something I really grapple with: that there's so many people working on population across not only human geography but the social sciences and other disciplines. For example, some have repositioned themselves around health geographies looking at population as a health category or the health of populations. So, whilst there are all these people working on population, there is also some splintering of subdisciplinary identity and boundaries. I've heard, for example from emerging researchers and postgraduate students, that difficulties arise over not understanding what are the definable boundaries of population geography—but should there be definable boundaries? And I think that's also a political challenge in some ways around careers in academia, in

²³It may be evident from Chris's course, especially the 'Space, Sex and Death' option, that he envisages a Foucauldian-biopolitical population geography, one also informed by what might be termed Agambenian geographies concerned with the making of *homo sacer*, 'bare life' and 'the camp' (lecture PG2, L6), ready to engage with such difficult subject-matters as eugenics and genocide (as themselves hateful exercises in 'applied population geographies'). In lecture PG2, L7 Chris explores how eugenicist discourses frame certain population cohorts as ones that should not be allowed to breed, perhaps even to be more-or-less deliberately 'left to die', alighting specifically on the case of 'the deaf' inspired in part by a paper in the journal (Mathews, 2011; also Mathews, 2006, 2010) that itself briefly speaks of 'Foucauldian geographies'. In lecture PG2, L8 Chris explores the terrors of genocide where 'letting die' slips so horribly into 'making die', including the Stalinist starvation of 1930s Ukraine (Applebaum, 2017), the Nazi Holocaust (connecting to work on Holocaust and Hitler's geographies: e.g., Giacarra & Minca, 2016), and the atrocities of the *Khmer Rouge* in Cambodia (Tyner, 2009a; also e.g., Tyner, 2009b, 2012; Tyner & Rice, 2016). Tyner (2009a, p. 42) provides an overall statement of some moment here: "population geographers [should] be better positioned to intervene in the struggle against spatial and moral exclusionary practices that serve to categorise, discriminate, oppress, and ultimately murder those who are perceived to be Others" (Tyner, 2009a, p. 42).

²⁴The papers that most catch the eye here of the population geographer are Hudson (2011), Gidwani and Reddy (2011), Merrill (2011), McIntyre (2011) and Yates (2011), as well as both the prologue by Nast (2011) and the brilliant introductory essay by McIntyre and Nast (2011). All are outstanding works of critical-radical-biopolitical population geography.

²⁵Curiously, Harvey (1974) does not seem to be a standard landmark for population geographers and is indeed a fugitive reference in the pages of the journal. He effectively spatialises a 'classical' Marxist argument about the making of the 'surplus population' as the 'reserve army of labour', many individuals within which are ultimately expendable or disposable like so much unpleasant 'waste'.

²⁶The Reverend Thomas Malthus (1756–1831) is occasionally seen as the 'real' originator of population geography, with his highly contentious arguments about the 'natural' tendency of human population levels, if unchecked by disasters or governmental intervention, to outstrip

a given region's capacity to keep it fed. Unsurprisingly, many papers in the journal on 'population transitions', environment and development sit in some relation, even if usually unstated, to Malthus. Harvey (1974) is bitterly critical of Malthus for the 'class character' of his reasoning, and one conclusion runs as follows: "Whenever a theory of overpopulation seizes hold in a society dominated by an elite, then the non-elite invariably experience some form of political, economic and social repression" (Harvey, 1974, p. 273). For a bold return to, and defence of, Malthus by a geographer, see Mayhew (2014).

²⁷One paper in the journal of relevance is Harris (2015, pp. 496–498)—deploying Harvey (2012)—who identifies a 'surplus population' that Tunisian authorities are happy to see migrate elsewhere (out of cities and maybe out of Tunisia). Visser (2018), meanwhile, shows how hostile are US jurisdictions to 'irregular migrants', ones without documentation, condemning them to the 'shadows' of 'informality' in local labour markets.

