

Transforming Human Geography: Embracing Afrocentricity

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Abstract

Re-examining what constitutes valid knowledge and how knowledge is produced and used are major focus areas in relation to the transformation agenda in higher education. This article critically examines these aspects in relation to the discipline of geography with a special focus on human geography which is substantially influenced by the humanities and social sciences. It specifically uses Afrocentricity as a methodological and conceptual framework to inform the transformation of human geography and provide insight into how to centralise African experiences and contexts in human geography teaching and research. The article has two main sections. The first section undertakes a critical reconsideration of human geography in the transformation context. The next section specifically examines the role of geographical research in advancing African scholarship. The article concludes that Afrocentricity provides a useful framework to critique accepted and widely used geographical categories and concepts; thereby rethinking what geographers do and the implications thereof, from a African-centred perspective.

Keywords: Human geography, afrocentricity, African scholarship, transformation, framework

Introduction and Context

The notion of African scholarship and transformation is at the centre of revisiting socio-economic change in different arenas and re-examining

processes of knowledge production and use. The latter requires a critical appraisal of disciplinary orientations and assumptions that underpin the academic endeavour in relation to both teaching and research. Transformation cannot and should not be equated only with changes in the demographic profile of persons which, in the South African context often refers to including (and often targeting) individuals and groups from historically disadvantaged communities such as Blacks/ Africans, women and the disabled. There needs to be a concerted effort to change mind-sets, value systems and ways of knowing that impact on society. Rethinking what constitutes valid knowledge, how it is produced and for what purposes becomes crucial, particularly in educational settings. This article critically examines these aspects in relation to the discipline of geography with a special focus on human geography.

The discipline of geography has two major strands: physical and human geography (the focus of this contribution), which are both concerned with the environment (physical and social), time and space. Kitchen and Tate (2013:3) assert that there is no consensus on who geographers are, what they do, and how they study the world. This reflects the broad scope of the discipline. Furthermore, Livingstone (1992 cited in Kitchen & Tate 2013:3) asserts that geography is elusive to define because it changes with societal changes. However, there is general agreement that the focus of geography is on interconnected human-environment relationships in different spatio-temporal contexts and scales as well as spatial manifestations and variations of socio-economic and environmental phenomena (Hanson 2004; Kitchin & Tate 2013; Murphy 2014; Varró 2014). Dear and Wolch (2014:6) specifically state that the focus of human geography is 'to understand the simultaneity of social, political, and economic life in time and space'. Both human and physical geography are interrelated and dialectic in nature, one impacting on the other. Research has shown that the physical and natural environment has and continues (albeit at a lesser extent among the more affluent in society who are in a better position to manipulate the environment than the poorer groups in society whose livelihoods and lives are more closely tied to the natural resource base) to influence human behaviour and choices (Cassidy 1997; Laland & Brown 2011). Bradley (1991:3) argues that relationships between the environment and culture are fundamental in understanding the historical development of the psychology and sociology of a particular group of people. In addition, there it is growing consensus that human factors

dramatically affect the physical world and that anthropological drivers are the main contributors to extreme climate events that are increasing globally (Bob *et al.* 2014; Brown *et al.* 2007; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). From an environmental perspective, it is also important to note that the distribution, exploitation, ownership and control of the world's natural resources, from land and water rights and entitlements to harnessing energy, has been instrumental in influencing human relations and power dynamics which, in turn, has informed human history.

It is important to note that the humanities and social sciences have a strong tradition of critical reflection and engagement. While geography as a discipline has been informed by some of these engagements (for example, the emergence of feminist or gender geography in recent years and the conceptualisation of political ecology as a theoretical framework), it has largely been dominated by discourses embedded in environmental sciences. Yet, a significant proportion of knowledge generation and sharing takes place in the sub-discipline of human geography which is influenced substantially by the humanities and social sciences. Furthermore, human geography plays a key role in sensitising physical geography research, particularly in relation to environmental degradation and climate change, to socio-economic implications and impacts. Additionally, Murphy (2014:1) asserts that recent renewed interest in geography does not necessarily reflect an appreciation of the contributions or importance of the discipline but is related more to the 'focus on difference and its association with visually alluring maps'. However, as discussed later, these maps are often projected in ways that are biased towards western supremacy and presented as 'objective truths'.

