



Pitch a Global Theorist: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

What do the following people have in common?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Kenya)

Taras Shevchenko (Russian Empire)

Patrick Pearse (Ireland)

Mercè Rodoreda (Catalunya)

Paulo Freire (Brazil)

What do the following people have in common?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Kenya)

Imprisoned in 1977 by the Kenyan government. His “crime” included writing and staging a play in **Gikuyu**, his native language, rather than English.

Taras Shevchenko (Russian Empire)

Arrested in 1847 and **exiled**. He wrote in **Ukrainian**, which was heavily suppressed by Tsarist authorities.

Patrick Pearse (Ireland)

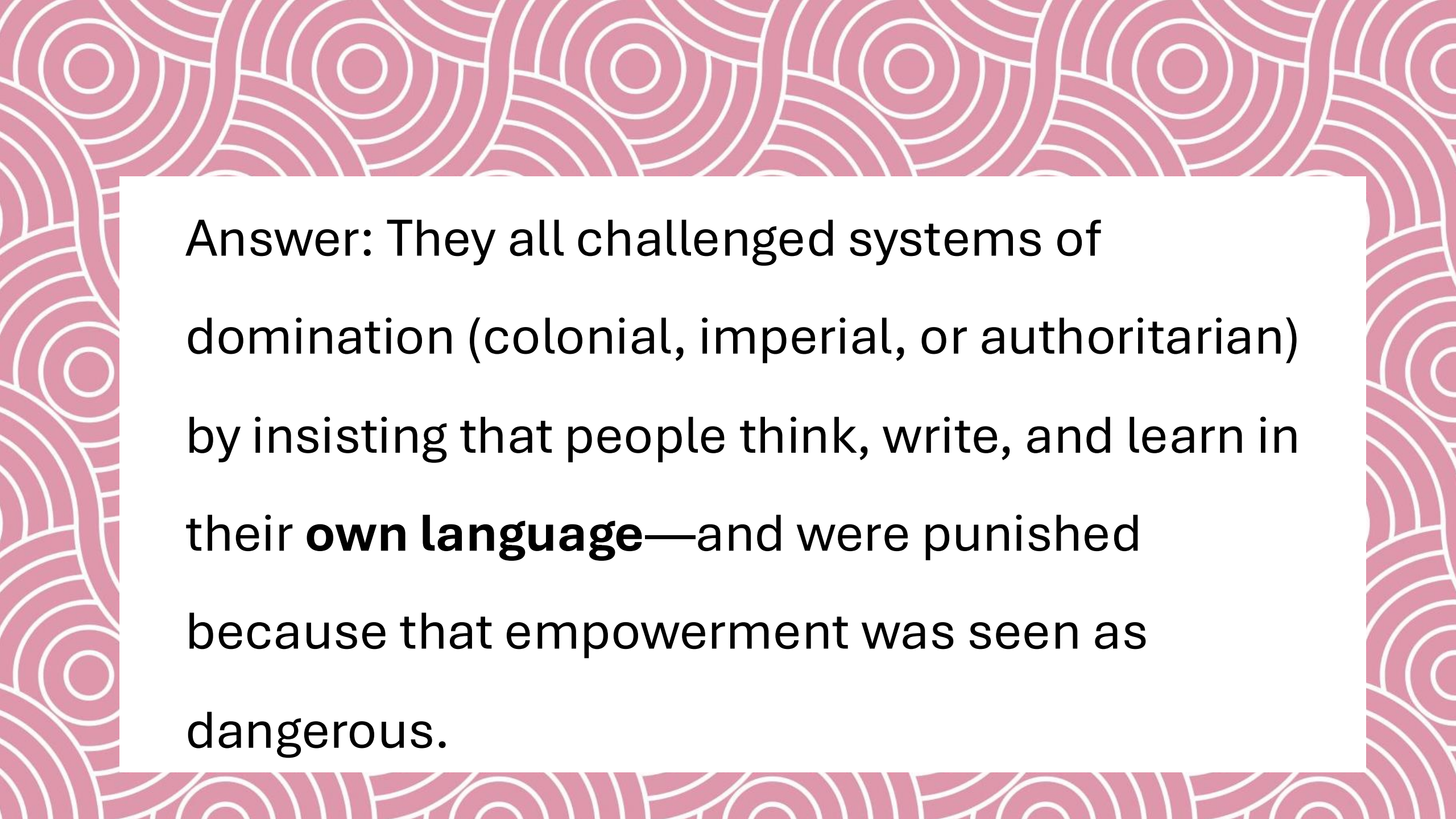
A key figure in reviving the **Irish language** under British rule. Though **executed** after the Easter Rising, his promotion of Irish was deeply political in a colonial context.

