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English and Global Education: Writing Apotropaic Texts to Deflect the Sorcery of Colonial|Modern|Development

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Abstract: Irrespective of the scholarship that exposes the violent impact of English on education systems in colonial, settler colonial, and (post)colonial contexts, it continues to take center stage in educational policy changes in academic institutions around the world. It is promoted by school and university curricula, global funding organizations, and political leaders as a language that provides unimaginable opportunities for everyone and, particularly for historically disadvantaged communities. Consequently, English has become the/a language of colonial|modern|development[2] enabling the continuation of its civilizing mission through discourses of progress. As a Sri Lankan expatriate academic and a former English language teacher, in this paper, I explore how English is embodied as desires and traumas in (post)colonial subjects (*le sujet*). My research in Sri Lanka with English teachers show how their experiences about/around English that give credence to its manifestation as truth-power can inevitably lead to the reproduction of harm in/through education. Therefore, drawing on ethnographic and archival research, I tell stories (as apotropaic texts) imagining curricular orientations that would deflect the sorcery of colonial|modern|development in English. In this paper, rather than supporting the view that English is imperialistic, neocolonial, and a threat to linguistic diversity, or merely promoting discourses that glorify it as a panacea for sociopolitical and economic problems, I invite educators to sit with the sticky tensions that emerge from one's attunement to English as the embodiment of desires and traumas.

Keywords: English, global education, curriculum, apotropaic writing, desires and traumas

Preface

"A whole mythology is deposited in our language."
– Ludwig Wittgenstein

"I have recalled it again and again: "a whole mythology is deposited in our language." It sticks in my memory. It has become part of my mythology."
– Michael Taussig

Lately, I have been experiencing nightmares that possess a peculiar sense of ordinariness. In these, I do not see myself falling into never-ending abysses, being hunted down by many-headed

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[2] Throughout this paper, I employ the vertical bar (|) to indicate the blurred (scholarly or otherwise) boundaries of modernity, coloniality, and development. In these times of violence and terror, I encourage readers to consider these as one and the same, indistinguishably interconnected rather than as distinct phenomena, discourses, or concepts.

monsters or gods, or being condemned to eternal hell for my unconfessed sins. Instead, these nightmares are so banal that they defy any need for dream analysis. In one such nightmare, I was taking the Common General Test[3], which is a required component of the state university admission exam (commonly known as the Advanced Level Exam) in Sri Lanka. The invigilator announced that the exam was going to be only in English. Realizing I had suddenly lost English, my second language, I asked the invigilator why the test was not available in Sinhala, my mother tongue. In an automated voice, the invigilator said, "The directive was received from the Ministry last night, accompanied by the President's mandate to conduct all future examinations exclusively in English. This measure is intended to accelerate students' acquisition of the English language, as it effectively and efficiently yields graduates who are equipped for the global workforce of today's fast-paced modern world." I woke up with chills and a sweat, anxious I had lost (my[4]) English. I imagine many of you who have learned English as a second language might find this just as unsettling.

What if I lose English tomorrow or some other day, like the sudden epidemic of inexplicable blindness in José Saramago's (1999/1995) novel *Blindness*, or through some Kafkaesque transformation? In that case, will I be removed from my graduate program, where I teach, read, and write in English? This sounds like a silly thought in an era of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiatives in U.S. universities. However, I like to sit with this question as a reminder of the overwhelming dominance of English, specifically in academia and education. The most painful part of this nightmare was studying for the Common General Test, memorizing "important" events that had taken place in the "world"[5]. Waking up, I created this collage of events as an apotropaic text (see Figure 1) to deflect the sorcery of colonial|modern|development infused into my own (and others') ways of knowing, being, and feeling through the post-independence Sri Lankan education system that continues to coerce its students to memorize imperial/genocidal accomplishments like Christopher Columbus "discovering" America and moon landing. This nightmare felt all too familiar as I had taken this exam in 2008, following a similar preparation regimen with high hopes of securing college admission.

[3] This exam tests students' general awareness of current affairs, reasoning, problem-solving, and communication skills. Passing this test, along with three other main courses, is the minimum requirement to enter public universities in Sri Lanka.

[4] Here I am reminded of Derrida's (1998) words, "that in any case we speak only one language – and that we do not *own* it. We only speak one language – and, since it returns to the other, it exists asymmetrically, always for *the other*, from the other, kept by the other. Coming from the other, remaining with the other, and returning to the other" (p. 40).

[5] Scholars have challenged the idea of the world as a ready-made place, critically considering epistemological, ontological, and ethical conundrums that this abstraction entails (e.g., Mignolo, 2011; Escobar, 2018; Tsing et al., 2024).

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Figure 1
An Incomplete Collage of Global Events

I call these nightmares mundane nightmares. They are saturated with sorcery, the evil magic of colonial|modern|development normalized by enlightenment thinking, neoliberal logics, and everyday technologies of coercion that reinforce desires of coloniality, modernity, and development in turn—both the process and the product. Also, they illuminate the complexity of sense-making as events, years, places, bodies, names, animals, machines, myths, facts, languages, and anything and everything blur into each other, defying the boundaries of day and night, and past, present, and future, collapsing and conflating myriad scales that we (think) use in our everyday life. Disorienting and reorienting like a long-winded grammatically incorrect sentence. And yet, they make sense depending on what one attunes oneself to as they dwell in a space of tension (Aoki, 1992; Jaramillo & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2019) that is in counterpoint to the desire for harmony or balance through compartmentalization and streamlining that colonial|modern|development imposes on lived curricular landscapes of multiplicity (Pinar & Irwin, 2011).

The sudden loss of English I experienced in my mundane nightmare also reminded me of an experience about dreaming and English. Some professors in Departments of English at Sri Lankan public universities have formed a theory about language competency based on dream analysis; perhaps this is just a dominant myth. Before presenting their theory, they ask students whether they dream in English, Sinhala, or Tamil. Students from upper-class families who learn English at their mother's knee usually say they dream in English, while others say they dream in Sinhala or Tamil, depending on their home languages. The professors then enlighten "their" students that dreaming in English serves as the most accurate proof of "native-like" competency in English[6]. It was just another instance of the curriculum of English instilling the desire to dream in it. It is embodied as desires and traumas (particularly in those who have learned it in former British

[6] See this video in which a former minister referring to this discourse during an interview. TRS Clips. (2023, September 14). *Sri Lanka's Complex Relationship with The British: Language, Culture, and Identity* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T25iuZEUt4U

colonies). Therefore, I want to use this paper to create apotropaic texts to deflect the evil magic of English interwoven with colonial|modern|development in global education, knowing so well that there are no guarantees.

