

# Worlding beyond ‘the’ ‘end’ of ‘the world’: white apocalyptic visions and BIPOC futurisms

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## Abstract

We often hear that the ‘end of the world’ is approaching – but whose world, exactly, is expected to end? Over the last several decades, a popular and influential literature has emerged, in International Relations (IR), social sciences, and in popular culture, on subjects such as ‘human extinction’, ‘global catastrophic risks’, and eco-apocalypse. Written by scientists, political scientists, and journalists for wide public audiences,<sup>1</sup> this genre diagnoses what it considers the most serious global threats and offers strategies to protect the future of ‘humanity’. This article will critically engage this genre to two ends: first, we aim to show that the present apocalyptic narratives embed a series of problematic assumptions which reveal that they are motivated not by a general concern with futures but rather with the task of securing *white* futures. Second, we seek to highlight how visions drawn from Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) futurisms reimagine more just and vibrant futures.

## Keywords

apocalypse, humanity, Black and Afro-futurism, desi-futurism, Indigenous futurism, racialization, whiteness

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## Introduction

It is often said that the ‘end of the world’ is approaching – but *whose* world, exactly, is expected to end? Over the last several decades, a popular and increasingly influential literature on ‘human extinction’, ‘global catastrophic risks’, and eco-apocalypse has emerged in the social sciences and popular culture. This rapidly growing body of knowledge is produced by scientists, science journalists, policy-analysts, and scholars of global affairs, all seeking to reach broad audiences and influence international policy-making. Their central aim is to diagnose the gravest global threats and to offer strategies to protect the future of what they regard as ‘humanity’. Yet, despite their claims to universality, we argue that these ‘end of the world’ discourses are more specifically concerned about protecting the future of *whiteness*. Although our primary aim in this article is to diagnose these potentially destructive narratives, we also engage with the rich and varied sphere of BIPOC<sup>2</sup> (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) futurisms. These contributions challenge the perception that there is no alternative to the apocalyptic futures imagined by white scholars. They work to create plural worlds that vastly exceed white visions of ‘the’ end of ‘the world’, embodying much wider, diverse, and transformative concepts of, and beyond, ‘humanity’, ‘nature’, and ‘the planet’. We view this article as a call for IR scholars to recognize and engage these plural imaginaries, which contest and perforate the boundaries of mainstream IR concepts such as ‘humanity’, ‘agency’, ‘governance’, ‘threat’, and ‘harm’. As Amy Niang’s contribution to this special issue shows,<sup>3</sup> those concepts are too often constructed through forms of power that negate, oppress, and super-exploit particular human bodies, societies, and ways of being.

Our analysis takes seriously this special issue’s efforts toward ‘thinking IR into the future’, but with several important caveats. First, we reject the Euro-centric notion that there is ‘a’ or ‘the’ single future – just as we reject the notion of a single world, now or ever. Such assumptions are at the core of the mainstream apocalyptic visions (and their linear temporalities) that are increasing integral to IR imaginaries at the ‘turn’ of the discipline’s ‘first century’. We contend that the foundational and generative role of such imaginaries in global power structures does not receive adequate attention in the field of IR or in the broader social and natural sciences. As a result, their tendency to narrow and homogenize the futures of worlds, plural, goes largely unchecked within the discipline and its discourses. Yet the white futurist discourses we discuss are influential: they aim to bring about major shifts in global public consciousness and policy-making and strategy. They are often accorded validation by the scientific credentials of their authors and their embeddedness in large-scale data and modeling processes. Through these means of public persuasion, such discourses have the potential to shape concepts that are, and will likely continue to be, foundational to IR: how threats are understood; the boundaries of ‘humanity’ and ‘nonhumanity’, and the distributions of harm across and beyond these structures; and the forms of agency and governance demanded by, and deemed acceptable within, a context of global crises. An interdisciplinary IR concerned with interconnected global challenges – the aspiration of this special issue – needs to attend to how dominant narratives and futural imaginaries cut off and sideline the concrete presents and possible futures of plural Others. Second, where this special issue asks ‘how *we* should hold things together, conceptually, empirically and disciplinarily’ (see introduction, italics ours),

we ask what possibilities arise when current structures fall apart – or, indeed, are actively dismantled by the resurgence of worlds they seek to oppress or erase. Far from seeing this scenario solely in terms of catastrophe, as many of the narratives discussed in this article do, we want to open up more conversation in IR about its emancipatory, creative potential for the global connection between and amongst plural worlds.

With these aims in mind, we start by examining a number of salient and influential works in the field addressing global crises, including ‘global catastrophic risks’ and ‘human extinction’, demonstrating how they express anxiety for, and seek to protect whiteness. The second section points to BIPOC futurisms that directly challenge the futures circumscribed by whiteness and offer distinct forms of subjectivity, temporality, and mobilities for responding to ongoing disaster. Throughout, we focus on how futures are imagined, who imagines them and with whose flourishing in mind in competing struggles for survival and thriving in (post-) catastrophic worlds.

### *White subjectivities*

Discourses that predict the imminent ‘end of the world’ are not as universal as they often claim to be. The futures they fear for, seek to protect and work to construct are rooted in a particular set of global social structures and subjectivities: whiteness. Whiteness is not reducible to skin pigmentation, genetics or genealogy. It is a set of cultural, political, economic, normative, and subjective structures derived from Eurocentric societies and propagated through global formations such as colonization and capitalism. These multi-scalar structures work by segregating bodies through the inscription of racial difference, privileging those they *recognize or construct* as ‘white’<sup>4</sup> and unequally distributing harms to those that they do not.<sup>5</sup> Whiteness is also a form of property<sup>6</sup> that accrues benefits – including material, physical, and other forms of security – and pervasive forms of power, across space, time, and social structures. Due in part to its trans-formation through long-duration, global patterns of violence and conquest, whiteness takes unique forms wherever and whenever it coalesces, so it should not be treated as universal – despite its own internal claims to this status. Most of the leading contributors to mainstream ‘end of the world’ discourses discussed in this article are rooted in Euro-American cultural contexts, and in particular in settler colonial and/or imperial states such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. As such, the forms of whiteness they embody are linked to particular histories of settlement, frontier cultures, resource-based imperialisms, genocides of Indigenous communities, histories of slavery, and modes of anti-Blackness.

