

## Appearances can deceive: what is happening here?

One of the most powerful insights of modern geography is the importance of perspective. Geography was for many years understood to be a window on the world. The GA was established in the late nineteenth century to further the study and teaching of geography by bringing the world into the room - with the help of 'lantern slides' (the current technology). Geography was mainly descriptive, and at its best this was fabulous and inspiring. But it was assumed that it was possible to provide this description reliably and accurately as a form of mimesis.



We are now more aware. Descriptions were, more often than not, from a particular perspective (not least in school geography textbooks). This we could summarise as white, male and British, carrying all the assumptions of superiority and blindness to other perspectives that these characteristics imply. In fact we comprehend this so well it is almost impossible not to look at images without an ironic, knowing understanding of their limits. Who is doing the looking? What assumptions are they bringing to the looking? These are good questions to bear in mind. Perhaps one of the essential roles of geography in schools is to teach this kind of awareness.

The photograph and account called the '[Promise of geography](#)' provides an example of how the ideas you bring to the looking limit, or expand, what you can 'see'.

The striking photograph that heads this family of images could be called the 'riddle in the sands'. We assume this person is a Touareg - in Raybans. But perhaps he is a holidaymaker on Fuerteventura preparing for an illicit beach barbecue!

**'What is happening here?'** And by implication: **'How are we going to find out?'** These are *critical* 'big questions' which geography helps us ask.