Apotropaic writing requires compassionate engagement with experiences of one's own and others along the illusive lines of phenomena, be it anthropogenic climate change, agribusiness, nuclear weapons production, soil conservation, or language politics. Apotropaic writing—derived from apotropaic magic that shamans and healers in diverse cultures use to deal with maleficent spirits/entities/beings—is done to avert the (evil) magic of agribusiness writing (Taussig, 2015). Agribusiness writing, according to Michael Taussig (2015), is:

> What we find throughout the university, and everyone knows it when they don't see it…Agribusiness writing knows no wonder…wants mastery, not the mastery of non-mastery. Agribusiness writing is a mode of production (see Marx) that conceals the means of production, assuming writing as information to be set aside from writing that has poetry, humor, luck, sarcasm, leg pulling, the art of the storyteller, and subject becoming object. Agribusiness writing assumes writing to be a means, not a source, of experience for reader and writer alike… assumes the need for explanation when what is at issue is why is one required…It cannot estrange the known that with which it works… Agribusiness writing wants to drain the wetlands. Swamps, they used to be called, dank places where bugs multiply. As if by magic the disorder of the world will be straightened out. (pp. 5 – 7).

In the rituals of apotropaic writing, if we are to consider Ludwig Wittgenstein's claim, "A whole mythology is deposited in our language" (Wittgenstein, 2018, p. 48) seriously, we are "to neither expose nor erase" this mythology, "but conspire with it" while "becoming aware of that presence in our lives, in our writing, and in our institutions" (Taussig, 2015, p. 3). To write apotropaic texts to deflect the magic of English embodied as desires and traumas (in me and perhaps, in others too), I draw inspiration from Taussig, who is inspired by Colombian and Peruvian shamans, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Friedrich Nietzsche, and probably many other thinkers. Apotropaic writing requires a different sensitivity to the storied world beyond the logics of colonial|modern|development discourses to estrange the known and to learn to "love the strange, be patient with it, let it get into you" (Taussig, 2015, p. 6).

I am a storyteller, like the kind Walter Benjamin (1968) talks about when he says, "The storyteller takes what he [*sic*] tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he, in turn, makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (p. 31). The stories – my apotropaic writing – I share with you in the next section are created based on my personal experiences and ethnographic fieldwork and archival research conducted in Sri Lanka intermittently from 2020 to 2023 on English (language) education. I interviewed English teachers working at public universities about their English (language) learning and teaching experiences. The archival research, conducted at the Department of National Archives, National Institute of Education, and a library of a Sri Lankan public university, focused on the history of English (language) education after 1948, the "independence" of Sri Lanka from the British colonizers. In the spirit of apotropaic writing, I resist the demand to explain the research procedures further. Instead, I am interested in the ethics of storytelling that is obfuscated by agribusiness technologies such as validity, reliability, and verifiability in research. As I write apotropaic texts, Donna Haraway's (2019) words ring in my mind: "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with…It matters what stories make worlds;

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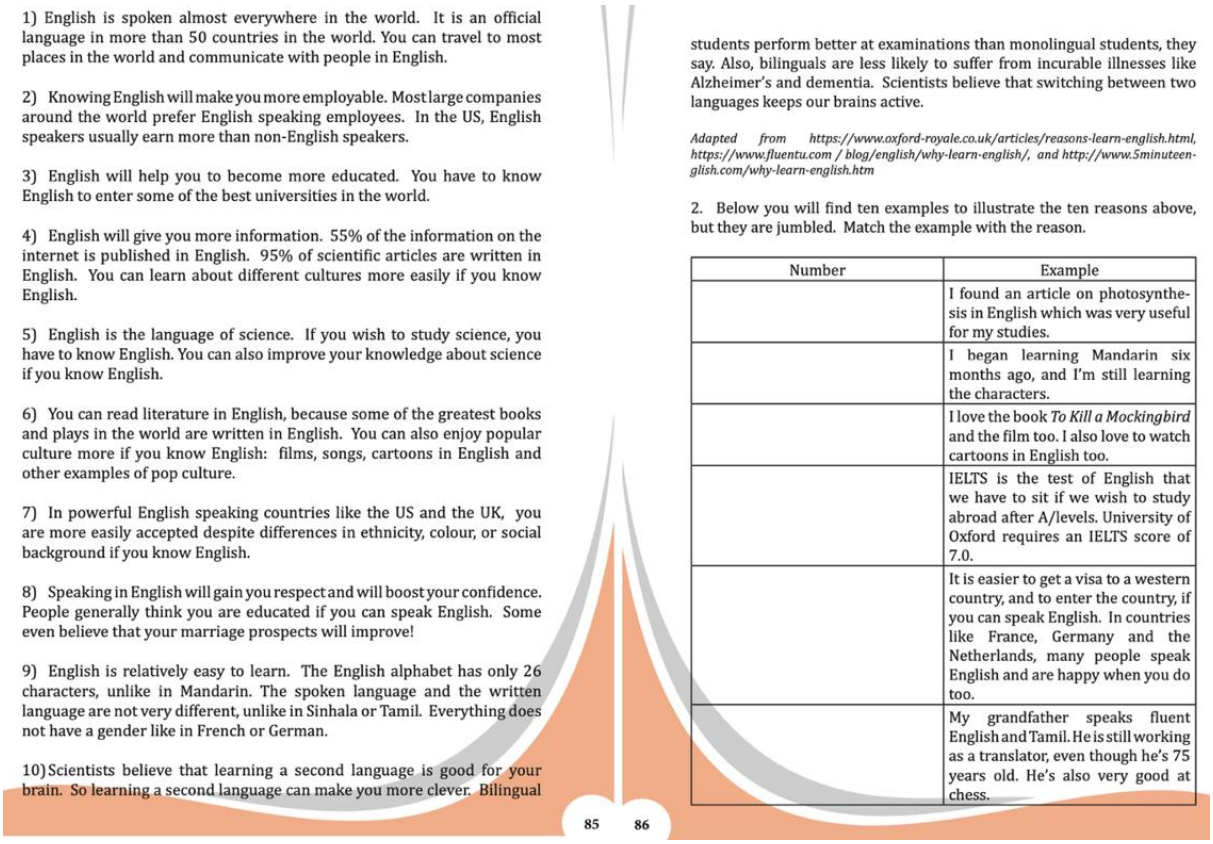
what worlds make stories" (p. 12). Stories reveal worldviews. Unless educators develop an attunement to the curricular significance of stories (Nelson & Durham, 2023), scholars run the risk of either completely dismissing them or taking them for granted merely as cultural artifacts. Let me explain.