Mercè Rodoreda (Catalunya)

Wrote *La plaça del Diamant*, one of the most important **Catalan** works of the 20th Century. Forced into **exile** after the Spanish Civil War when Catalan was effectively suppressed at home.

Paulo Freire (Brazil)

Imprisoned and exiled after the 1964 coup. His literacy work emphasized teaching people in their **own linguistic context**, which authorities saw as threatening.

The background of the slide features a repeating pattern of concentric circles in shades of pink and white, creating a textured, ripple-like effect.

Answer: They all challenged systems of domination (colonial, imperial, or authoritarian) by insisting that people think, write, and learn in their **own language**—and were punished because that empowerment was seen as dangerous.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan writer, theorist, and educator whose pedagogy centers on **language, power, and decolonisation**

... language shapes thought, and without that grounding, education reproduces colonial ways of knowing.



NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O *Decolonising the Mind*

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE
IN AFRICAN LITERATURE



Core Pedagogical Ideas

In *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ argues that **language is not neutral**, it carries culture, values, and worldview.

Colonial education systems imposed European languages which:

- Alienated learners from their own cultures

- Positioned Western knowledge as “superior”

His pedagogical stance:

- Teach and learn in **mother tongues where possible**

- Value multilingualism as intellectual expansion, not deficit

👉 **Implication for learning design:**

Language choices in curriculum are not just delivery decisions—they shape identity, participation, and epistemic access.

Decolonising Knowledge and Curriculum

In *Moving the Centre* (1993) and *Globalectics* (2012):

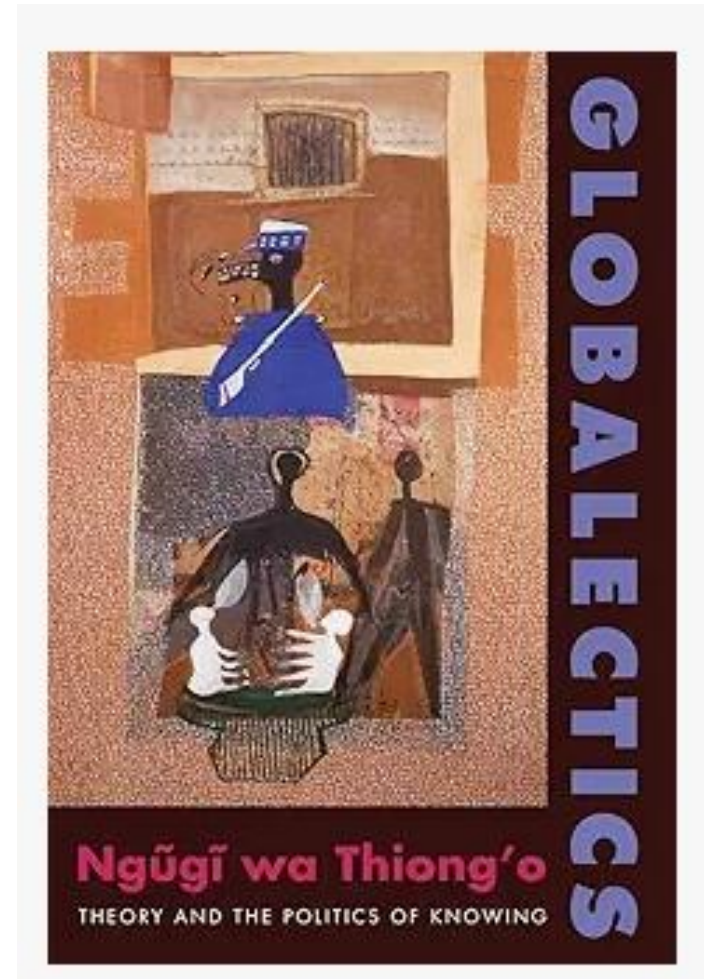
- He critiques the **Eurocentric “centre” of knowledge**
- Calls for **plural, globally distributed knowledge systems**