Whiteness is remarkable in its ability to render itself invisible to those who possess and benefit from it. Many, if not most, of the (often liberal humanitarian) authors of ‘end of the world’ discourses seem unaware of its integral influence on their thinking, and would almost certainly be horrified at the thought of their work entrenching racialized injustices. We are not suggesting that these authors espouse explicit, intentional and/or extreme racist ideals, on which much public discussion by white people of racism tends to focus.<sup>7</sup> Nor do we wish to homogenize or present as equivalent all of the viewpoints discussed in this paper, which display a range of expressions of whiteness and levels of awareness thereof.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, we work to center broad, everyday, structural ways in which underlying

*logics* of whiteness and white supremacy frame and permeate *mainstream* paradigms and discourses, including those identified as liberal, humanitarian, or progressive. Even amongst white people who consciously and explicitly disavow racism, unconscious, habitual, normalized, structurally-embedded assumptions circulate, and are reproduced in ways that perpetuate race<sup>9</sup> as a global power structure. This includes one of the authors of this paper (Mitchell), who, as a white settler,<sup>10</sup> continues to benefit from and participate – and thus ‘invest’<sup>11</sup> – in structures of whiteness, and therefore has a continual responsibility to confront them (although total divestment is not possible).<sup>12</sup>

The ‘habits’ of racism<sup>13</sup> are reflected strongly in the way that contemporary ‘end of the world’ narratives frame their protagonists: those attributed with meaningful agency and ethical status in the face of global threats; those whose survival or flourishing is prioritized or treated as a bottom line when tradeoffs are imagined and planned; and, crucially, those deemed capable of and entitled to ‘save the world’ and determine its future. This is expressed in several key features of the genre, including its domination by white thinkers; the forms of subjectivity and agency it embraces; and the ways it contrasts its subjects against BIPOC communities.

First, contributors to fast-growing fields like the study of ‘existential risk’ or ‘global catastrophic risk’ are overwhelmingly white. As we will see, almost all of the authors identified by the literature review on which this paper is based, and certainly the most influential thinkers in the field, are white. For example, the seminal collection *Global Existential Risk*,<sup>14</sup> which claims to offer a comprehensive snapshot of this field, is edited by two white male Europeans (Nick Bostrom and Milan Circovic) and authored by an almost entirely white (and all-male) group of scholars. Likewise, the most senior positions within influential think tanks promoting the study of ‘existential risk’, such as the Future of Humanity Institute, the Cambridge Center for the Study of Existential Risk and Humanprogress.org, are dominated by white men, with few exceptions.<sup>15</sup> Another expression of this tendency toward epistemic whiteness is found in the habit, prominent amongst white academics, of citing all or mostly-white scholars, which entrenches a politics of citation<sup>16</sup> that privileges whiteness and acknowledges only *some* intersectionalities as relevant.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned above, Mitchell’s (2017)<sup>18</sup> work offers an example of this tendency: while it engages critical, feminist, and queer post-apocalyptic visions written by white authors, it does not center BIPOC perspectives or knowledge systems.

These examples do not simply raise issues of numerical representation, nor can whiteness necessarily be dismantled simply by altering these ratios. More importantly, all-white or majority white spaces create epistemes in which most contributors share cultural backgrounds, assumptions, and biases that are rarely challenged by alternative worldviews, knowledge systems or registers of experience. In such epistemes the perceived boundaries of ‘human thought’ are often elided with those of Euro-centric knowledge. For example, influential American settler journalist David Wallace-Wells<sup>19</sup> contends that there exists no framework for grasping climate change besides ‘mythology and theology’. In so doing, he ignores centuries of ongoing, systematic observation and explicit articulations of concern by BIPOC knowledge keepers about climactic change. The bracketing of BIPOC knowledges not only severely limits the rigor of discourses on global crises, but also, as bi-racial organizer and thinker adrienne maree brown<sup>20</sup> argues, it produces distorted outcomes.

For instance, it smuggles normative judgments that ‘turn Brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims’ into apparently ‘objective’ claims. Similarly, the influential work of Black American criminologist Ruth Wilson Gilmore<sup>21</sup> demonstrates how white imaginaries of the threat posed by BIPOC bodies has produced the massive global penal complex and the radically unequal distribution of life chances. In short, imaginaries create worlds, so it matters greatly whose are privileged, and whose are excluded.

Further, emerging narratives of the ‘end of the world’ explicitly center figures of whiteness as their protagonists – as the survivors of apocalypse, the subjects capable of saving the world from it, and as those most threatened. In these discourses, ‘survivors’ are framed as saviors able to protect and/or regenerate and even improve Western forms of governance and social order by leveraging resilience, scientific prowess, and technological genius. For example, the cover of American settler scientists Tony Barnosky and Elizabeth Hadley’s book *Tipping Points for Planet Earth* features a stylized male ‘human’ whom they identify as former California governor Jerry Brown (a powerful white settler politician) holding the earth back from rolling over a cliff.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, presenting a thought experiment about the planet’s future, Homer-Dixon<sup>23</sup> asks his readers to imagine ‘an average male – call him John’ (in fact, the most popular male name globally at the time of writing was Mohammed). This is followed by images of a Caucasian male dressed in safari or hiking gear – both emblematic of symbols colonial conquest<sup>24</sup> – tasked with choosing from two forks on a path, as imagined by white American poet Robert Frost. This image of rugged masculine whiteness, embodied in physical strength, colonial prowess, and the ability to dominate difficult landscapes is mirrored in his framing of his former co-workers on oil rigs in the Canadian prairies<sup>25</sup> as models of resilience. Similarly, American settler science writer Annalee Newitz<sup>26</sup> proposes the Canadian province of Saskatchewan as a ‘model for human survival’, based on her perceptions of the resilience, persistence and collaborative frontier attitudes of its people. Saskatchewan is a notoriously racist part of Canada, in which violence against Indigenous people continues to be integral to its white-dominated culture<sup>27</sup> – yet this polity and its culture are held up by Newitz as a model of ‘human’ resilience. By imagining subjects in whom whiteness is elided with resilience and survival, these discourses not only normalize and obscure the modes of violence and oppression through which perceived ‘resilience’ – or, in blunt terms, preferential access to survival – is achieved. They also work to displace the threat of total destruction ‘onto others who are seen as lacking the resourcefulness of the survivor’.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, many ‘end of the world’ narratives interpellate subjects of white privilege by assuming that readers are not (currently) affected by the harms distributed unequally by global structures of environmental racism. For instance, Barnosky and Hadley<sup>29</sup> (italics ours) state, ‘if you are *anything like we are*, you probably think of pollution as somebody else’s problem. . . you probably don’t live near a tannery, mine dump or any other source of pollution’. For many people of color, living near a source of pollution may be nearly inescapable as a result of structural-material discrimination, including zoning practices and the accessibility of housing.<sup>30</sup> Viewing ecological harms as ‘someone else’s problem’ is a privilege afforded to those who have never been forced contemplate the destruction of their communities or worlds.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, these authors – along with many others working in the genre – invoke narratives akin to ‘all lives matter’ or