Roger Lederer and Carol Burr (2014) explore and explain over 3000 bird names in *Latin for Bird Lovers*. In their description of the *Corvus* genus (crows and ravens), they share stories about crows in different cultures. They share a Native American myth that is "about how the crow (or raven) became black after rescuing the moon, sun, and stars from an owl's lair" (Lederer & Burr, 2014, p. 54). According to a British myth, "If ravens ever fled the Tower of London, the monarchy would fall" (Lederer & Burr, 2014, p. 54). Therefore, until this day, six ravens are kept in captivity in the Tower of London by Yeoman Warders. These myths tell two stories about power, desires, and actions, presenting two contrasting orientations (curricula) toward the world. The Native Americans, through the symbolic universe depicted in the myth, de-center the human and (re)orient humans to imagine a world where the crow performs a heroic act for the wellbeing of the universe. In contrast, the British myth expresses their continuing anxiety about the monarchy's possible collapse, maintaining a desire for (further) conquest. This desire is consistently channeled through English, as spells of development|modernity that promises (post)colonial subjects a path to mastering the "global" through mastering English. Here are some spellbinding spells from the General English textbook for high school (Advanced Level) students in Sri Lanka (see Figure 2):

Figure 2

An Excerpt from a Grade 12-13 General English Textbook Provided by the Department of Education in Sri Lanka (2017)



1) English is spoken almost everywhere in the world. It is an official language in more than 50 countries in the world. You can travel to most places in the world and communicate with people in English.

2) Knowing English will make you more employable. Most large companies around the world prefer English speaking employees. In the US, English speakers usually earn more than non-English speakers.

3) English will help you to become more educated. You have to know English to enter some of the best universities in the world.

4) English will give you more information. 55% of the information on the internet is published in English. 95% of scientific articles are written in English. You can learn about different cultures more easily if you know English.

5) English is the language of science. If you wish to study science, you have to know English. You can also improve your knowledge about science if you know English.

6) You can read literature in English, because some of the greatest books and plays in the world are written in English. You can also enjoy popular culture more if you know English: films, songs, cartoons in English and other examples of pop culture.

7) In powerful English speaking countries like the US and the UK, you are more easily accepted despite differences in ethnicity, colour, or social background if you know English.

8) Speaking in English will gain you respect and will boost your confidence. People generally think you are educated if you can speak English. Some even believe that your marriage prospects will improve!

9) English is relatively easy to learn. The English alphabet has only 26 characters, unlike in Mandarin. The spoken language and the written language are not very different, unlike in Sinhala or Tamil. Everything does not have a gender like in French or German.

10) Scientists believe that learning a second language is good for your brain. So learning a second language can make you more clever. Bilingual students perform better at examinations than monolingual students, they say. Also, bilinguals are less likely to suffer from incurable illnesses like Alzheimer's and dementia. Scientists believe that switching between two languages keeps our brains active.

Adapted from https://www.oxford-royale.co.uk/articles/reasons-learn-english.html, https://www.fluentu.com / blog/english/why-learn-english/, and http://www.5minuteenglish.com/why-learn-english.htm

2. Below you will find ten examples to illustrate the ten reasons above, but they are jumbled. Match the example with the reason.

Number	Example
	I found an article on photosynthesis in English which was very useful for my studies.
	I began learning Mandarin six months ago, and I'm still learning the characters.
	I love the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the film too. I also love to watch cartoons in English too.
	IELTS is the test of English that we have to sit if we wish to study abroad after A/levels. University of Oxford requires an IELTS score of 7.0.
	It is easier to get a visa to a western country, and to enter the country, if you can speak English. In countries like France, Germany and the Netherlands, many people speak English and are happy when you do too.
	My grandfather speaks fluent English and Tamil. He is still working as a translator, even though he's 75 years old. He's also very good at chess.

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The impact of British imperial ambitions is still felt in (post)colonial and settler colonial settings alike. Imagine students in Sri Lanka chanting these evil magic spells alongside their teachers, year after year! This paper merely scratches the surface of imperial violence that is evaded in the (post)colonial public school English curriculum (Allweiss & Al-Adeimi, 2024). I have learned from Sara Ahmed that "scratching seems to convey the limits of what we have accomplished" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 151). Although one might feel sore, it is the educator's responsibility to scratch at the surfaces of imperial magic walls that seek to contain, conceal, and host bodies that are possessed by evil spirits of colonial|modern|development. Writing apotropaic texts in English—conspiring with its mythology—with the ethical commitment "to do less harm next time" (Fendler, 2011, p. 41) is what I aspire to perform through/by creating apotropaic texts to deflect the sorcery of the English curriculum and the development|modernity it promises.

Although limited in their human-centeredness, the stories shared in the next section invite educators to sit with the embodiment of English as desires and traumas, assuming such an attunement might enable us to deflect its sorcery. As I perform in this paper, apotropaic writing might be a ritual that educators and wordsmiths could engage in as they wake up from ordinary nightmares. I invite the readers to sit with their stories around and about colonial languages as they listen to what I share with them here.

The Weight of English

A boy in the village wanted his father to be an army soldier. At least in his mind, his father was in the army. When the class bullies came at him, he would tell them, "My Thaththa is in the army! He will come and teach you a good lesson!" Just like he had heard his teacher scream at some students when they misbehaved: "Ruwan… If you don't stop scribbling on your desk right this second, I will come and teach you a good lesson! Isuri… what are you secretly munching on? If you don't put the food back in your bag right now, I will teach you a good lesson!