²⁸Also see Tyner's compelling trio of *Progress in Human Geography* reports on 'Surplus populations', 'Premature death' and 'Truncated lives' (Tyner, 2013, 2015, 2016). His *Body Count* book (Tyner, 2009a) opens with an explicit (Foucauldian) critique and reconstruction of population geography (and it is indeed a substantial influence on Chris's thinking).

terms of where you have to position yourself and how you have to present yourself.

CP: Absolutely. So, obviously the stuff you do, migration studies, can be cast as about security and development, geopolitics maybe (e.g., Botterill, 2017; Botterill & Hancock, 2018; Botterill & McCollum, & Tyrrell, 2019), but also health stuff; and so, yes, it is often badged as something other than population geography (cf. Rosenberg, 1998). And I'm not quite sure where we go with all of this. Obviously there's a huge, great complicated intellectual landscape out there which, for me, I just find massively exciting. I'm interested in disciplinary and subdisciplinary labels: I'm interested in why they arise, why they start to matter to certain people, and I suppose what I worry about is when people become attached to a label, say population geography but it could be historical geography, and they start circling the wagons around that label, like "I've got my little field, I belong to that field ... and I will now protect that field." And often that defensive posture, rather than being excited, open-handed, "ooh yeah, let's reach out, let's draw in all of those possibilities," it's "no, no, this is what we do, this is what we are. Yes, I'll occasionally talk to some people elsewhere, but this is what we do." And I think that there possibly has been a tendency in parts of population geography to do just that, which is why in many ways my Glasgow course is a labour of love: it's a 'love letter' to this journal that I also find sometimes irritating because I think you should have more of "this, this and this in it".

KB: Are you talking about *PSP*?

CP: I'm talking about *IJGP* and then *PSP*, because that's central to the course. In the course, I continually go back to papers that are in there in the journal, quite deliberately, and in the course assessment students have to choose three papers from the journal as the basis for critically reviewing what the subdiscipline has entailed and how it has changed over the years. So, in some ways the course is a 'love letter' to this journal, but I can see tendencies in the journal to circle the wagons around something; and I'm not sure whether that happens deliberately or whether it just sends out certain messages, "this is what's in and this is what's out," but there seem to be all kinds of possibilities that ought to be there but are not. There ought to be more stuff on 'surplus populations', there ought to be more Foucauldian stuff, there should be some debate about Haraway, for instance, in there. There should definitely be a theme issue where population geography responds to Donna Haraway's provocation about "make kin, not babies".²⁹

But you do see a certain kind of tendency, as in, for instance, yet another suite of papers on transnational migration. Okay, they've

²⁹In some recent writings, as an outgrowth from her arguments about humanity's deleterious effects on countless other species, Haraway ends up arguing from a stance—one hard to cast as anything but 'neo-Malthusian'—calling not just for human population control but for actual reduction, carried in a ringing declaration to 'make kin'—friendships and alliances with all manner of 'oddkin' (non-human species)—rather than making 'human babies' (Haraway, 2016, 2018). A spirited rebuttal of Haraway's position, from someone previously deeply inspired by Haraway's feminist, anthropological and science studies 'more-than-human' theorising, is provided by sometime geographer Lewis (2017). Haraway's position is a prominent target of dissension in a themed section called 'Confronting populationism' in the feminist geography journal *Gender, Place and Culture*: see editorial introduction by Hendrixson et al., (2020) and following papers (especially Ojeda et al., 2020). Such contents would have been great for *PSP*.

maybe done it differently, its emphasis is embodiment (Dunn, 2009) rather than quantification, and that's genuinely great, but there seems to me—this sounds much more critical than it's meant to be, and genuinely this is a 'love letter' to a subdiscipline—that sometimes the horizons could be broader and you could enrich "the thing in the middle." It shouldn't be a matter of being worried about all those other people who do population out there—myriad population studies scholars and health geographers, say, maybe they're talking about 'One Health' and population—it should be, "no, come in, come in, let's have a chat! In fact have a bit of a chat in our journal!" And, to be fair, if you look at the editorials down the years, they've talked about wanting to be more interdisciplinary, and there was obviously a deliberate move to take geography out of the title when the journal became *PSP*, and there's an editorial that reflects upon that change.³⁰ A recent editorial has talked about being more and more interdisciplinary and drawing upon folks from all over the place, but rightly saying there should still be some sense of a focus on geography, on space, on place, however exactly you understand those concepts, hence underlining that this is not a place for, if you like, 'straight' demography.³¹