'colour-blindness'<sup>32</sup> that erase unequal distributions of harm and threat. For instance, during their international travels for scientific research and leisure, Barnosky and Hadley (*italics ours*) describe a dawning awareness that 'the problems we were writing about. . . were everybody's problems. . . no one was escaping the impacts. . . *including us*'. They go on to frame as equivalent flooding in Pakistan that displaced 20 million people and killed 2000 with the inconveniences caused by the temporary flooding of the New York subway system in 2012. In addition, they cite evidence of endocrine disruption in American girls caused by pollution, stating that the youngest of the cohort are African American and Latina but that 'the most dramatic *increase* is in Caucasian girls'<sup>33</sup> (*italics ours*). In this framing, even though BIPOC children remain most adversely affected, white children are pushed to the foreground and framed as more urgently threatened in relative terms. These comparisons background the disproportionate burden of ecological harm born by BIPOC, and reflect a stark calculus of the relative value of white and BIPOC lives. The 'all lives matter' logic employed here constructs 'a universal human frailty'<sup>34</sup> in which *responsibility* for ecological threats is attributed to 'humans' in general, and the assignment of specific culpability is avoided. While Newitz avers that 'assigning blame [for ecological harm] is less important *than figuring out how to. . . survive*',<sup>35</sup> we argue that accurately attributing *responsibility* is crucial to opening up futures in which it is possible to dismantle the structural oppressions that unequally distribute harms and *chances* for collective survival.

Preoccupation with the subjects of whiteness in 'end of the world' discourses is also reflected in the framing of BIPOC communities as threats to the survival of 'humanity'. These fears are perhaps most simply and starkly expressed in anxieties over population decline within predominantly white countries, paired with palpable fear of rising birth rates amongst BIPOC communities. Chillingly, such fears are often connected to the mere biological *survival* of BIPOC, and the reproductive capacities of Black and Brown bodies – especially those coded as 'female', and therefore 'fertile' within colonial gender binaries.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in his treatise on 'over'-population, American settler science writer Alan Weisman addresses the 'problem' raised by the likely significant increase of survival rates (especially amongst children) as a result of widely-available cures for illnesses such as malaria or HIV. Since, he avers, it would be 'unconscionable' to withhold these vaccines, Weisman suggests that malaria and HIV research funding should also promote family planning – that is, control of BIPOC fertility – since 'there's no vaccine against extinction'.<sup>37</sup> Here, BIPOC survival and reproductivity is literally – even if not strictly intentionally – framed as an incurable disease that could culminate in 'extinction'. Although some of these discussions examine total growth in human populations globally,<sup>38</sup> much of this research focuses on relative population sizes, usually of BIPOC-majority places to those inscribed as white. For instance, British doctor John Guillebaud predicts a 'birth dearth' in Europe while likening 'unremitting population growth' in other parts of the world to 'the doctrine of the cancer cell'.<sup>39</sup> Although these regions are described in various ways throughout the genre – for instance, as 'poor' or 'developing', the areas slated for growth are almost always BIPOC-majority. For example, Hungarian demographer Paul Demeny (*italics ours*) argues that Europe's population is steadily shrinking 'while nearby populations *explode*'.<sup>40</sup> Drawing on Demeny's work, Homer-Dixon warns of a future 3:1 demographic ratio between North Africa/West Asia and



Europe, along with 70% growth in Bangladesh, 140% growth in Kenya, and a doubling of the populations of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Directly after sharing these statistics, he appends a list of international news reports referring to, for example, clashes between Indigenous communities in Kenya, riots in Shanghai, and murder rates in Mexico.<sup>41</sup> In so doing, he directly juxtaposes BIPOC population growth with stereotypes of violence and ‘incivility’.

BIPOC are often represented in these narratives as embodiments of ecological collapse and threat, embedding the assumption that ‘black people don’t care about the environment’,<sup>42</sup> and that the global ‘poor’ will always prioritize short-term economic needs above ecological concerns. This belief is reflected in travelogue-style descriptions of ecological devastation, including Barnosky and Hadley’s musings, while on holiday in Utah, that the ancient Puebloan society collapsed because they had run out of water – a situation which they project onto future Sudan, Somalia, and Gaza. In addition, they diagnose the fall of what they call the ‘extinct’ Mayan community to overpopulation and over-exploitation of resources – despite the survivance<sup>43</sup> of over 6 million Mayan people in their Ancestral lands and other places at the time of writing.<sup>44</sup> These descriptions chime with the common refrain on the part of settler states that BIPOC are unable to care properly for their land, even in the absence of conflicting data. This constructed ignorance allows those states to frame BIPOC territories as ‘wasteland’ awaiting annexation or improvement, or as dumping grounds for the externalities of capitalism.<sup>45</sup> What’s more, the use of BIPOC communities as cautionary tales for planetary destruction strongly suggests that the redistribution of global power, land ownership, and other forms of agency toward BIPOC structures would result in ecological disaster.

### Unidirectional time

One of the hallmarks of emerging ‘end of the world’ discourses is profound anxiety about disruptions to – or reversals of – the linear concept of time that underpins European post-Enlightenment sciences. At stake, these discourses claim, is the ‘progress’ of humans and other life forms toward greater complexity and perfection. Frequently, lifestyles, forms of governance, conditions and structures associated with whiteness are presented as the current pinnacle of this movement under threat by global crises. For example, in *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future*, in which they assess the global effects of climate change, American settler scholars Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway issue ‘a call to protect the *American way of life* before it’s too late’ (italics ours).<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in the context of global population dynamics, Weisman<sup>47</sup> worries about the collapse of modern Western urban infrastructure and the loss of a ‘European standard of living’. Similarly, Barnosky and Hadley reminisce about recreational family trips to ‘Africa’ to see ‘the last remnants of big game’.<sup>48</sup> These texts express profound anxiety over the loss of what Quandamooka scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls white possessions, including empire, territory, and the biological and cultural capital of whiteness.<sup>49</sup> They also enact a form of pre-emptive possessive mourning<sup>50</sup> which frames particular animals and geographical features as the birthright of Western children.