The boy's father taught English at another school in a nearby village. Every morning, on his way to school with his father, the boy would count the army uncles: one under the big banyan tree, two at the bus stop next to the temple, and three in front of his school. His father's best friend, Lenin, named after Vladimir Lenin by his communist father, had two brothers in the army. Lenin's father, called Master by everyone (shortened for English Master), was the boy's father's first English teacher. Lenin was a music teacher and a part-time social worker. When the boy visited Lenin's uncle's family house, he would stare at the large portraits of the two military men elegantly dressed in uniforms with machine guns in their hands and chains of ammunition drooping down from their shoulders. Standing next to their portraits were artillery cases - taller than the boy and heavier than the boy - with wooden tips like spires of stupas. In a corner near the artillery cases, Lenin's *tabla* gathered dust.

For as long as he could remember, whenever his parents bought him toys, the boy would always ask for toy guns. He and his cousins had so many of them: long black guns with rattling sounds, colorful guns that spat water, and pistols with beautiful lights that shot tiny plastic balls. Other village children who played Tigers and Lions - shooting each other with dried coconut fronds or bamboo sticks up-cycled into guns - would let him and his cousins join their games only for an exchange of organic guns for their colorful plastic ones made in China.

Every night, at dinner, he watched the army on TV. They were praised for fighting the Tigers, rescuing people from floods, digging up bodies buried under landslides, digging deep trenches, driving tractors stacked up with bodies, gliding with parachutes, and lying on bloody beds in hospitals. Once, his class teacher asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up,

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the boy told the teacher that he wanted to be an army soldier just like Lenin-uncle's brothers. The teacher said, "Of course, you'll be a brave soldier one day and protect our country!".

Every morning, his father took him to school on his Jialing motorcycle, which was made in China. At the school gate, his father would lift him off the bike and tell him to run to his class. He would run as fast as he could to get to the classroom, most of the time just before the school bell rang.

Every afternoon, his mother would come to the school gate to pick him up from school. She would take his bag, his water bottle, and umbrella and walk behind him while he always dashed ahead, occasionally glancing back to make sure that his mother was following him. They would walk along the tar road, turn to the mud road, and down the footpath leading to the river. When they were near the river, he would sprint, remove his shoes, and wade across the shallow water. As he waited for his mother, he would dig a small pit in the sand bank. While the water seeped through the sand into this imaginary pond, he would catch a few Tilapia fry and put them in it. His mother would walk past him, warning him, "Don't you dare leave those innocent creatures there to die without water!" Most of the time, he would forget them there, distracted by something or other. In the second half of the walk, after crossing the river, tired, he would ask his mother, "Why can't Thaththa come to get me from school? Why do I have to walk home with you?" "Because he is at work," she would say.

One morning, the boy and his father arrived at school earlier than usual. His father saw the principal standing at the gate inspecting the students' uniforms. With the support of a team of teachers and student prefects, he meticulously inspected each student, ensuring their uniforms were pristine and in line with school regulations. Boys with hair too long were sent to the nearby barber shop for a trim, while girls whose frocks fell above the knee were instructed to let down the hem to increase the length. Glancing at the older students who looked embarrassed by these punishments with a mild smile on his face, the boy clung to his father's hand as they walked toward the principal.

He feared the principal, who always wore a stern look. He had heard stories about the principal: that the principal would hit mischievous boys with a cane, make the bad boys kneel on the sand, or hit their knuckles with the sharp edge of a ruler if they hadn't done their homework. The principal's usual stern look, that came from his military training, softened into a warm smile when he saw the boy's father. They spoke in English. Although the boy didn't understand anything, he knew they were speaking in English because English was his parents' secret language. Sometimes, his father would ask his mother, "What's for dessert?" and his mother would spell, "/MANGO/." He had quickly learned that /MANGO/ meant mango. This way, they had taught him other English words and how to spell them. He also knew that if what was spoken was not Sinhala, the other language everyone spoke was English. Only Tigers spoke Tamil. He was a Lion. Like the Lion in the national flag!

The boy's father left the boy with the principal, telling him that he should not run late for work. "Come, I'll walk you to your classroom," the principal patted the boy's head, held his hand, and walked. "Son, what is your name?" the principal asked the boy in English. "Uchith," he timidly answered. "What is your class?" The principal asked. "Grade three Rose," he answered. The classes were named after flowers, reflecting the Sinhala saying: "Children are like flowers." "What is your teacher's name?" The principal asked, scratching his white beard and smiling with him. Why can't he wear this smile every day, Uchith wondered. "Pushpa," he said, smiling back at the principal. "You know what Pushpa means?" The principal asked. Uchith nodded and said, "flower." When they reached his classroom, everyone was unusually silent for a third-grade classroom. Pushpa was already in the classroom and welcomed Uchith with a glowing smile he had never seen on her face. Her eyes glistened with excitement to see him. After the principal left, his friend Ruwan asked,

"Did you come to school today with the principal?" Uchith laughed and said, "The principal is my father's friend." That day, while walking home, he told his mother, "I'm going to be an English teacher, just like my father!".

That morning Uchith's teacher had told the students to remind their parents that the parent-teacher meeting was the day after: "Tell your mothers to come wearing sarees. Mothers who don't come in sarees will not be allowed to enter the school!" To this, Amila, well-known for his cheeky questions, asked with a mischievous grin, "Teacher, what about the fathers?". The classroom erupted in laughter, but it quickly died down when the teacher banged her long cane on her table. Twice.

The boy didn't want his mother to come to the school the next day. He wanted his father to be there. He waited till they were having dinner, and that's when they usually watched the news on the television. Around 90 people had been killed in the suicide bombing by Tigers in Colombo, injuring at least a thousand. It was all chaos. His parents were shocked and angry by what they were watching. And then the boy broke the news, turning towards the father, "Thaththa, you will have to come to our school tomorrow for the parent-teacher meeting." "Amma will come, I have to go to work," his father said while serving himself another round of curries. Then, he started begging his father to come instead of his mother: "Thaththa, can you come instead of Amma? Amma comes every day to school to pick me up; you can come, no?". His mother seemed to like the idea and added, "Can't you meet the teacher before you go to work. Tell her I'm not well. I hate wearing sarees." His father said, "I SAID NO!" and his mother became silent as it often happened.

