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Unlearning: Afrocentrism as Method, Not Artefact

(what is a substack and why does everyone keep asking if I have one?)



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Just a note: You may know me from my [Instagram](#) series on decolonial thought and a [video](#) I made about John Mbiti's *African Religions & Philosophy*. But returning to my MA papers recently, I realized something, long before there was an audience, I was already thinking from inside a much older conversation. This post is a revised version of one of those papers, and I'm sharing it as a record of my own process of unlearning.

"Mother Wanjiku, wherever your soul rests, I beg you to forgive me for all the years I had abandoned the tongue you gave me at birth; the language through which you sang me lullabies; and told me stories that thrilled the heart. I have come back home: I embrace my mother tongue. The prodigal son is back." (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)

When Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o delivered his 2019 Premi Internacional Catalunya Prize acceptance speech entirely in Kikuyu, it was not just a symbolic gesture. It was an epistemic one. By choosing his mother tongue, Ngũgĩ insisted that language is not merely a vessel for thought, but a site where memory, culture, and power converge. To speak Kikuyu on a global stage was to refuse the quiet demand that African thought must first pass through European languages to become legible.

That refusal is the heart of what I understand as *unlearning*.

Unlearning is not forgetting. It is not ignorance. It is not a rejection of knowledge. It is the slow, often uncomfortable process of recognizing that much of what we have been taught as neutral, universal, or objective is in fact produced by particular histories, interests, and hierarchies of power. For many Africans, and people of African descent, unlearning is the work of disentangling ourselves from epistemic frameworks that have consistently positioned us as objects of study rather than as thinking subjects (I'll expand more in this point in another post using V.Y. Mudimbe's book *The Invention of Africa*).

Afrocentrism, as it is often discussed, is misunderstood precisely because it is treated as an identity claim or an aesthetic preference. But Afrocentrism, at its core, is a methodological intervention. Coined by Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentrism asks a deceptively simple question: *what changes when Africa and African people are placed*