In addition, many authors working in this genre worry about the interruption of the perceived stadial progression of ‘humanity’, a narrative that celebrates the emergence of

whiteness through the elimination of ‘inferior’ races or cultures.<sup>51</sup> For example, Canadian settler scholar Elizabeth Finneron-Burns (*italics ours*) warns that the extinction of ‘humanity’, which she associates with ‘rational life’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘civilization’ (terms all deeply linked to Euro-centric and colonial subjectivities) would be ethically wrong ‘if the advances made by humans over the past few millennia were lost or *prevented from progressing*’.<sup>52</sup> In this vein, Bostrom idealizes a future in which the continued evolution of ‘(post)humanity’ culminates in a form of ‘technological maturity’ that adheres to mainstream norms of white maleness: deeply disembodied, unattached to place, and dominant over, or independent from, ‘nature’.<sup>53</sup>

Closely-linked to worries about the loss of potential ‘human progression’ is the fear of *de-volution* or back-sliding. In some cases, fears of demographic decline in ‘white-majority’ regions (see above) extend to worries about the biological ‘extinction’ of white people. For instance, a recent report asserts that there has been 59.3% decline in total sperm count in men from North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, but no comparable or significant decline in South America, Asia, and Africa, despite a paucity of studies in the latter regions (Ghosh 2017). While warning of a biological decline of whiteness, the articulation of these fears and the funding of research to address them undergirds a resurgence of whiteness formed in the perceived face of its destruction.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, many contributors to ‘end of the world’ discourses offer strategies for the reconstruction and ‘improvement’ of existing power structures after a global catastrophe. For example, American settler economist Robin Hanson calculates that if 100 humans survived a global catastrophic disaster that killed all others, they could eventually move back through the ‘stages’ of ‘human’ development, returning to the ‘hunter-gatherer stage’ within 20,000 years and then ‘progressing’ from there to a condition equivalent to contemporary society (defined in Euro-centric terms).<sup>55</sup> Other authors focus on social, political, and economic forms of regeneration through simplification, which Homer-Dixon<sup>56</sup> calls ‘catagenesis’. ‘*Western civilization* is not a lost cause’, he insists,

‘using reason and science to guide decisions, paired with extraordinary leadership and exceptional goodwill, *human society* can progress to higher and higher levels of well-being and development. . . But that requires resisting the very natural urge. . . to become less cooperative, less generous and less open to reason’ (*italics ours*).<sup>57</sup>

In this vision, *Western civilization* – which, is elided here with ‘human society’ – can salvage the future using some of its trademark claims: the possession of reason, science, and cooperativeness. However, this requires assimilating all human communities into a Western liberal-cosmopolitan mode of civility and suppressing forms of resistance that threaten to knock this goal off course. If ‘humanity’ is able to achieve this goal and develop a ‘prospective mind’ capable of seeing opportunity in destruction, Homer-Dixon argues it will be able to ‘turn breakdown to *our advantage*’<sup>58</sup> (*italics ours*). Recalling that the ‘us’ in this discourse actively interpellates whiteness, this discourse frames global catastrophe as an opportunity to consolidate white structures of domination, assimilate resisters, and ultimately increase their power. Other authors who foresee post-apocalyptic movement toward a dazzling future (for whiteness) are clear about its costs. In his seminal book on human extinction, Canadian settler philosopher John Leslie states that ‘misery and death



for billions [caused by an ecological crisis] would be immensely tragic, but might be followed by slow recovery and then a glittering future for a human race which had learned its lesson'.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Bostrom argues even the fractional reduction of threats to the possibility of posthuman, techno-infused subjectivities, by any means, would be worth 'at least a hundred times the value of a million [contemporary] human lives'.<sup>60</sup> Although rarely explicitly stated, it is not difficult to discern *whose* lives these authors believe might be sacrificed for the 'greater good' of 'learning lessons' and rescuing 'humanity' as they see it. This can be gleaned from these authors' assessments of the 'winners and losers' of previous global upheavals. For example, in assessing the tumult of the twentieth century, Homer-Dixon states that Western capitalist societies were amongst the 'most adaptive' – and therefore closest to his ideal of the 'prospective mind' – while

'at the other end of the spectrum, we find societies, including many in sub-Saharan Africa and some in Asia and Latin America, that have much lower ability to manage or adapt. . . a few, like Haiti and Somalia, have completely succumbed.'<sup>61</sup>

While this statement refers historical patterns, it is presented as part of an analysis that explicitly analyzes historical trends as indicators of future scenarios. As such, it inscribes ongoing racial inequalities and stereotypes far into the future.

Despite these strategies for re-vitalization and post-apocalyptic resurgence, some white futurists express concerns about the 'de-volution' of 'humanity' from its perceived pinnacle in Euro-centric societies. For example, American settler economist Hanson describes the emergence of 'humanity' in terms of four 'progressions': from animals with enlarged brains to 'hunter-gatherers', then to agricultural societies and finally technology-driven industrial models. From his perspective, the 'return' to a 'hunter-gatherer' society would constitute the reversal of 'human progress'.<sup>62</sup> This scheme echoes a twentieth century scientific paradigm that holds that 'humanity', 'human nature', and liberal values emerged from the transcendence of hunter-gatherer brains and social structures.<sup>63</sup> In this vein, Homer-Dixon (*italics ours*) states that without the emergence of modern petro-capitalism, '*we would still be hunter-gatherers, surviving on grubs, roots and local game*',<sup>64</sup> and that moving 'back' to this state would involve the crushing of 'engineering marvels, political institutions and *our* culture and great art. . .into dust' (*italics ours*).<sup>65</sup> He and others, including Oreskes and Conway (2014) predict that this 'reversal' would also destroy democracy and liberal cosmopolitanism, producing highly-authoritarian forms of governance.<sup>66</sup> In the face of this feared 'de-volution', some authors worry that 'it is not even clear how much longer our descendants would remain distinctively "human"'.<sup>67</sup> These accounts explicitly denigrate 'hunter-gatherers' – including many contemporary Indigenous societies – as 'pre-human', authoritarian and a degraded form of (pre-)humanity, while effacing the technological, political, and other forms of modernity and futurism embraced by BIPOC communities (see below).

Following this logic, proposed efforts to safeguard 'human' achievements or 'progress' often focus on controlling, directly instrumentalizing or even eliminating BIPOC bodies. According to Bostrom and his colleagues,<sup>68</sup> reducing existential risk would require invasive, assimilative forms of government, including the creation of a

'singleton' – a form of governance that encompasses the entire planet and beyond, and in which every aspect of existence is merged into a collective intelligence. Less ambitious strategies for securing an 'improved' future for whiteness involve intensive control, surveillance, and policing. According to Newitz (*italics ours*) 'if we want our species to be around for another million years, . . . we must take control of the earth' through geo-engineering, bio-engineering, or the colonization of other planets.<sup>69</sup> In many cases, these strategies involve the intensification of control over BIPOC bodies, relationships, and ways of life. Homer-Dixon (*italics ours*), outlines an 'aggressively proactive' strategy that includes, amongst other measures, family planning in countries that '*still* have high fertility rates'; conservation of 'resources', transitions to cleaner energy globally, post-conflict reconstruction,<sup>70</sup> efforts to boost resilience of governments in 'poor' countries to reduce the 'spillover' of immigrants and disease; and targeted efforts to destroy 'extremist groups'.<sup>71</sup> Barnosky and Hadley also focus on education, particularly of girls, in BIPOC-majority places – including the use of explicitly colonial educational traditions, as in Mauritius – as a means of suppressing birth rates. They argue that it may be necessary to devote 50% of earth's land to feed a growing 'human' population, including 'switching from traditional crops to high-yield crops' and 'consolidating small farms into large, mainly monocultural operations, including the use of genetically modified organisms'.<sup>72</sup> In so doing, they influential American settler conservationist E.O. Wilson's (2016) proposal to annex 50% of earth's surface as 'inviolable nature reserves' governed by the norms of Western conservation.<sup>73</sup>