By the afternoon the next day, the school was crowded with parents and their children, mostly mothers in their sarees. Uchith is waiting to see his father, who had gone to work after dropping him off at the school gate. The classroom is packed with the parents and their children. Sitting in the middle of the crowd, his mind wanders off. He wishes his mother was sick and his father would come. Pushpa, standing at the blackboard, calls aloud the names of each of her students. In response, the students' parents raise their hands. Then, Pushpa tells the parent how good, bad, or awful their child is. Uchith doesn't see his father among the parents as he scans the room several times. Now, he is getting nervous and scared and is about to cry. He feels lonely in the middle of this suffocating crowd of mothers, fathers, and their children. Suddenly, he sees his mother waving at him from a corner of the classroom. He smiles at her. It takes a moment for him to realize his father isn't there. Something takes over him. He feels a pain in his throat that glides down to his stomach. A pain he has never felt before. He starts to cry as loud as possible, as if to humiliate his mother in front of everyone. In a moment, his mother had moved swiftly like air, air that the boy didn't feel breathing in until he gasped for breath and screamed so loud, "My tummy hurts!" as if the class bully had struck him hard in his belly. His teacher, either worried that Uchith might be seriously ill or that his crying would disrupt the meeting for some time, said, "You should take your son home. Let's meet up some other time."

That day, his mother carried him, his water bottle, his umbrella, and his bag in her arms along the tar road, along the mud rod, down the footpath, across the river, over the scorched sand, up the riverbank, along the mud road, until they reached home. He had clung to her body like a baby monkey. He had felt her breathing hard and fast as she walked and ran, worried about her screaming son. He had clung to her with the anger of a child in pain who thought that his mother was responsible for his father's absence. His principal at the gate, his father's incomprehensible English, his teacher's glowing smile, his principal's English would wrap around his mind like a tape pulled out of a VHS cassette. How could he explain to his mother the lesson he had learned, the weight of English, the stranglehold, the magic, the vein dividing, tongue splitting, conquest

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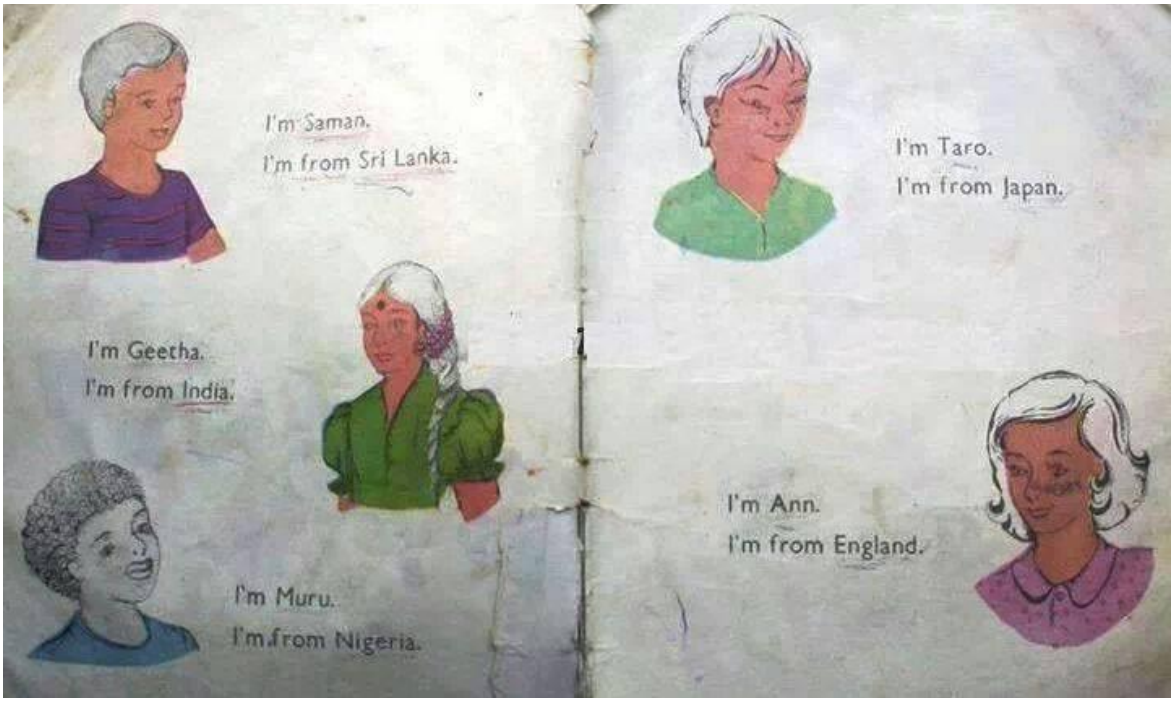
masking power of English? He would let the anger grow in him, like the rust on an iron - ever spreading. He would let it settle in his heart like the limescale that would collect at the bottom of their kettle.

Looking Towards the North

On the first day of class, an international-graduate-student-instructor at a US university assigned to teach an International Education course introduced herself to her predominantly White students. She told the students her name and where she was from and asked, "How many of you have heard about Sri Lanka?". The 25 students in the class looked at each other awkwardly while avoiding eye contact with the instructor. She said, smiling, "It's the teardrop in the Indian Ocean, a Google Search away, if you are curious to know," and pressed the clicker to move to the next slide, instructing, "I want you to look at this image closely and share what you notice." The students gradually stopped their chit-chat and looked at the image displayed on the screen.

Figure 3
An Excerpt from a Grade Four English Language Textbook Provided by the Department of Education in Sri Lanka (1993)



"What do you notice?" she asked. The students seemed confused for a moment, wondering what the instructor was trying to get at. The instructions seemed not clear enough. "Do you notice anything peculiar in this image?" she asked again. "It is all in English," one student said. In other classes, they had learned a great deal about multilingualism and translanguaging pedagogies. "Yes, I see where you are coming from. It is an excerpt from my fourth-grade English as a second language textbook. This book did not have Sinhala and Tamil, the two official languages of Sri Lanka. Thank you! Did anyone notice anything else?" Another student raised her hand, "All the faces, more or less, have the same color, like pale pink or yellow, except for Muru." "Yes… why

is Muru white?" someone else said. "I'm glad you noticed. I want to use this image to share a bit about myself and introduce you to this course through it," the instructor explained.