The aim of this article is to explore the Afrocentric perspective as a methodological and conceptual framework to inform the transformation of human geography. It is intended to provide insight into some of the issues and approaches to the development of an Afrocentric perspective of human geography which revolves around the argument that African experiences and contexts can provide a focus for the scholarship and transformation of African communities. The process of redefinition is critical to the nature of knowledge production and the transformation agenda.

Monteiro-Ferreira (2014:i) argues that Afrocentricity is an intellectually dominant idea of the African world with increasing impact and influence on the social sciences that challenge major epistemological traditions in Western thought. Although there is a clear impact and influence

of Afrocentricity and transformation debates on the historical, sociological, psychological, educational, criminological, theological, political science, philosophical, linguistic and anthropological disciplines as illustrated by Asante (2007) and Bangura (2012); very little work has been done on the implications of Afrocentricity on geography and the physical and natural sciences in general. It is important to note, however, that while Afrocentricity as a conceptual framework has been embraced in the social sciences and humanities, Pellebon's (2012:19) study that examines whether Afrocentricity is integrated in Social Work education concludes that this is limited in the actual curricula and research agendas in selected higher education institutions. This suggests that even within social science disciplines, the theoretical embracing of Afrocentricity as a framework has not sufficiently translated into transforming what is taught and researched.

Smith (2008:89) undertakes a review of Molefe Kete Asante's (regarded as one of the main intellectuals of developing Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework) 2007 book and concludes that it is useful 'as a foundation to understanding the processes connected to African centred thought which then can be applied to understanding the continent's (Africa's) contributions from a historiographical and theoretical perspective'. Asante (1998:19) specifically asserts that Afrocentricity is a 'frame of reference' (specifically embedded in 'African cosmology, axiology, aesthetic, and epistemology') that informs 'the study of African concepts, issues and behaviours'. Furthermore, Bangura (2012:109) states that Africancentrism (also interchangeably used with Afrocentricity in the article) 'presupposes knowledge of a commonality of cultural traits among the diverse people of Africa which characterise and constitute a worldly view that is somehow distinct from that of the foreign world views that have influenced African people'. Furthermore, Karenga (1988:404) defines Afrocentricity as a 'perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people' that challenges, what Graham (2001:6) indicates as, 'forms of inclusion (and exclusion) that have led to social injustice'. Ince (2009:52) states that 'the Afrocentric paradigm directly challenges representations that have conventionally commanded claims to knowledge' which were 'embedded in notions of superiority based on race, gender and class distinction'. Social justice is central to Afrocentricity (Daniel & Lowe 2014:1) and human geography (DeVerteuil 2013:599).

Afrocentricity implies and provides a standpoint and perceivable

focus from which to derive a systematic, coherent and beneficial (in relation to improving the conditions and status of Africans and the African diaspora) framework and perspective which has implications for geographical research and what we claim to be geographical knowledge, particularly in human geography given its socio-economic orientation. Research processes, as well as the nature of knowledge production generally, include the orientations and assumptions of the researcher and the research subject(s), whether it be ideas, people or places. The nature of the processes of knowledge production and relationships among various stakeholders and interest groups are immersed in unequal power relations and dynamics that need to be critically addressed since they influence outcomes and impacts.

A Critical Reconsideration of Human Geography in the Context of Transformation

Geographical research (as is the case for research and knowledge generation more generally) is not an objective, value-free, scientific endeavour. It is therefore imperative that the geographical concepts, perspectives and approaches be critically examined. Afrocentricity, as articulated earlier, provides an alternative standpoint to assess human geography.