There was an interesting piece quite recently, writing about 'spatial demography' and putting that focus back in, but clearly distinguishing spatial demography from population geography (Raymer et al., 2019). As an aside, there is obviously a trajectory in the journal which is effectively debating relationships between population geography and demography, and not wanting population geography to be sucked into the maw of just being demography. And so the response when the subdiscipline has difficulties, as Findlay and Graham (1991) put it, shouldn't be "let's have a 'demographic revolution'," as in some defensive cozying up to 'straight' demography, but rather it's got to be a revolution which involves all these other possibilities; which in many ways is the same as what I'm saying. But I still get a sense that the journal could be *more* of a meeting-place in this respect; it could be *more* of a gathering-place.

KB: That makes sense. So how do you think population geography is viewed by the rest of the discipline, by geography more widely?

CP: I would sense that there is possibly a bit of an image problem because I think that, for a lot of folks, population geography is seen as the place where quite technical, maybe quite quantitative population studies are done, and that it is quite closed. Now if you engage with it, the subdiscipline, you realise, well in fact that's not the case, despite what I have just said about forms of closure, it's certainly not closed: there are forms of closure, but that's true in any of our subdisciplinary fields. An extreme version would be those who do see it as an irrelevance: a certain kind of more critical, more theoretical human geographer might well see population geography as a

³⁰"[We] have intentionally removed the word 'geography' from the new title," the editors declared, "so as to attract articles from those working in any discipline" (Boyle, 2004, p. 1).

³¹"[W]e encourage ... social scientists interested in population but whose work does not engage with geographically informed interpretations of 'space and place' to find other publication outlets" (Findlay & Mulder, 2015, p. 690; also Mulder et al., 2018, p. 1).

relatively acritical, relatively atheoretical, throwback.³² But that would of course be unfair; that would be entirely unfair. But, nonetheless, I think that possibly is a perception.

And so those folks, if they want to talk about population, and maybe they want to talk about the sorts of issues around 'bio-power' or violence, they're going to look for other coordinates. And they might assume that population geographers haven't done that, but of course population geographers *have* kind of done that and they've done that in different ways, and there's still plenty that could be learned from those people who identify as population geographers and who have published in the journal. But perhaps there's still a wider perception that "there's nothing there for us."

KB: Yeah, definitely the idea of population geography as apolitical is something that I feel has attracted that perception. Do you think there is a politics to population geography in the way it's done now or potentially for the future?

CP: I mean it's interesting to what extent you would cast population geography to date as apolitical. Again, if you look carefully at the history of population geography, is it apolitical? I suppose, as we have discussed, the stereotype would be that it reduces population to matters which are quite technical (that it has always been 'post-political!').

KB: Still political, though?

CP: Yes, and there are of course many population geographers who understand that all those technical decisions made about, for instance, how you count population, how you decide all the spatial statistics you might deploy to understand the spatial dynamics of the population, are themselves political decisions. I think there's probably a lot of population geographers down the years who haven't really wanted to do that, they haven't really wanted to engage with that, but we've got a few interesting pieces in the journal—which could be better known—about effectively the politics of the Census, of different kinds of censuses and population recording systems, for instance controlling Australian Aborigines, and there's stuff too about the Commonwealth censuses and how they construct categories of race (e.g., Christopher, 2005, 2011; Frantzman et al., 2014; Kraly & McQuilton, 2005). Now, it's all there in the journal, but possibly people outside wouldn't think they could go there and find anything very interesting along these lines.