These plans for 'saving humanity' and the planet involve the re-enactment and innovation of key techniques used by European colonizers to annex land, displace communities and undermine the sovereignty of BIPOC peoples across the planet. Similarly, Weisman considers possible strategies of social control designed to reverse-engineer 'liveable' conditions. To this end, he defines

'the optimum population as the number of humans who can enjoy a standard of living that the *majority of us* would find acceptable. . . roughly equivalent to a European level, pre-[2008 financial]crisis'.<sup>74</sup>

Drawing on work by Gretchen Daily, Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Weisman's ideal future would involve 'guaranteed sustenance', 'shelter', 'education', 'healthcare', 'freedom from prejudice', and 'opportunities to earn a living'. Such a 'humanitarian' society, he avers, could 'maintain human cultural diversity and in places dense enough to allow a critical mass of intellectual, artistic and technological creativity', along with 'exciting cities' and 'wilderness', both of which reflect Euro-centric notions of 'culture' and 'nature'. Yet this future society, in which pre-2008 Europeans are explicitly framed as the baseline for 'liveable' lives, would not countenance 'pastoral, preindustrial existence',<sup>75</sup> which is framed as a step back. Nor would it aspire to ending inequality, which is dismissed as unrealistic – or, more to the point, not a priority when the survival of 'humanity' is considered to be at stake. So, while Weisman's vision allows for a minor reversal (to a time perceived as a high-water mark for Euro-American societies), it confirms other lifeways as 'unliveable' or not 'humanitarian', and does not consider the transcendence of global inequalities essential to a thriving future.

To achieve such ideal futures, many writers in the 'end of the world' genre treat BIPOC as instruments or objects of sacrifice. In a stunning display of white possessive logic,<sup>76</sup> Hanson suggests that, in the face of global crisis, it

'might make sense to stock a refuge with real hunter-gatherers and subsistence farmers, together with the tools they find useful. Of course, such people would need to be disciplined enough to wait peacefully in the refuge until the time to emerge was right.'<sup>77</sup>

In this imaginary, Hanson quite literally suggests the (re-/continuing)imprisonment, (re-/continuing)enslavement and biopolitical (re-/continuing)instrumentalization of living BIPOC in order to enable the future re-generation of whiteness. This echoes the dystopian nightmare world described in Métis author Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*,<sup>78</sup> in which the bone marrow of Indigenous peoples is brutally and systematically harvested to enable climate-change-wracked settlers to dream in order to imagine futures. However, this form of instrumentalization is not only found in the realm of speculative fiction: Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys White details how white environmentalists and policy-makers regularly instrumentalize Indigenous communities, their knowledges and systems of governance to develop policies intended to protect dominant societies from climate change. In such cases, Whyte contends, Indigenous communities are reduced to the role of the 'last remaining Holocene survivors' whose continued existence is justified largely by their ability to teach white people 'how the rest of humanity can save itself'.<sup>79</sup>

Like the narratives discussed above, in which communities declared as 'extinct' are mined for insights into the future of Western societies, such narratives work to propel the 'forward' movement of whiteness by pushing BIPOC societies into 'the past'. Some narratives enact this dynamic by imagining the total destruction of BIPOC-dominant societies. For instance, Oreskes and Conway's counterfactual imagines the survivors of global climate change as those living in the 'northern inland regions of Europe, Asia and North America, and high-altitude parts of Latin America', who are able to 'regroup and rebuild'. However, they project, 'the human populations of Australia and Africa, *of course*, were wiped out' (*italics ours*).<sup>80</sup> Although this vision may appear (at least to white readers) to espouse concern for the BIPOC peoples of Australia and Africa, they also reflect the ease with which the total elimination of these peoples is assumed and imagined as a matter 'of course' by these authors, reflecting and shaping the expectations of readers. In popular discourses such as mainstream science fiction, this dynamic is often portrayed as a zero-sum struggle between white and BIPOC communities. For instance, the highly popular genre of zombie films and even IR texts<sup>81</sup> appropriate these creatures, representatives of Black and Brown bodies and rebellion against slavery, while envisioning their elimination as a means of ensuring survival.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, influential American settler science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein's *The Day After Tomorrow* locates threats to whiteness in the bodies of 'Pan-Asians' who have colonized white places and must be violently eradicated.<sup>83</sup> White readers might argue that these forms of science fiction are just that: fictive fantasies. However, since science fiction regularly influences not only public imaginaries but also public policy, including the development of US military applications and strategy,<sup>84</sup> IR scholars should take its visions seriously.

### *Geographies of 'purity' and BIPOC mobilities*

One of the major fears of white apocalyptic thinkers is that spaces claimed by and for whiteness will be mixed with, and ultimately overwhelmed by spaces they associate with BIPOC suffering or degradation. While one of the key privileges associated with whiteness is the right to flow freely across and occupy any space<sup>85</sup> at any scale, the movement of BIPOC bodies is framed as a threat demanding containment. The deeply spatialized fear of BIPOC communities' adaptive mobilities is often envisioned as the inversion or 'flipping' of the planet and its racialized geographies. For instance, Oreskes and Conway imagine a Northern Hemisphere transformed by the scorching of crops, leading to global food riots; mass northward migration of people and insects, producing outbreaks of typhus, cholera, dengue fever, yellow fever, and retroviruses; and the eventual global breakdown of the international system of states – all starting in what they refer to simply as 'Africa'.<sup>86</sup> These imaginaries, in which 'Northern' 'white' parts of the planet are transformed into 'Southern' or 'non-white' spaces, reflect what Brazilian political theorist Denise Ferreira Da Silva<sup>87</sup> describes as the global inscription of racial hierarchies into the planet itself. They go even further than mainstream Anthropocene discourses that obscure the racialized inequalities of planetary change<sup>88</sup> by framing BIPOC spatialities as a driving force of global collapse.