An African-centred perspective of human geography rests on the premise, as articulated by Keto (1991) and Asante (1988; 1992) decades ago and more recently (Asante 2007), that it is legitimately and intellectually useful to treat the continent of Africa as a geographical and cultural centre that will provide the reference point(s) in the process of gathering and interpreting information about people from the African continent and diaspora. This correlates with Asante's (1993:112) assertion that the geographical scope of Afrocentricity is not limited to the continent of Africa but wherever 'people declare themselves to be Africans'. Asante (1992:9) further states:

The fundamental assumptions of Afroecological inquiry are based on the African orientation to the cosmos. By 'African' I mean clearly a 'composite African' not a specific discrete African orientation which would rather mean ethnic identification, i.e. Yoruba, Zulu, Nubia, etc.

The term ‘African’ is used in this article to not refer exclusively to skin pigmentation or geographic location but to signal reference to a common and connected heritage that is linked to a personal identity that is rooted in notions of a common origin, struggle and experience. This is not to disregard socio-economic differentiation linked to aspects such as race, class and gender. It is to centralise values and worldviews, that is, the key issue is African thought and western thought, not African people and western people.

In geography, the implications of a Eurocentric dominance can be discerned by an analysis of various concepts that are employed and which remain central to the development of geography as a discipline and the way in which issues are theorised. This is important since, as Bangura (2012:103) states, ‘many of the concepts and contexts used in works dealing with Africa and its diaspora employ Eurocentric concepts and contexts that often do not capture the essence of the phenomena being discussed’. In relation to geography specifically, at the most basic level, the history of the discipline has credited European scholars and explorers for making ‘discoveries’ and developing tools and explanations that have been part of African and other people’s indigenous knowledge base for centuries prior to these ‘discoveries’. Several studies highlight that these ‘discoveries’ were already known by local people prior to colonisation (Asante 1992; 2002; Karenga 1988; Keto 1991). Reclaiming African history and contributions have been at the centre of Afrocentricity and, more recently, the African Renaissance Project. The manner in which the world is generally physically presented, especially in maps, and mentally conceptualised further supports the notion of Eurocentric dominance and imposition (Bangura 2012; Blaut 1993; McGee 1995). Keto (1991) illustrates how the lines of longitude use Western Europe as the centre. Furthermore, the world map which is most commonly used depicts the northern hemisphere at the ‘top’ and the southern hemisphere at the ‘bottom’ despite the planet being an object in space that can be viewed from any orientation. Another blatant spatial example of Eurocentrism in geography is in cartography where the Mercator projection which enlarges the northern hemisphere is mostly used.

Hoover and Donovan (2004:18-19) argue that concepts are ‘(1) tentative, (2) based on agreement, and (3) useful only to the degree that they capture or isolate some significant and definable item in reality’ and that ideas, perspectives and theory development occurs through the linking of concepts which is used to refer to observable phenomena and communicate

research findings. Essentially, concepts are central for classification and permits generalisability. For example, ‘population explosion’ or ‘overpopulation’ is a key concept in population geography. This concept is generally used to describe population change (and specifically growth) among Black people. However, this apparently ‘universal’ concept is fraught with cultural and socio-economic undertones and value judgements of poor Blacks in particular being irresponsible and dependent on government support. For example, derogatory terms like ‘welfare mothers’ or ‘welfare queens’ are often used to refer to single Black mothers who receive state support. Furthermore, on the African continent, the notion of ‘population explosion’ sits uncomfortably with the cultural and biological genocide that denotes specific forms of violence that persists in many African countries (Eck & Hultman 2007; Gleditsch 2012; Pruniér 2007). This is not a focus of population studies in geography with genocide (and violent conflicts generally) being the focus of research in conflict studies. The notion of overpopulation therefore co-exists uncomfortably with the existence of genocide.

The use of several spatial and socio-economic categories and names, the basic disciplinary language of geography, is also Eurocentric in a number of ways. There is a tendency for regions to be defined relationally to Europe, for example, use of terms like the Far East, Middle East and the ‘Dark’ continent (referring to Africa). This is also a typical example of spatial distortion and imposition of identity that temporally and spatially disconnected Kemet (the original name for Egypt) from Africa and located it in the ‘Arab World’ or Middle East. In doing so, the contributions Egyptian civilisation made to the world were removed as being from Africa. The socio-political and economic implications of using terms such as the ‘First World’, ‘Third World’, ‘developing regions’, ‘underdeveloped regions’, ‘developed countries’ and ‘industrialised regions’ are problematic and reinforce Eurocentric hierarchies of power and privilege. The terms used to refer to African countries (‘Third World’, ‘developing’ and ‘underdeveloped’) are generally associated with negative stereotypes and meanings. Furthermore, they tend to mask differences within countries and regions and particularly the plight of Africans in the diaspora. For example, the United States of America is deemed to be a ‘developed’ and ‘First World’ country, however, more Black people in America live in poverty compared to Whites (Boyd 2014; Glasmeier 2006) which can be linked to persistent racism and other