So I think there is a politics, small 'p' politics, arising throughout the journal's history. I think there's a lot of papers which effectively have an awareness of politics. Of course, they do so in part because the wonderful thing about the journal is the extent of its global reach,

so one thing you can't accuse it of is being parochial. What you can accuse it of is perhaps too often extending a certain kind of Eurocentric model, such as the 'demographic transition model', and assuming that it somehow applies elsewhere. But nonetheless a lot of the people who do that work are still very aware of these other places, they are aware of context, they are aware of politics, but nonetheless they are unwilling, if you like, completely to dismantle something like the 'demographic transition model' (e.g., Agyei-Mensah, 2006; Gould & Brown, 1996; Reher, 2001, 2004; Walford & Kurek, 2016). Which is where Elspeth Graham's critiques are so good: I mean there's an early one that's in the journal (Graham, 2000)—and then there's a more recent one, a chapter she calls 'Demographies' (Graham, 2014; also Graham, 2021)—which is really good and effectively it's a postcolonial critique querying Eurocentricism or Global-Northism: it's all about [whispering], "you know, we need *demographies* in the plural," and not just project one singular model of demographic transition 'from here' to everywhere else.

I think that there are people publishing in the journal and in the subdiscipline of population geography who have been aware of that kind of issue, a certain politics: not necessarily the politics in the situations they're studying as such, but the politics of knowledge, the politics of what kinds of knowledge are being produced. And I suppose that is what my course is about in many ways: it's about the politics of what kind of knowledge is being produced, for what reasons? And I think that, yes, maybe population geography could do more, be more self-reflexive, in this respect. I mean there could be a journal theme issue on the politics of population geography *as* knowledge, something like that.

KB: Let's do that! So, we've talked a bit about how population geography is viewed by the wider discipline, but what about when you think about really influential demographic studies and things like the Centre for Population Change³³ that have made big impacts, they're recognised by policymakers and the media. So, what do you think the view of population geography is from sites like government and media?

CP: Well, my feeling would be that population geography in that sense is regarded as useful, providing useful knowledge—meaning all those people who do census geographies, constantly refining our spatial analysis, estimation and projection of already-collected and -bounded population datasets (e.g., Norman et al., 2003; Norman et al., 2008; Wilson & Rees, 2005), as well as providing useful understanding of, for instance, missing data, trying to understand how we can compensate for 'missing households' or better monitor, track, people who come in and do not go out of a given jurisdiction. Of course, what I'm doing there is also hinting at a *critical* line that might be argued about such 'useful' work. So, I think that from the official perspective, population geography could be seen as very

³²A not uncommon refrain, following White and Jackson (1995), Graham (2000) and Graham and Boyle (2001), has been to bemoan the relatively atheoretical character of population geography. Taking the overall volume of papers published in the journal there is merit in such a claim, although the exact truth might rather be that theory of sorts *has* been present but very lightly worn. Moreover, as well as brushes with Foucault and assemblage theory, as already detailed, it is possible to find explicit engagements with the likes of de Certeau and Lefebvre (Chattopadhyay, 2010; Ho & Hatfield née Dobson, 2011), Latour (Jöns, 2015; Phillips, 2010; Välimaa et al., 2023), and—maybe a *particularly* distinctive dimension of papers clustering in the journal, suggesting a 'Bourdiesian' (Zotova & Cohen, 2019) population geography concerned with 'doxa', 'habitas' and different forms of 'capital'—Bourdieu (e.g., Bauder et al., 2017; Boterman et al., 2018; Holt et al., 2019; Prazeres, 2018; Schapendonk, 2015; Simpson et al., 2021; Walker, 2011).

³³The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centre for Population Change, established in January 2009, is the UK's first research centre on population change. Based jointly at the Universities of Southampton, St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Strathclyde and Stirling, in partnership with the National Records of Scotland and the Office for National Statistics, it includes contributions on population geography and 'geodemographics'.

useful, and I think quite a lot of money has been put into working on things like census geographies, which can of course also benefit inquiries into migration geographies, because it's seen as providing that kind of useful knowledge. But, given everything I've said a few moments ago, I might also want to have a caution about that, a caveat about that, to be more critical about that. So again, I want to ask what kind of knowledge will you be producing, for what kinds of purposes? But of course I admire a lot of the extraordinary spatial statistics that are done by all kinds of people.