"When I think of global education in its many shades, be it international education or global citizenship education, my mind goes back to this lesson from my fourth-grade English textbook. My fourth-grade English teacher might have asked us to repeat after her: I'm Saman. I'm from Sri Lanka. I'm Taro. I'm from Japan. I'm Geetha. I'm from India. I'm Ann. I'm from England. I'm Muru. I'm from Nigeria. Then, we might have mimicked the grammatical structures to introduce ourselves to each other, acting as if we didn't know each other's names or where we were from. After that, we might have completed a worksheet where we matched the names – Saman, Taro, Geetha, Ann, and Muru – with their countries.

I grew up during a civil war in the North and the East in Sri Lanka." She continued with her meandering story. "The Tigers, the terrorists, the suicide bombers, children who were soldiers should be wiped out. Then and only then will the Sinhalese, true owners of the country, be able to develop Sri Lanka," our teachers taught us, parents discussed over dinner, and Buddhist monks preached. Children grew up always looking towards the North. The threat in and from the North was numerous and never-ending. I heard that after the British had left, India had invaded Sri Lanka: first, on the 4th of June 1987, the Indian Air Force had airdropped supplies in support of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); then, from 1987 to 1990, the Indian Peace Keeping Force committed countless atrocities against Tamil civilians. No one was sure whose side India was, if they supported the Tamil Tigers or the Sinhala Army. Like in any war, women and children suffered the most.

We grew up always looking towards the North: lands of beauty, prosperity, and many seasons. Real English came from there, weapons came from there, peacekeepers came from there, real money came from there, and peace talks happened in English. It was named the link language." The instructor paused for a moment to take a sip of water. The class was silent, and the unending hum of the central air conditioning system was quite loud and clear.

"Children grew up always looking towards the North. Ann was from the North, and we all wanted to look like her, think like her, speak like her. The pictures in my fourth grade English textbook, a synecdochic representation of the five nation-states, placed all Saman, Taro, Geetha, Muru, and Ann on the same plane as if they were all equally deemed human, as if English united us and as if we were all "articulate" in it the same way without accents, hierarchies, or historical trauma; the colonizer and the differently colonized on the same page of history. Holding hands. English, which was dethroned in 1956 with the racist Sinhala-only language policy, later reappeared more strongly as the link language, linking ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and linking all Sri Lankans with the global. We did not ask our English teacher why Muru was the only image in the entire textbook with no color on his face, nor did she explain. Perhaps, she did not notice. The foreign funders and local curriculum designers of the Sri Lanka-Norway-UNESCO Primary English Project unanimously agreed, as you notice in the image, that if Muru's face was to be colored, it would have to be pitch-black. So, they decided to leave Muru colorless – either as a favor or perhaps because Muru was deemed unworthy of whitening. Or maybe the whitening wouldn't work on someone taboo-black, standing at the farthest end of the color spectrum. Any questions so far?" the instructor asked. No one spoke. So, she continued with her story.

"Children grew up always looking towards the North. Every text is an orientation. The English curriculum made us want to become like Ann and never like Muru. Hating what is black. Hating the Tamils who, we were told, were blacker than us, the Sinhalese. Hating ourselves for not being White enough like Ann. In shops in Sri Lanka, you'd find whitening cream imported from India that promises to make one look "fair and lovely." What a (post)colonial imaginary!

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Something was wrong, but how could I know better than the elders in our communities: teachers, monks, priests, parents, and politicians? The English curriculum (mis)educated us to be complicit with global racial capitalism and instilled the desire to become like the colonizer. In a book of many colors, Muru was a colorless blur with curls like my brother's. Muru could never come from England, nor could Ann from Nigeria. This was my first international education lesson. In a world configured by (post)colonies and competing empires, how strange it is to occupy positions of complicity within the American empire – as a teacher of International Education, discussing topics that explore topographies of colonialism, such as the difference between immigrant, migrant, refugee, and stateless people while making pain and suffering clinical and palatable for you. How strange it is to occupy positions of complicity with oppression around the world, knowing that my tax dollars as a non-resident alien in the United States can create more refugees and stateless people. Even out of my own family! Tax and the empires, genocides and the empires, peace talks and the empires, will we ever be past that? This course is about this mess, muddled with English, your mother tongue, my second language. Do you have any questions?" she asked.

The Sword and Shibboleth

Outside, it has been thundering for quite some time now. They are reading *Burmese Days* in that large, dimly lit theater-like classroom in which the professor stands on the small stage facing the students sitting in circular rows spiraling towards the heavens like the Colosseum. The professor, as customary in English Departments in Sri Lanka, invites his students to read aloud a few paragraphs from the novel and discusses what Orwell (1980) might or might not have intended to express about British colonialism. "Nimanthi, please read starting from the last paragraph on page 170," says the professor. Nimanthi reads aloud:

> "Elizabeth was still nursing her gun on her knees, while Flory leaned against the veranda rail pretending to smoke one of the headman's cheroots. Elizabeth was pining for the shooting to begin. She plied Flory with innumerable questions. 'How soon can we start out? Do you think we've got enough cartridges? How many beaters shall we take? Oh, I do so hope we have some luck! You do think we'll get something, don't you?'
> 'Nothing wonderful, probably. We're bound to get a few pigeons, and perhaps jungle fowl. They're out of season, but it doesn't matter shooting the cocks. They say there's a /liopard/ round here, that killed a bullock in the village last week.' 'Oh, a /liopard/! How lovely if we could shoot it!"

Two students in the front row giggle when Nimanthi pronounces leopard as /liopard/ for the second time in a row. The next moment the entire class bursts into laughter as if someone has cracked a great joke.

Seeing that the professor is raising his hand to signal Nimanthi to stop reading, his forehead wrinkling and his eyes narrowing, some students stop laughing and nudge others sitting next to them to be silent. The professor says, "I'm not surprised about your laughter. It's tragically ironic when, in a (post)colonial literature class, you all laugh at a (mis)pronunciation. Before we go back to Orwell, I want to invite you to sit with two stories. The first story is about myself and my education here in this Department, and the second is a story I recently heard from someone else."