forms of oppression. Additionally, most of these terms are based almost exclusively on European economic criteria which ignore the importance of indigenous knowledge and livelihoods, historical factors and cultural dimensions in relation to development processes.

There is also a key assumption that underpins the use and implied meanings of the categorisations, that is, processes of economic development follow western patterns. This assumption has serious policy and development planning implications that encourage top-down planning in African contexts which are often externally conceptualised and funded. This is also associated with an imposition of western models and values systems on the African continent and the African diaspora. At best, these policies and planning approaches partially address the socio-economic, political and environmental challenges and problems experienced by African people. At worst, they are wholly inadequate and inappropriate with disastrous implications and consequences for African communities, often worsening conditions and reinforcing inequalities and conflicts. Thus, it is clear that the 'naming' of geographical concepts and the taken for granted 'language' of the discipline have serious implications at the research, interpretation and policy levels. As Bangura (2012:104) suggests, language and naming are powerful, profound and subtle processes; capturing meaning (and loaded with value judgements).

Geographers display a tendency to compartmentalise the world spatially and economically using political, economic and environmental categories. This is embedded in a desire to 'map out' landscapes and demonstrate the high levels of socio-economic and environmental variability that characterise the world, including the different forms of inequalities. The common spatial compartmentalisation is demarcations which relate to geographical location (rural, urban, coastal, inland, informal, built areas, etc.), race, nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, income levels and economic status. These categories tend to reinforce and (re)create differences and hierarchies in society. It is important to note that specific categories often overlap with each other to create multiple jeopardies for many groups of people such as poor rural women. Critically examining the implications of the geography of compartmentalisation or categorisation reveals that belonging to or not belonging (the politics of inclusion and exclusion) to a particular group and/ or spatial location is what creates relative oppression and privilege concurrently at different scales (the

household, community, local, regional and global levels) and in different places and contexts.

While categories are useful for analytical purposes and tracking changes over time, it is important to note that this tendency to homogenise is extremely problematic. There are substantial differences as alluded to earlier within specific spaces (such as within countries) and categorisations (such as First World or rural) can be misleading, especially when there are perceived notions of what these constitute. The Afrocentric perspective encourages social scientists to critically evaluate the validity of knowledge, ways in which knowledge is produced and for what purpose, and epistemological assumptions and theoretical/ conceptual frameworks. As stated earlier, Afrocentricity advocates that there is a need to move away from 'homogenising' concepts that are Eurocentric but presented as universal. Afrocentricity gives priority to the experiences of African peoples in different contexts while also relating these experiences to broader socio-economic and political structures as well as historical processes. Advocating an African-centred approach in human geography implies that research and explanations cannot be uniform in terms of issues, approaches and outcomes, since they examine the socio-economic and political expressions and experiences of the concerns and interests of people from different localities, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds.

Location is central to geographical thinking and research, and is linked to geography's concern with absolute (the exact coordinates) and relative (how place is perceived and experienced) space. Dear and Wolch (2014:9) identify three aspects of socio-spatial dialect: how social relations are constituted through space, how social relations are constrained by space and how social relations are mediated by space. Murphy (2014:3) particularly notes concerns related to location biases which 'affect what gets more or less attention, the ways in which location and geographic mobility are intertwined, and the opportunities a focus on geographic location offers in efforts to understand the coupled nature of human–environment systems'. The National Research Council (2010:45) in the USA argues that globally, more is known about certain contexts and issues (particularly in relation to risk and resilience) than others as a result of locational biases. They specify that this is particularly notable in Asia and Africa where research on hazards, for example, is underrepresented. Murphy (2014:3) states:

The disparity in geographical coverage has far-reaching implications

if one considers the unacknowledged assumptions that often accompany generalisations grounded in case studies that are developed without adequate consideration of locational bias.