An interesting person to think about here is Danny Dorling. Dorling is in many ways a population geographer, I think sometimes identifying himself as such.³⁴ And of course there are his famous 'Dannygrams',³⁵ which are his map representations of Britain and elsewhere showing sizes of unit proportional to population levels, not measured by area, so you actually get a much clearer impression of how the population is distributed and how countless other factors, which could be right down to the detail of, say, who votes Brexit, are then related to these demographics. He hence uses his advanced spatial-statistical population geography to explore a whole bunch of political themes. And he's obviously someone who's really fascinated by equality (e.g., Dorling, 2017) and thinks there are huge problems with inequality, so he becomes someone who is using his spatial-statistical population geography knowledge as a tool of critique; as a tool of really quite advanced political critique. Where I think you can legitimately argue with Dorling is that he doesn't then start to talk much about the deeper structural reasons for why there are all these inequalities in the first place; he is in a sense the arch 'descriptioner', the arch provider of descriptions. But the work that he does in that sense, I think, could be harnessed much more than it is by a radical-critical agenda (also Philo, 2014).

This is actually to do with the genealogy of Marxist geography. Marxist geography emerges in the 1970s, and you had people like David Harvey, obviously, who started identifying the inner dynamics of capitalism as kind of explanatory device, using really quite sophisticated Marxist tools (e.g., Harvey, 1973). But then you had someone like David M. Smith, who establishes a tradition called welfare geography, where he's very much concerned with patterns of inequality, but will talk a bit about the underlying motors of what produces inequality and will talk about Marxism (eg. Smith, 1977). But, effectively these become two different trajectories. And Harvey (1972), in the famous 1972 'Revolutionary, counter-revolutionary theory' essay, basically distances his project from two things: those who compile massive dossiers of inequality, which could be David Smith in the 1970s or Danny Dorling in the 2000s, and also 'advocacy geographers' on the streets (who Harvey saw as doing nothing more than local activisms and protesting without seeing the deeper drivers). So in that sense, I think you set up, right at the very outset, a series of oppositions within radical, critical Marxist geography, which means that someone like Dorling, who has inherited Smith,

actually is 'over there', he's just producing these dossiers of inequality, and 'over here' you've got the people who are doing the real theoretical work which should energise the next Leninist 'Vanguard'. And so I am actually answering again about the politics of population geography, because I think that a certain kind of scissoring apart has occurred in the orbit of what *could* be a critical population geography.

KB: What role do you think methodology plays in all of this?

CP: Well I think that's a really good question because so much of population geography, both within and without, is perceived as methodological, and a lot of those methods are quantitative, about data analysis, data cleaning, etc., and Dorling sits firmly in that camp because that's what he does. And so, methodologically, a lot of the difficulties of and for population geography do stem from a certain over-reliance—and a perception elsewhere that there is an over-reliance—on quantitative, technical procedures. And the important thing to do is to try thinking about ways that you bridge quantitative, qualitative and critical work, and all points in-between, and show that quantitative, technical procedures can also be part of a radical politics, can also be a part of the making of critical knowledge.

I point to someone like Matthew Hannah in the work that he does on deconstructing the Census, the US Census and all his work on the German Census (e.g., Hannah, 2001, 2010; also Legg, 2012), where he's in command of the more technical issues but also then addresses the politics of those issues. In so doing, he develops his—what I think is a really interesting—notion of 'statistical activism' (also 'informational citizenship'), whereby people should be much, much more engaged and enraged by the whole issue of who gets counted, who is *uncounted*, who is *discounted*; in which connection the kind of rage that, in a simplistic sense, certain kind of radical critiques might express—"we don't want to be surveilled"—needs to be countered with an argument that, "no, there are in fact many occasions when you *do* want to be surveilled, or rather you want to be known." You don't want to be uncounted and discounted, you don't want to be the undocumented, the irregulars, you actually want to be counted, because once you're counted you also have the potential, in certain kinds of societies at least, to have civil rights, voting rights.