The disruptive movement of BIPOC bodies into spaces claimed as 'white' or 'white-dominated' is another major trope within discourses on global catastrophic risks and 'human extinction', which associate these bodies with disease and violence that might imperil white lives. Historically, the flow of harm has mainly moved in the opposite direction: the epidemics of disease and violence spread by the movement of Europeans across the planet has continually devastated BIPOC communities. Indeed, the rhetorical force of white apocalyptic narratives lies in the imagined reversal of these conditions, and the fear of 'white people [being made to live] under the conditions they have forced upon others'.<sup>89</sup> For instance, Barnosky and Hadley base much of their thinking on American settler economists Paul and Anne Ehrlich's concept of the 'population bomb', conceived during a hot night in Delhi in which they were disgusted by the spectacle of people urinating and defecating in the streets. They also refer to the possible increase in 'Rwanda<sup>90</sup>-like atrocities', leading to a 'new normal [for white people] where rapes, lost loved ones, missing limbs and dogs feeding on human carcasses become non-news'.<sup>91</sup> In addition, they see what they perceive as 'traditional healing' techniques used in West Africa, combined with more accessible plane travel, as a threat to the West, and promote the use of Westernized hospitals to contain these microbes.<sup>92</sup> This attitude affirms white stereotypes about the lack of hygiene and modern medicine, and 'unhealthy' relationships with animals (e.g. eating, hunting, and co-habiting that might lead to zoonosis), amongst BIPOC. Similar assumptions were reflected in the spring of 2020, when the global COVID-19 pandemic was widely attributed in the media to the unhygienic conditions in Chinese food markets, and racialized by then-US President Donald Trump as 'the Chinese plague' and 'the Chinese virus'.

BIPOC mobilities, bodies, and the organisms associated with them by white thinkers are often imagined as laying waste to white achievements. For instance, Weisman uses the movement of coyotes and wild turkeys – both associated strongly with Indigenous

peoples in North America – into New York’s central park as an image of the incursion of ‘wildness’ into urban modernity.<sup>93</sup> In the same vein, Barnosky and Hadley, on a European holiday, lament that

‘more migrant workers are coming in, taking jobs and requiring basic social services that somebody has to pay for. Throngs of people are bowing to Mecca each evening outside churches in Italy and France’.<sup>94</sup>

For Barnosky and Hadley, the presence of BIPOC on the steps of classic European architecture is visually jarring, and they worry over the social and medical disruption that these bodies might bring. For his part, Homer-Dixon (quoted in Nuwer), is concerned that the ‘pressures’ created by the movement of BIPOC will create almost ‘immunological’ responses amongst states and ‘the prerequisites for mass violence’,<sup>95</sup> particularly in Europe. Much of his strategy for global renewal involves constraining the breakdown of white-dominated structures *while* closely controlling the formation of solidarities and the resurgences of groups that hold grievances against these structures. The overt, generalized suspicion of groups working to fight against oppression – including racialized violence and colonization – and their folding into the category of ‘terrorism’ telegraphs invasive strategies for policing BIPOC struggling to achieve alternative futures. A similar tendency to blame those oppressed by existing global power structures for possible conflict is found in the work of Canadian settler scholar Eric Kauffman. Aiming to appease citizens of ‘white-majority’ countries concerned with ‘white extinction’ or even ‘white genocide’, he proposes creating permanent refugee camps that would provide temporary respite while blocking any permanent pathways toward citizenship. In so doing, he naturalizes – and euphemizes – the imposition of racial geographies as a matter of understandable ‘concern for one’s own people’ and expresses a profound fear of hybridity.<sup>96</sup> These accounts show that, while liberal-humanitarian authors are preoccupied with fears of looming authoritarianism engendered by BIPOC communities, they themselves are often at the forefront of imagining and planning repressive power structures.

## Engaging BIPOC futurisms

Now, we want to shift focus to a different set of futural imaginaries emerging in the face of *ongoing* (not just future) global catastrophes. In contrast to the white futures discussed above, these narratives center diverse, plural subjectivities and forms of agency, undermining homogenous notions of ‘humanity’; attune to nonlinear temporalities; and embrace lively practices of mobility and hybridity. In so doing, they imagine *multiple* futures and alternatives to apocalypse. They also re-frame the possible end of whiteness, as a structure of domination, as an opening for the emergence of plural worlds. In this piece, we engage with contributions to three bodies of knowledge, imagination, and action that contribute to BIPOC futuring practices. Afro-futurism uses the lens of science fiction, techno-science, music and art critically to (re-)center Afro-centric cosmologies, histories and epistemes, and to confront ongoing oppressions rooted in anti-Blackness.<sup>97</sup> Indigenous futurisms<sup>98</sup> engage with fiction, visual and performing arts, film, videogames, social movement organization, ceremony and other mediums to promote decolonization, critique colonial power

structures, and promote the resurgence of Indigenous forms of governances, including better relations with earth and other planets.<sup>99</sup> Asian futurisms imagine rich, distinct futures rooted in plural Asian histories and forms of life, while contesting the global instrumentalization and policing of Asian bodies in service of white futures. Rather than formal disciplines, these bodies of thought and action are open-ended movements manifested in the arts, social organizing, spiritualities, and other elements of lived experience that directly address, but also exceed, the study of 'global catastrophic risk'. As such, they are different in kind from the abstract, data-driven, expertise-based and policy-oriented work of the white futurists discussed above and should not be assessed according to the norms of those disciplines, but rather in their own terms (i.e. in relation to the knowledge systems, ethics, legal orders, and other aspects in which they are embedded).

In this short article, we cannot even begin to offer a comprehensive account of the rich and wide-ranging fields of BIPOC futurisms, and we do not mean to suggest that the thinkers and practitioners we cite are representative of any of these spheres. Our more modest goal in this final section is to point IR scholars toward examples of how BIPOC thinkers, organizers and makers are imagining and actively embodying alternative futures and novel solidarities during and beyond disaster. Nor do we wish to generalize about these remarkably diverse contributions; instead, we focus on points that resonate across what are irreducibly singular visions. We hope that this piece will bolster and affirm a much wider, deeper engagement with these discourses within IR (and other disciplines). Moreover, as BIPOC futurisms are embodied in multiple mediums, we affirm a growing recognition of the importance of arts, sciences and plural forms of knowledge and creativity within IR<sup>100</sup> and call for future IRs and other disciplines that center and honor BIPOC ways of knowing. This engagement is crucial – not as a means of strengthening or rescuing the future imaginaries discussed above, but rather in order to contest them, dismantle the forms of violence they embed, and, most crucially, to open space for futures beyond (the) apocalypse (of whiteness).