Bob *et al.* (2014:28) note specifically that limited data and specific case studies in Africa on climate change pose research and intervention challenges that need to be addressed to empower the continent to adapt to and mitigate against the devastating impacts of changes in climate and the environment. Human geography has a substantial role to play in this regard.

Driver (1995:403) asserts that the enthusiasm for the writing of new histories of geography is indeed one of the most striking developments across the discipline. Despite this, Sidaway (1997:74) argues:

Yet it is everywhere taken more or less for granted what is being discussed is only western civilisation – and, more significantly, as if it were the unique source of its own geographical tradition.

Sidaway (1997:92) notes that within this initiative of rethinking geography there remains a tendency to construct and centralise western tradition within accepted frameworks. Essentially, this means that while geographical contributions, frameworks and concepts may be debated and challenged, these are limited and the status quo remains largely intact. The growing discourses around ‘Eurocentricity and geography’, ‘the re-writing of geographical history’, and other similar topics are important components of the broader geographical restructuring and transformation processes. Geography as a discipline cannot be separated from its own history and cultural biases and misconceptions which need to be confronted and contested.

The Role of Geographical Research to Advance African Scholarship

Kitchin and Tate (2013:1) state:

Research is the process of enquiry and discovery...For the human geographer, research is the process of trying to gain a better

understanding of the relationships between humans, space, place and the environment.

Geographical research is generally primary data collection based. Increasing visibility in terms of both information that exists and the number of persons involved in generating the information is the starting point for integrating and centralising Africans into human geography as researchers and subjects. Visibility emanates through appropriate and unbiased data collection and training of African-centred human geographers. Identifying research areas and agendas that respond to the needs and concerns of Africans; collecting and analysing disaggregated data that unpacks differences and examines commonalities; training and empowering local researchers and using local organisations; and adopting methodological approaches that gives voices to the marginalised (especially at the local level) are among some of the ways to bring Africans into human geography research. African voices, indigenous knowledge and expertise must enter the definition of what constitutes research, and knowledge production and dissemination in human geography.

The geographical tradition of mapping has evolved overtime, especially in the context of the advancements in computing and spatial technologies which have seen the emergence of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Remote Sensing. These spatial methodological approaches present information that is generally better suited to capture variables pertaining to the physical landscape. Although there is an increased focus on participatory GIS (Bassa *et al.* 2014:108) which is intended to integrate social phenomena into spatial mapping approaches in geography, these studies are limited and they rely heavily on consensus-building perceptions of the physical environment (often derived during focus group exercises which in itself implies that generally a small proportion of the population participate) and these are confined to social aspects such as land use, soil quality and infrastructural issues that can be easily ‘mapped’. Other social phenomena such as land conflicts, safety and security considerations, and experiences of exclusion and land dispossession tend to be neglected or reduced to points on a map identifying areas of ‘hotspots’. There is limited detailed exploration of what this means in the lives of people. This is also noticeable in climate change research where the focus tends to be on mapping climate variables with a neglect of social resilience and adaptation, yet the

latter are central to strengthening local and global capacities to cope with climate change.

The examination of the limitations of spatial techniques as an illustrative example raises the question about the multidisciplinary that geography seeks to embrace. A geographer is typically trained in a range of quantitative/ statistical, spatial (including GIS discussed above) and qualitative approaches. However, while there is this broad (and perhaps unique) continuum of methodological training, the outputs of geographical research generally tend to indicate a proclivity to specialisation, not only reinforcing the dualism of human and physical geography but also strengthening using one methodological approach/ technique within the sub-disciplines. An examination of the articles published in the *South African Geographical Journal* for two years (2012 and 2013) supports this assertion. Of the 28 articles published during this period, 19 (67.9%) were based on primary data while 9 (32.1%) comprised of desktop studies. Of these, the majority (21 – 75%) used a single technique while 5 (17.9%) used mixed methods. Two of the 9 desktop articles did not refer to any data while 7 used secondary data sources to undertake the analyses. Only 3 articles (10.7%) integrated qualitative approaches. The results indicate the bias towards quantitative approaches and also the lack of integration of multidisciplinary in understanding geographical phenomena from multiple perspectives. This suggests that the discipline of geography needs to relook at how it trains researchers and undertakes research. In terms of the training of researchers, it is possible that techniques are taught separately and there is a lack of focus on how to combine methods. This dilutes the strength of geography as a discipline that has a multidisciplinary orientation and is well suited to straddle and build bridges between the physical, natural and social sciences.