And so Hannah has a really quite sophisticated argument about 'statistical activism' and he wants to revisit things like the Suffragettes as indeed 'census parties' precisely because they *want* to be counted or they *wanted* to be able to count.³⁶ And I think that one of the ways in which you would create new kinds of connections within and for the subdiscipline would be to acknowledge that there's a whole set of really complicated theoretical arguments to hear about the making of this surplus, the excess and the waste, as already explored; but that possibly, if we find new ways of counting, of accounting for, and including those people in a way that they can count, we count them and they count in the domains of

³⁴Dorling has published in the journal (Ballas et al., 2005; Pattie et al., 1996).

³⁵A term coined, we believe, by Rachel Woodward when working as a Research Assistant for Dorling in the later-1990s.

³⁶In a different but not unrelated vein, see the telling claims of Hyndman (2003, 2007) discussing the 'body count' (also Tynes, 2009a) and the politics of whose deaths in war zones or after terrorist atrocities are counted, deemed to matter or become the subject (and maybe spatial sites) of official mourning.

policy-and-practice, that might be a way in which a certain kind of statistical/critical divide in population geography could be—'bridged' maybe sounds too simple—but let's say 'bridged'.

KB: Yes, I mean just thinking about different kinds of accountability, as well as about recognition, misrecognition (Hopkins et al., 2017): these debates would be really interesting to recast in terms of *how you count!*

CP: Yes, it's not just accountability exactly, but I think accountability should nicely go along with a notion of *recountability*: in other words, people should be able to *recount* their lives too. It's interesting once you start playing around with the words 'count' and 'countability' (the quality of being countable); but I think we should have accountability *and* recountability, the latter being where those other traditions in population geography—such as the 'biographical'—become important.

KB: In terms of the research group, what would you like to see the PGRG doing in the next five years in terms of its aims to support population geographers and promote population geography? Who and what should the Group's work benefit and incorporate?³⁷

CP: Well I suppose you could suggest—but this obviously reflects my own preferences/prejudices—that the Group should have a big event on 'surplus populations' or it should have a big event on 'make kin, not babies'. In other words, it should show that it wants to intervene within those—what I would consider to be those—bigger debates that are traversing our discipline. And in relation to the latter problematic, one of the many things that surprised me again about this journal, for which I'm writing this 'love letter' in the course, is the extent to which it only marginally engages with questions of environment. Environment to some extent gets in there: it's more in terms of 'resources' and 'carrying capacity', but it doesn't often get in there as the 'political ecologies' angle (but see below) or even as the complex sensuous lived ecologies of concern to many of our human geography colleagues (cf. Rishbeth & Birch, 2021). But also where is climate change? Where is the Anthropocene?

When I finished the course, I was talking about Anthropocenic population geographies. What does it mean to think about population geography and the Anthropocene? Partly because I want to do this historiographically, I return to some work, including in the journal, by Nanda Shrestha, who's a Nepali population geographer now working in the US but did all this work on Nepal, and they—him and Dennis Conway—had these early provocations about ecology, 'local knowledges' and local understandings and engagements in/with ecology as a challenge to Malthusianism (and they also have notions of 'surplus'

in there too).³⁸ They start to create another different vision of a population geography again, which maybe returns to Trewartha and 'physical earth' and 'cultural earth',³⁹ but does that in a really quite nice way. But I think that what's surprising is that you don't have many papers, for instance, on climate refugees: I think three or four, I thought it would be more (e.g., Leyk et al., 2017; Liu & Balk, 2020; Nawrotzki & Bakhtsiyarava, 2016; Safra de Campos et al., 2016). There was a paper on 'environmental refugees' (Persson, 2019), but actually the authors took at that as people fleeing from Scandinavian cities to the countryside: it's another counter-urbanisation paper. So where is population and the Anthropocene?⁴⁰ And so what about a big session on Anthropocenic population geography?

KB: So, the final question—which you've already partially answered anyway—is around how you would advise the PGRG Committee to resource, promote and sustain the Group, given the challenges that we have discussed?