### *Plural subjectivities*

Amongst the most prominent features of BIPOC futurisms is the diversity of the subjects, forms of subjectivity and agency they center. Far from adhering to a homogenous account of 'humanity', the subjects of these discourses often confound easy divisions of gender, age, and species. For instance, Oblivia Ethyl(ene) the central figure of Waanyi writer Alexis Wright's 2015 novel *The Swan Book*, is a mixed-Indigenous woman permeated by viruses, sexual trauma, and industrial toxins who, while young, is also Ancestral.<sup>101</sup> Through a combination of Dreaming<sup>102</sup> Law, post-apocalyptic pragmatism and cross-species attunement, she (inadvertently) leads a movement of Australians and refugees through a flooded, climate-ravaged world. They move rhythmically, collectively, in tune with the altered land around them, not toward salvation or even hope but rather toward an always-unfolding, radically contingent present into which pasts and futures are pleated. This type of adaptive, distributed leadership in responding to ecological disaster undermines the cult of John (see above), the rugged, domineering individual expected to 'save the earth'.

brown's ethos of 'emergent strategy' offers a resonant account of subjectivity and agency. Developing modes of collective action based on biomimicry, she calls for



large-scale social-ecological change through ‘inch-wide, mile-deep’ forms of organization that emerge from, and do not attempt to dominate, earthly rhythms. Like thinkers concerned with complexity and emergence – including Bostrom, Homer-Dixon and many others – brown is interested in how massive-scale change can be brought about through micro-interventions, finely-tuned receptiveness and flexibility in the face of change.<sup>103</sup> However, where white futurisms tend to understand rupture as a threat to existing structures of power and security, seeking to instrumentalize them and recuperate power, brown’s emergent strategy embraces the process of continual change and the creative uncertainty of crisis – after all, the structures in crisis are those that directly oppress BIPOC. Inspired by the work of science fiction writer Octavia Butler,<sup>104</sup> these real-life and imagined leaders are multi-generational, female, nonbinary, and/or gender-fluid subjects who lead by attuning to and ‘riding the waves’ of complexity, drawing on multiple worldviews and knowledge systems and driven by powerful senses of wonder and for emerging futures. Rather than relying on centralized policy-making dependent on complex institutional structures to *manage or control* complexity, brown’s emergent ethos aims to engender better relations with complexity through speculative, futures-oriented practices. These include social justice organizing, protest, and resistance to policing; solidarity-building; the generation of pleasure; and grassroots efforts to widen access to food, land, and healing.

Crucially, these forms of agency are profoundly, fleshily embodied – in stark contrast to the abstract, digitally-mediated ‘post-human’ futures dreamed of by Bostrom and others. Indeed, many BIPOC futurists work to reclaim Black and Brown bodies and their unique forms of agency from ongoing instrumentalization within systems of Eurocentric power. For instance, Chinese-American writer and digital artist Dawn Chan contests the practices of ‘othering across time’ in techno-orientalism: an ongoing manifestation of the oriental gaze that extracts from Asian pasts, presents, and future imaginaries to safeguard the futures of white communities. Drawing on pop culture imagery, Chan shows how Asian bodies are depicted as sources of future labor waiting to be activated by white forms of power – as the ‘future child labourers’, ‘numbers savants’, or technological ‘geniuses’ capable of saving ‘humanity’ from destruction.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Chinese-American writer Danielle Wu’s critique of the popular *Blade Runner* films argues that Asian bodies and cultures are reduced in such white future imaginaries to interchangeable, expendable technologies used for white sexual and other forms of gratification.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the white imaginaries discussed above rely to a massive extent on forms of technological skill with which, Chan points out, are projected onto Asian bodies – and which other BIPOC communities, including Indigenous peoples, are perceived to lack.<sup>107</sup> Through this tendency of ‘othering across time’, Chan contends, BIPOC bodies are instrumentalized and co-opted in the service of white futures. Her critique highlights the diversity of BIPOC forms of embodiment and agency – including not only technology-based praxis, but also land-based futures rooted in the resurgence of ancient relations.<sup>108</sup>

What’s more, many BIPOC futurisms work deliberately to cultivate forms of agency as solidarities across communities and multi-species worlds that are oppressed by whiteness in different and unequal ways. This involves interrogating and dismantling systems that strengthen white-dominated power structures by placing BIPOC groups into relations of co-oppression.<sup>109</sup> In this context, one of the most important forms of agency embraced

within BIPOC futurisms is active and intentional effort to create generative, sometimes temporary or improvisational,<sup>110</sup> solidarities, and forms of collective power across the racial borders imposed by white structures. This form of agency, as we will see below, directly undermines the modes of centralized, strategic, control-oriented agency intended to 'save earth' and preserve (the existing) order within white imaginaries.

### *Plural temporalities*

BIPOC futurisms are not necessarily constrained by the homogenous, unidirectional form of linear time that generates the central anxieties of white futurists. On the contrary, they assert distinct forms of 'temporal sovereignties'<sup>111</sup> – that is, the ability to determine their worlds by inhabiting distinct temporalities and rejecting imposed ones. To do so, they draw on multiple cosmologies, including those that embrace deep time, temporalities in which the Western concepts of 'past', 'present', and 'future' are interwoven; and the coexistence of multiple intersections of time-space.<sup>112</sup> For instance, in Cree-Métis filmmaker Danis Goulet's *Wakening*, a Cree warrior is tasked with convincing the Ancestral monster Weetigo to align with BIPOC peoples and their allies in rising against an authoritarian future government that has emerged in response to ecological collapse. She appears as a young, female or nonbinary protagonist navigating climate-ravaged, post-industrial wasteland that could be part of a past, present or future world (in Western terms). Simultaneously, she is the embodiment of the Ancestral trickster Wesageejak, moving through multiple registers of time as she plays out an ancient dynamic.<sup>113</sup> In both of these narratives, the futures created by the protagonists cannot easily be defined as either a 'return' or a 'movement forward' in time; instead, they mingle futures, pasts, and presents to respond to always-changing conditions. For example, futurists such as Butler, N.K. Jemison and other BIPOC science fiction thinkers critique past and present conditions *as* and *by* creating worlds set millennia or even epochs in what Euro-centric thought considers 'the future'. Similarly, Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko's characters confront colonialism, and the cascades of violence, extinction and ecological collapse it sets off in a constantly-unfolding 500-year present.<sup>114</sup> These temporal registers draw attention to the fact that, for many BIPOC communities, apocalypse is a threat waiting in 'the future', but rather a continuing condition. Indeed, as Whyte avers, through everyday practices such as tending to the land and community relations, Indigenous peoples are *continuing* to rebuild post-apocalyptic worlds devastated by *ongoing* colonial genocide.<sup>115</sup> These imaginaries directly negate the assertions by Wallace-Wells, Homer-Dixon and others that 'we' – that is 'humanity' – are constrained by short time spans and the inability to think through deep time, and therefore ill-equipped to cope with the scale and complexity of global catastrophic risk.