It is important to note that in relation to the use of quantitative approaches and techniques used in geography, including spatial techniques such as GIS and Remote Sensing, there is an assumption of generating knowledge that is ‘objective’ and reflective of the ‘truth’. In fact, the process of verifying information or physical features in reality is referred to in relation to GIS as ‘ground truthing’. This assumption of objective knowledge that is scientific and factual is a problem in relation to the sciences generally. Afrocentricity and other theoretical approaches such as humanism and feminism have contested this notion of objective knowledge and reiterated that the assumptions needs to be critically unpacked in the context of

differing perspectives and vantage points. Afrocentricity in particular has specifically engaged critically with Eurocentric ideology and vantage points (Asante 2007; Bangura 2012) which frame much of what is considered to be 'objective or valid' knowledge that masquerades as universal truths.

Linked to notions of what is deemed to be valid knowledge are contestations regarding whether Africa (and African societies) is the object or subject of research and knowledge production. This concern has been raised for decades. For example, Rodgers-Rose (1993:10) states that at a research level Africans have become suspicious and concerned as researchers from outside the continent (generally Europeans and North Americans) become the authority and experts on issues pertaining to African people and conditions, advancing the 'solutions' that will lead to addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges and empowering Africans. This aspect is also noted by Mohanty (1991:1) in relation to the Asian context who raises key questions that are still pertinent today about who produces knowledge about historically colonised peoples as well as from what location and for what purposes this knowledge is produced. Keto (1991:10) refers to this as 'colonial signatures' which arise when experts and authorities outside African communities exceed those that are inside these communities. This debate persists today and is strongly related to whose voices and concerns count. Asante (1998:xii) states that 'Afrocentricity is a moral as well as intellectual location that posits Africans as subjects rather than objects of human history'. This is not only relevant to history but also how research is conducted, disseminated and used.

In terms of geography and the African context, of particular concern is the proliferation of research relating to climate change issues. A positive sign is that there is significant research capacity on the continent focusing on climate change research in Africa. While beyond the scope of this article, it will be interesting to examine the profile (for example, gender, race, nationality, etc.) of the researchers based in African institutions and who are the key funders. This type of analysis is important to examine whether meaningful capacity to undertake research is being developed in Africa and whether there is a dependency on external resources to be research intensive in specific critical areas. Also, is the research focused on the physical and natural sciences or is human geography which underscores socio-economic considerations integrated into the research focus areas? Additionally, it is essential to examine whether alternative methodological and theoretical

perspectives are being adopted. The importance of viewing phenomena from different angles and perspectives strengthens our understanding of complex and interrelated issues such as climate change that has multiple drivers and several consequences.

As indicated earlier, key geographical research focuses on interactions between nature, society, space and time. Keto (1991) and Asante (1993) argue that the struggle over the control of space and time are major factors that contribute to power alignments and dynamics in society. They further contend that this control of space and time has also been central in allowing Eurocentric researchers to gain dominance over the rest of the world. Undeniably, there has been a resolute effort by Eurocentric scholars and politicians to control and manipulate time (especially the presentation and interpretation of historical processes and events) and space. Colonisation and the delineation of spatial regions and political boundaries globally, and specifically in Africa, mainly by Europeans with limited, if any, consideration for indigenous populations, cultures, traditions and histories are blatant examples of spatial control and dominance. The socio-economic, political and environmental legacies of these processes are still evident. There is little doubt that the most distressing episodes in the lives of the Black people such as colonisation, enslavement and apartheid were and are geographical exercises. These processes included the forced removals and relocation of people from their birth places and indigenous environments. This resulted in dislocations of familial systems and livelihoods that have resulted in widespread poverty among Black populations globally. Furthermore, distinctive boundaries were created to control human and natural resources. Poor people in particular were forced to move into areas with low agricultural productivity and limited natural resources. Despite our knowledge of how geographical regions and boundaries were created, as geographers we generally do not challenge these spatial constructs. Our continued acceptance of these physical features and boundaries serve to validate and give credibility to their existence.