Key concept: **“Moving the Centre”**

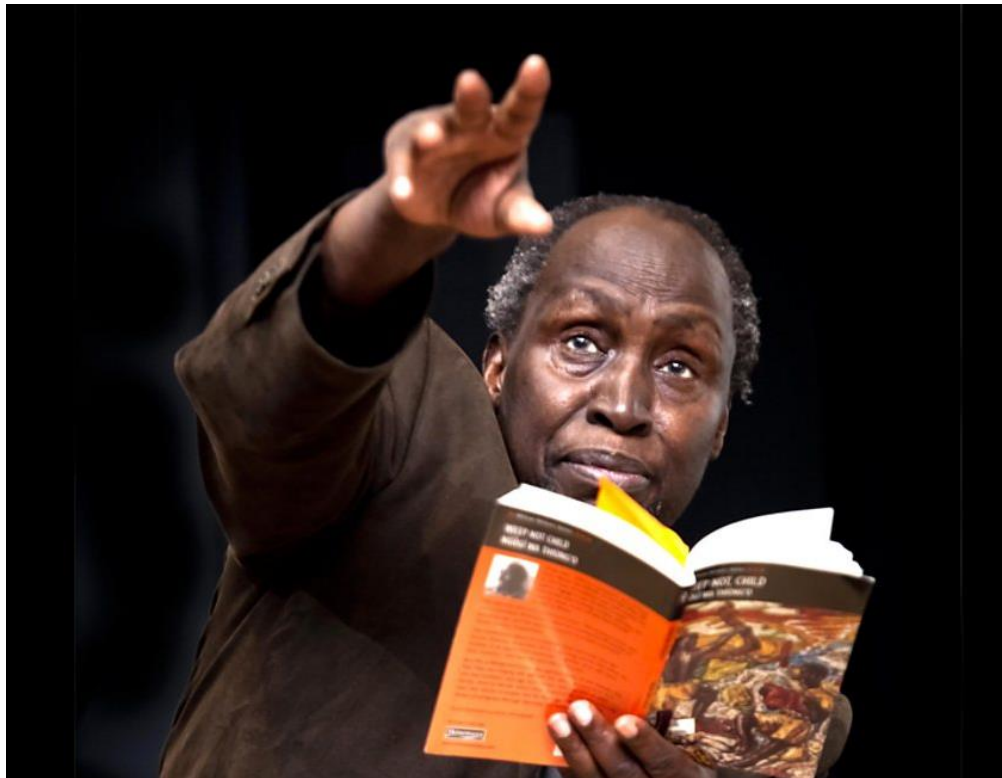
- From Europe → to a multiplicity of cultural perspectives
- From elite knowledge → to community knowledge



Implication for learning design:
Curricula should not just “add diversity” but **restructure whose knowledge is foundational.**



Education as Cultural and Political Practice



Ngũgĩ aligns with thinkers like Paulo Freire, but with a stronger focus on colonial history.

Education is:

- A site of **power संघर्ष (struggle)**
- Either reinforcing domination or enabling liberation

In practice, he advocates:

- Critical engagement with history
- Learners as **active cultural agents**, not passive recipients



Implication for learning design:

Shift from content delivery → to **critical, reflective, and culturally situated learning experiences.**

Key Pedagogical Works:

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=Dgk7EAAAQBAJ>

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1993). *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms*. James Currey.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2012). *Globalectics: Theory and the politics of knowing*. Columbia University Press.

<https://cup.columbia.edu/book/globalectics/9780231159500>

Writings:

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1972). *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture, and politics*. Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1981). *Writers in politics: Essays*. Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1981). *Education for a national culture*. In *Writers in politics: Essays*. Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1983). *Barrel of a pen: Resistance to repression in neo-colonial Kenya*. Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). [*Decolonising the Mind \(Google Books preview\)*](#): *The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1993). *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedom*. James Currey.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (1998). *Penpoints, gunpoints and dreams: The performance of literature and power in post-colonial Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2009). *Something torn and new: An African renaissance*. Basic Books.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2012). [*Globalectics \(publisher page\)*](#): *Theory and the politics of knowing*. Columbia University Press.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2013). *In the name of the mother: Reflections on writers and empire*. Boydell & Brewer.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2016). *Secure the base: Making Africa visible in the globe*. Seagull Books.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, N. (2018). *Wrestling with the devil: A prison memoir*. The New Press.