"Many years ago," the professor says, "I was in this classroom, just like you, taking an introductory course in English literature. On our first day, Prof. Corea who taught that course back

then, busily walked into the classroom at least 15 minutes late and asked her students to participate in an activity. She asked us to pronounce the two words, "not" and "pot". The first student pronounced "Not, pot," Prof. Corea said, "Wrong!". The student, ashamedly, brought her eyes from the professor back to her desk. "Next!" Prof. Corea said with her index finger pointed at the next student in the first row. "Not, pot." Prof. Corea said, "Wrong!" and pointed her index finger at the next student. The third student said, "Not, pot," the professor said, "Pronounce again," as if she had misheard something. The student re-pronounced, and Prof. Corea said, "Right!". That student, who had looked terrified a moment ago, like all the others, immediately got a faint glow on her face. The fourth student pronounced, "Not, pot" and Prof. Corea said, "Wrong!". After that short activity, which felt like a lifetime, among all the 65 students in that class, there were only three students who had got it "right". This was before I had learned that "the inability to differentiate the English vowels/o/and/O/has become a stigmatized marker in Sri Lanka."[7] Without a single word about why she had done this activity, Prof. Corea made a brief note in her small leather-bound notebook. The students, all of them, looked terrified during the whole class. I was terrified, too. Throughout the class, one thing circled in my mind, "I should find a way to listen to the BBC or take classes at the British Council." There weren't smartphones back then.

A few weeks later, in the same class we read Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. That day, Prof. Corea asked me and another student to play Caliban and Miranda, Act 1 Scene 2. You can find these lines on Google. Have a look at it for a moment. So, my classmate read:

> "Abhorred slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> (Though thou didst learn) had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
> Deservedly confined into this rock,
> Who hadst deserv'd more than a prison."

When it was my turn, I read Caliban's lines:

> "You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you.
> For learning me your language!"

Following the reading, Prof. Corea illuminated us explaining Caliban's words through which Shakespeare had mistakenly presented postcolonial resistance. "Caliban's words were speaking back to the empire," she said. Caliban, a monster that Shakespeare and Europe had created to justify conquest, had echoed a (post)colonial project that had already begun, that Bill Ashcroft and others would centuries later call *The Empire Writes Back*. Like no other day, I felt proud of myself after listening to the professor as I identified myself with Caliban, a colonized second-

[7] See, Wijetunge, S. (2008). *The stigma of "not pot English" in Sri Lanka: A study of production of /o/ and /O/ and implications for instructions* [Master's thesis, George State University]. https://doi.org/10.57709/1059184

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language learner of English who had spoken back to the empire in the language of the empire! During that class, another thing had been etched in my mind: the stark contrast between my English and my upper-class English as a first-language-speaking classmate's English that gave life to Miaranda's words. She was one of those students who had got "Not, pot" right during that terrifying first class."

The professor pauses for a few seconds. The classroom is so silent that everyone could hear the raindrops leaking down from the roof falling into the tin bucket that a janitor had left just before the class started. It was chilly and there was even less light coming through the yellowing rain splattered French windows. The professor continues with his story.

"I also remember reading *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë in a Victorian English literature class. Halfway into the class, after much deliberation on Heathcliff's identity as a "bastard," and laughing, Prof. Senanayake corrected himself; "an illegitimate child." Then he moved to discuss Joseph, who speaks a servants' language, the Yorkshire dialect. To read the words spoken by Joseph, Prof. Senanayake said he wanted a gruff voice and looked straight at me. He asked me to read a passage he chose, through which I struggled, stumbled, and struggled again.

When he said, "Enough," I stopped and looked at him. Prof. Senanayake was staring at the novel in his hands. On his cheeks and pressed lips, I saw a suppressed giggle that would have burst into laughter like yours today. My classmates, unlike you, were staring at their novels with no expression on their faces. Prof. Senanayake discussed Brontë's brilliance in her authentic portrayal of the Victorian servant. But not a word about the British Empire and how servants were produced by the empire for the empire. I kept staring at the photocopied novel lying on my lap, scarred for life that my English would never be English enough. All of my professors had done their PhDs in the US or in England."

At this moment, the rain starts pouring outside, causing the students to lean in. The leak in the roof started squirting water towards the back rows. "It might be wise for some of you to relocate to the front rows," the professor suggests. In response, the students gather towards the front, huddling together for a clearer hearing of the second story.

"My parents' only Muslim friend," says the professor, "and the only Muslim businessman in our town, Hakeem, visited us with his family in late May 2019. They were leaving our town, where Hakeem had done wholesale business as long as he could remember. My parents had invited them for dinner, for a proper goodbye! Following the Easter Sunday bombing on April 21st of 2019, it took Sinhala Buddhist nationalists several weeks, till May 14th, to organize themselves to vandalize and burn down shops in Minuwangoda and several other places. They had hoped for another Black July. Rumors say that the army was just watching from close, not from afar.

In the middle of the night on May 14th, Hakeem's shop also caught fire. Luckily, people in the neighborhood got together and put it off before it burned down Sinhala shops attached to Hakeem's. This was the third time his shop had caught fire and like the first and the second times, the police concluded that it was an unfortunate accident due to a short circuit.

After an awkwardly silent dinner, when my parents tried to convince Hakeem and his son to stay, Hakeem told us a story as if to explain his decision to leave. On the 24th of July 1983, he was driving from Colombo to Matara with his two brothers to attend a funeral. "Colombo was a pool of Tamil blood," he said. "Sinhala mobs stopped our car so many times during this trip. They asked us to pronounce a list of Sinhala words that the Tamil speakers usually mispronounced. We grew up speaking Tamil, and none of us were able to pronounce them "correctly". Although, or perhaps because, we were wearing the topi, they suspected us of being Tamils disguised as Muslims. We had to prove that we were not Tamil by lifting our sarongs. How many times we lifted our sarongs that night to prove we were Muslim! That time, I lifted my sarong to save my

life; next time they will lift my sarong to make sure they kill the right kind. I don't want to risk it all again." He looked at his son, who had just joined his business."