CP: Well I think the Group should probably very honestly ask itself the question: do we need a distinct subdiscipline called population geography? Or, if we do, and I think the answer actually is still yes, are we saying yes because we simply want something that we've grown up with, and we love, to continue, something that we feel we belong to? Or is it because we think it can make a genuinely important difference to wider fields of intellectual engagement and, perhaps further down the line, political and practical engagement? So I think that simply having a subdiscipline called population geography is a matter that still needs to be examined. I know this seems like a constant navel-gazing, but I don't think you can just say, "okay, it exists, it's good that it exists, and how do we ensure we've got lots of other people who call themselves population geographers and how do we establish a career trajectory for people who continue to call themselves population geographers?" I think perhaps a more flexible sense of why you think it's really good to have a body of knowledge that has this loose attribution, population geography, is something that also needs to be addressed; asking why we would see there to be benefits for people perhaps to use that label on occasions, which could be tactical, when it comes to career appointment, research grant applications, and so on. But simply protecting it *because it exists* doesn't seem to me to be that healthy. It needs to be something that's reflexive, and clearly this exercise—the wider project in which our interview sits—is designed to do just that.

³⁸In the journal, there is a wonderfully wide-ranging paper by Shrestha and Conway (1996), covering all of the bases mentioned in the interview, but it needs to be seen in the context of longitudinal and comparative studies reported by the same authors in varying combinations and with Bhattarai (Conway et al., 2000; Shrestha et al., 1999; Shrestha, 1982).

³⁹Indeed, Conway (2004) makes this move explicitly, combining Trewartha with a concern for 'population-environment relationships and inter-science initiatives'.

⁴⁰Looking again at recent issues of PSP, several other papers can be identified that speak to what might be termed an environmental population geography concerned with extreme environmental events, some if not all of which might be deemed anthropogenic in origin: Guo et al. (2020), on population dimensions of preparing for extreme storm events in coastal areas, with a case study of Hong Kong; McLeman et al. (2022), looking back at the 1976 South Dakota drought and asking what lessons it holds for 'drought migration research'; Colbert et al. (2022), attempting to appraise and model population change in the wake of the Canterbury, New Zealand, 'earthquake sequence'; and Xu et al. (2023), exploring migration in relation in the nexus of food insecurity, Covid-19 challenges and the Chinese household registration system (*hukou*).

³⁷On reflection, we both feel that there is also so much more to be done to interface population geographies with all the challenging work currently being undertaken under the umbrellas of Black geographies and Indigenous geographies, and more specifically to consider the extent to which studies reported in the journal might be (re)interpreted through such lenses. For instance, a consideration of Black population geographies might consult Boyd (2018; also Boyd, 2019, referencing Woods, 1998), who touches on the cultural life of the 'northern Black metropolis' of the early-twentieth century US, a 'city within a city'; while a consideration of 'Indigenous population geography' (Harris & Prout Quicke, 2019, p. 4) might consult Taylor and Bell (1996, 2012) and related inquiries into the population mobilities, policies and settlement of indigenous peoples (see Bell & Taylor, 2004 [including chapter by Bedford & Pool, 2004]; also Prout & Howitt, 2009). See also Shrestha et al. (2003).

KB: Absolutely, yes, 'reinvigorated'.

CP: Yes, I still think there should be something called population geography. I think it does—of course in an imprecise way, and it's always going to be an imprecise way—identity a cluster of concerns, let's put it like that, which I think are increasingly important for how we understand—academically, intellectually, critically and maybe in terms of actual practical politics, and ethically too—the planet on which we live. I don't go along with those people who simply say we can/should disband all labels: I would always reply that we can't, we need labels, agreed ways in which we talk about these concerns. So, when we say population geography, I might be very different to many others who call themselves population geographers, but there's still a loosely agreed amalgam of things that you know lie underneath the label. And then you can get on to a discussion about where you may differ in terms of what exactly those things entail, how they should be researched, how they should be made available and accessible for analysis, teaching, more popular presentation, advocacy or activism.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this paper as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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