Human geography is also critically engaging with constructs and consequences of globalisation. While geographers call for context-sensitivity and locality-based research, there is a general tendency within the discipline to emphasise the importance of global processes and interventions, particularly in the context of climate change which has emerged as a key thematic area in the environmental sciences generally and the discipline of

geography specifically. There is recognition that globalisation encourages trade liberalisation, foreign investments, consumption, mobility of people and goods, and intensifies international competition. These processes undermine indigenous and locally-based livelihoods, entrenches land dispossession and land grabbing, and promotes unsustainable practices; all of which increases environmental degradation and poverty. Despite the serious challenges that globalisation presents, countries worldwide (including on the African continent) aspire to be integrated into the world economy, as highlighted by Knox *et al.* (2014) and Martin (2013), and within the educational arena in particular there is a desire for internationalisation. Little and Green (2009:166) specifically examine the role of education in successful globalisation which is defined as ‘economic growth combined with equality and social peace’. While they illustrate how China, India, Kenya and Sri Lanka have developed forms of successful engagement with the global economy, they do not indicate how this can be sustained and whether the majority of African countries are well positioned to take advantage of opportunities presented. From a geographical and Afrocentric perspective, it is also important to raise who within these countries benefit and if benefits are geographically spread, especially in the rural areas where the majority of the poor reside.

Furthermore, Asante (2007) asserts that far from promoting multiculturalism, globalisation encourages the homogenisation of societies and cultures underpinned by western values, thought and practice. This has serious implications for the types of knowledge systems that are given credibility. In particular, the roles of indigenous knowledge systems in empowering local communities to respond to climate change impacts are critical to increase resilience and decrease vulnerability among the poor (Bob *et al.* 2014; Ibrahim 2011). This is particularly relevant in the African context where there is growing consensus that Africa will bear the brunt of negative climate change impacts:

Many African countries are still characterised by high levels of poverty; poor social services and infrastructure; livelihoods (including agricultural production and ecotourism) reliant on the natural resource base which is sensitive to climate variability; high percentages of urban poor who are vulnerable to natural hazards; and high levels of migration (sometimes as a result of climate factors).

Furthermore, these states and their communities frequently have little capacity to cope with or adapt to disasters or changes (including climate stressors) (Bob *et al.* 2014:33).

Human geography should be at the forefront of developing a research agenda to examine local initiatives and efforts as well as transform curricula to integrate climate change impacts.

More generally, in the African context, there is a need to revisit human geography curricula from an Afrocentric perspective. The experiences and locality-specific case studies need to be integrated to reveal the diversity of voices, issues and place dynamics. Afrocentric, inclusive curricula will also require transformation and re-training among educators and researchers to embrace different perspectives, educational approaches and methodological choices. The visibility of issues directly relevant to the African context and African people may also address the problems of higher drop-out rates among Black students as well as greater disengagement (Dei 1996:170). Thompson and Thompson (2008:48) describe this as the ‘politics of (in)visibility’ and calls for academics to provide information and ideas that will assist in unmasking racism ‘by providing evidence and empirical data on the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class’. Furthermore, there should be more focus on highlighting the achievements and research contributions of Black academics in human geography who can be role models for students and illustrative examples of what they are capable of achieving. There is also a need for more practical experiences and skills training. What is required is critical research focusing specifically on the curricula, pedagogic practices, and methodological approaches in human geography. This also implies moving away from portraying African people and societies as victims but as having agency and recognising knowledge systems and know-how. As Obama (2007:233) states, it is important not to be ‘robbed of our agency’ or be ‘trapped in cynicism or despair’. Furthermore, Asante (2002:102) asserts that:

Afrocentricity presents one way out of the impasse over social and cultural hegemony: the positioning of the agency of the African person as the basic unit of analysis of social situations involving African descended people is a critical step in achieving community harmony.