The professor pauses for a moment and continues. "In another island like ours, during a (post)colonial massacre in 1937, the Dominican soldiers had held up parsley to people they had suspected as Haitian and asked what it was. You understand what happened to those who couldn't pronounce, no? I wish I had included Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* in the syllabus. You live and learn. You do better next time. Now, would you all mind turning to page 80? In case you have missed this section, I want us to sit with what Orwell has to say about English. Nimanthi, would you mind reading from "'Butler!' yelled Ellis". Nimanthi reads aloud:

> 'Butler!' yelled Ellis, and as the butler appeared,
> 'go and wake that bloody chokra up!'
> 'Yes, master.'
> 'And butler!'
> 'Yes, master?'
> 'How much ice have we got left?'
> 'Bout twenty pounds, master. Will only last today, I think. I find it very difficult to keep ice cool now.'
> 'Don't talk like that, damn you- 'I find it very difficult!' Have you swallowed a dictionary? "Please, master, can't keeping ice cool"- that's how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well. I can't stick servants who talk English. D'you hear, butler?'
> 'Yes, master,' said the butler, and retired.

"Thank you, Nimanthi!" the professor says and looks outside through the yellow stained windows wondering if the rain had stopped.

Postface

> "In some way or another one can protect oneself from the spirits by portraying them"
> – Michael Taussig

In line with the broader theme of this special issue, I want to pose a question: "What magic brings the global majority into being?" If this magic is confined to the sorcery of Western colonial|modern|development, we might want to find ways to deflect this magic with apotropaic magic. Why so? I have presented, through the above stories, how coercing students to dream in English in colonial, settler colonial, and (post)colonial contexts, where it dominates the linguistic ecology, makes people less conscious of how English is central to the magic that normalizes mundane nightmares in everyday life. Sorcery channeled through spells like: "In powerful English-speaking countries like the US and the UK, you are more easily accepted, despite differences in ethnicity, color, or social background, if you know English," and "English is the language of science. If you wish to study science, you have to know English" (see Figure 2), teach to desire and dream like the colonizers embracing white supremacy and patriarchal capitalism as development|modernity. This miseducation has dire consequences, which we are currently experiencing in various shades, such as anthropogenic climate change, extinction of species, ethnonationalist wars, racism, homophobia, and sexism, to name a few forms of violence (Butler, 2024). The mythologies deposited in English that stick to our memory and become our mythologies

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circulate colonial desires and traumas from generation to generation, conditioning our dreams towards imagining a linear future of modernity|development at the risk of ecological disasters, wars, and displacement. So, "How could one find ways to deflect this magic with apotropaic magic?"

In its entirety, for me, writing on the dominance of English in global education is an attempt to create one long apotropaic text to deflect the sorcery of colonial|modern|development. Perhaps, this involves developing an attunement to its evil spirits so that one could "protect oneself from the spirits by portraying them" (Taussig, 1993, p. 1), as I have attempted here. In such attempts there are no guarantees because they require one to work hard towards "uncoercive rearrangement of desires" (Spivak, 2004, p. 81), first with one's own self and then with others. My attunement to the role of English in the global education landscape made me understand how global education in its different forms—International Education, Comparative International Education, and Global Citizenship Education—is dominated by English (Barros, 2016) and it shapes how colonizers and colonized together engage in worlding processes. At least, meditating on the tensions that emerge from my attunement to English as the embodiment of desires and traumas has made me more sensitive to my own complicity with its sorcery by teaching students to become modern through dreaming in English.

Imagine what dreaming to become modern has brought into existence! In the wake of European imperialism, Western-oriented healthcare systems have developed or modernized, so have the number of illnesses created by unhealthy atmospheres humans themselves generate (Murphy, 2017), the COVID-19 pandemic being just one of them. Making the unlivable terrains livable for us, food systems have developed in the wake of European imperialism and the Second World War (Cowen, 2014; Sharpe, 2016), so have the number of nonhumans and migrant workers exploited in industrial farms (Blanchette, 2020), 1.56 million children exploited in cocoa farms being just one painful story (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). National armies have developed into larger international coalitions to maintain world peace (e.g., NATO), and so have the genocides of today's world, the civil war in Sri Lanka (1983-2009) and the ongoing genocide in Gaza being two among too many. Education systems have developed with the advent of information technologies and so have the number of children being abused and deprived of any access to public education, fourteen-year-old Devika Balakishnan's suicide (Al Jazeera, 2020), and Detroit's 'right to read' lawsuit (Bakuli, 2023) trace a sliver of the systemic violence in public education in the Global South and the Global North. Machine learning of natural languages has developed with the corporation between multinational companies and top research universities (e.g., ChatGPT), so have the number of education systems moving into English medium instruction while othered languages are left to die with the ways of being, knowing, and feeling deposited in them (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003), Rajamama Kusunda's death marks such a historical event among many others (Magar, 2018). Amidst all this, the sixth mass extinction makes headlines regularly in the form of famines in Sudan, heat waves in India, hurricanes in the US, permafrost melting in Alaska, and oceans rising, drowning the Maldives, Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu, while people and animals go buried under garbage landslides (Egger et al., 2020; Winter, 2024). This is just the surface of the crisis of global racial capitalism and proslavery democracies (Mbembe, 2019; Stoler, 2022), which are historically interwoven with Western education institutions (e.g., Eugenic ideology and the world history curriculum (Dozono, 2023)) and European imperialism. The sorcery of English, incanted by British colonialism and unfolding American imperialism (Immerwahr, 2020) in today's global education landscape, traffics through bodies aligning "some subjects with some others and against other others" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117).

Instead, educators could perform sympathetic magic through English, subverting its dominant manifestations as a hydra, a bully, a juggernaut, a nemesis, a siren song (Rapatahana & Bunce, 2012), a sword (Kandiah, 1984) and a panacea for all ills. To do so, we, as educators, could collude with nonviolent mythologies deposited by Indigenous people (who have survived multiple waves of colonization) in various languages, including English (for instance, see Taussig (1993) on Cuna healing rituals). We could perform sympathetic magic through English by attuning ourselves to philosophers and artists whose speculative fabulations imagine futures where humans and nonhumans create more caring, loving, vulnerable, and coevolving relationships (for instance, see Haraway's (2016) The Camille Stories). Given the pluriversal nature of where we inhabit (Escobar, 2018) in this more than-human world, our task is to attune ourselves to ways of knowing, being, and feeling that exist outside of the sorcery of colonial|modern|development. We, educators, could perform sympathetic magic while thinking deeply about our words and actions because as Foucault said, "everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 343).

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