Similar assertions are made by Outerbridge (2013:63) who states: 'Afrocentricity purports that, in order to obtain these goals, there must be a self-conscious awareness of the need for re-centring through African people's intellectual agency'. Furthermore, Monteiro-Ferreira (2014:xiii) states that Afrocentricity provides 'the possibility that African cultures and values bring renewed ethical and social significance to a sustained project of human agency, liberation, and equality'.

The importance of generating relevant knowledge and information to inform change is particularly acute today since, as Gilley (2010:87) notes, despite two decades since Nelson Mandela proclaimed a 'new African Renaissance' (which was 'an attempt to have a fruitful encounter with modernity after decades of self-destructive ones'), there has been very little socio-economic and political progress on the continent. Furthermore, environmental challenges and conflicts worsened by climate change are increasing in Africa (Bob *et al.* 2014; Gilley 2010). This situation requires disciplines such as human geography to engage with these issues.

Methodologically, human geography embraces a wide ranging methods toolkit that includes quantitative, qualitative and spatial approaches as discussed earlier. The quantitative and spatial approaches have been adapted to explore socio-economic and environmental phenomena. The discipline is therefore well positioned to provide new and innovative ways of examining key research issues on the African continent. However, a key question is linked to the use value of knowledge generated from geographical research which can be extended to academic research more generally. Liu (2014:1) specifically raises concern in relation to the tendency of human geography research findings being confined to 'libraries and academic publications' which is generally 'appreciated only by a small number of academic communities'. He further states that while there is greater call for human geographers to contribute to policy development and debates, suggesting increased public engagement and practical relevance emanating from the research, in reality this is limited and lacks real impact. The transformation of human geography must address this aspect and examine ways to translate research findings to inform practical outcomes that are sensitive to context and meaningfully engages with local communities in a manner that is empowering and centralises local experiences and knowledge as encouraged when adopting an Afrocentric paradigm. Liu (2014:1) states that human geographers must interact more with stakeholders (specifically

society, industry and the state) external to the academic community.

Conclusion

Geographers who embrace an Afrocentric perspective and approach may have to contend with resistance from other geographers since they challenge assumptions and concepts that frame the nature and focus of the discipline. Theoretical suppositions, methodological orientations and techniques, research findings and interpretation as well as pedagogic practices are critically examined. Human geographers in particular who pursue an African scholarship agenda need to address the issues raised in this article. Afrocentricity provides a relevant and appropriate framework in this context to transform human geography, thereby ensuring that we are not intentionally or unintentionally favouring western or Eurocentric geographical concepts and practices. Afrocentricity thus provides a framework to critique accepted and widely used geographical categories and concepts.

Afrocentricity is a 'place perspective' (Asante 1992:6) and this article indicates that place matters and has socio-economic, political and environmental implications. As Castree (2009:169) states, it is important to consider 'the difference that place makes'. The focus of geography has always been on space, time and place (specifically human-environment interactions) which are the contexts of natural and human experiences, events and processes. As suggested in this article, some geographers located within radical, humanist and gender geography strands have already created the foundation for challenging traditional and established theories. However, Afrocentricity provides a useful lens to centralise African voices, experiences, concerns and interests. This can contribute to the further development of methodological and conceptual options and alternatives that can assist substantially in the pursuit of African scholarship that encourages a rethinking of research approaches. Furthermore, Varró (2014:3) calls for 'culturally and spatially sensitive political-economic perspectives' in geography which relates to the Afrocentric approach advocated for in this article. As articulated in this article, fundamental problems that Black people face on the African continent and the diaspora are linked to intensely and often deliberate geographical exercises (the control and manipulation of space and time). The dismantling and transformation of these institutions and mind-sets must, of necessity therefore, incorporate geographical restructuring

which includes how geographers think and what geographers do.

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