What's more, where white futurists fear what they perceive as 'reversal' or 'decline', these phenomena are more ambiguous across BIPOC worlds, where they do not necessarily constitute a loss. This idea is reflected in Anishinaabekwe writer Louise Ehrdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, set in a near-future United States in which evolution is reversing itself. In response, the white-dominated government implements increasingly invasive policies intended to control the births of BIPOC babies in particular, whom they appear to believe will either be the first 'devolved' humans, or the last 'normal' ones. In

this context of anxiety-induced oppression, the Anishinaabekwe/Catholic protagonist, Cedar, along with other pregnant BIPOC fugitives, prepares to give birth to a baby of mixed heritage, driven by love for whatever that possibly ‘devolved’ baby might turn out to be and a desire to secure its future. Meanwhile, her Indigenous biological family seize the moment of crisis to regain sovereignty and achieve a more equitable redistribution of land through the re-assertion of their laws.<sup>116</sup> Both sets of characters, while framed by white anxieties of reversal, actively work to create ‘new’ worlds that are simultaneously acts of return to ancestral lifeways – a possibility rejected by Weisman and others who disdain the thought of a ‘pre-industrial’ or ‘hunter-gatherer’ existence. Indeed, while certainly not dismissing the incredible harms of ecological collapse, many BIPOC futurists embrace possibilities of Ancestral futures, imagining vibrant modern lifeways grounded in ancient forms of knowledge, laws, and the reversal of trajectories of oppression.

In the words of Desi-futurist Ryan D’Souza, South Asian future imaginaries function as an always-unfolding ‘recovery project’ in which the acts of re-building worlds and futuring are fused.<sup>117</sup> They also expose the tendency within white apocalyptic discourses to treat BIPOC communities as though they were consigned to extinction, or a pre-determined future, such as the dystopian, alienated worlds imposed by techno-orientalism.<sup>118</sup> Instead, BIPOC futurisms tend to embrace the mixing of temporalities, the rhythms of reversal and renewal and the contingencies that these create.

### *Plural mobilities and hybrid geographies*

The worlds envisioned by BIPOC futurists do not focus on maintaining current inscriptions of ‘difference’ imposed by a universal notion of ‘humanity’, or pursue societal ‘purity’.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, as mentioned above, amongst the most salient forms of agency engendered in BIPOC futurisms is the creation of solidarity, coalition, and community across imposed lines of race, gender and sexuality, species, generation, and temporality. It is important to note that many of the subjects of these narratives are of mixed heritage and part of communities that include beings other than humans such as animals or land – including Oblivia from *The Swan Book*, the Métis, Black-Indigenous and multi-national Indigenous leaders of *The Marrow Theives*, Cedar from *Future Home of the Living God* and brown and many of her fellow emergent strategists. As such, these imaginaries do not seek to eliminate white *people*, as some extreme white nationalists fear, but rather the power structures that render *whiteness* and allergy to hybridity and dominant at the cost of all other life forms.

Further, rather than working to maintain existing geo-racial orders, many BIPOC future imaginaries actively scramble existing geographies focused on containment – including the inscription of race into global North/South dichotomies and fears of contagion (see above). Instead, many work to generate vibrant mobilities – and, indeed, relationships between movement and rootedness – that have made and can continue to make BIPOC communities responsive and flexible in the face of disaster.<sup>120</sup> Rather than viewing them solely as weaknesses or forms of vulnerability, such future imaginaries understood BIPOC mobilities as integral to creative, adaptative modes of survival. For example, D’Souza articulates a concept of community – captured by the

term ‘desi’ – that is intensely linked to particular places *and* global in its scope. As D’Souza explains, this concept ‘refers to country but does not specify any [particular] country. . . they [desis] are home wherever they are located’. This concept of community includes the vast and diverse South Asian diaspora – many moved by colonial violence and extractive capitalism – and its formations across multiple times and spaces, including ancestral places erased by colonial violence and the future homes of these communities.<sup>121</sup> Far from the hellish images of the ‘spillover’ of Black and Brown bodies into ‘white-dominant’ spaces imagined by white futurists, D’Souza’s geography shows how desi worlds *already* denaturalize borders cut into land and bodies by colonial and imperial powers. In so doing, desi formations highlight the violences that make those cuts and offer nurturing ways of inhabiting a(n always-) changing earth. Resonant themes are found in the movement of Oblivia’s multi-species, mixed heritage group of beings northward in *The Swan Book* – along with the climate-displaced Europeans and monkeys that find themselves in Australia.<sup>122</sup> They can also be found in the overarching motif of *Almanac of the Dead*.<sup>123</sup> In this narrative, tens of thousands of people and animals from multiple Indigenous communities across South and North America, along with descendants of enslaved Africans – some living and others dead, some human and others spirits, some in what Western cosmologies recognize as ‘real time’, and others occupying broader timescales – move together in a rhythmic migration north. In so doing, they embody the eclipse of five centuries of brutal colonial violence and realize prophecies of BIPOC resurgence. Where white futurists see such mobilities and geographical ruptures as threats to the survival of ‘humanity’, these narratives embrace multiple, hybrid, fluid forms of more-than-human being that move along with the rhythms of a changed and changing planet.

## Conclusion

Discourses on ‘global catastrophic risk’, ‘human extinction’, and similar large-scale threats are fundamentally apocalyptic: they see the collapse of currently-dominant power structures as the ‘end of the world’ and the extinction of ‘humanity’. This is a powerful and increasingly common way of conceptualizing the changing patterns of inter-relations between humans, ecologies, climates, and technologies addressed in this special issue, and it is a compelling narrative for many mainstream audiences. However, we have argued that what these discourses in fact worry about is not, in fact, the end of earth, but rather the collapse of *whiteness* as a formation of global power. The subjects whom they frame as under threat *and* as possible saviors reflect Euro-centric norms that have been conflated with ‘humanity’. Meanwhile, their underlying fears of reversal and decline, and the desire to ensure the smooth ‘forward’ trajectory of ‘human progress’ express their reliance on linear, Western time. What’s more, to protect the structures that sustain whiteness, and the powers and privileges it confers, these discourses seek to guard and impose stark racialized geographies and forms of control over Black and Brown bodies, which are viewed as drivers of ecological and social collapse. Since these discourses are designed to influence policy-makers and global publics through hegemonic cultural structures such as popular science and culture, they have the potential to exert profound influence on how ideas such as threat, risk, security, and survival are understood. As

such, the next century of IR (and other) scholars and practitioners need to pay close attention to the assumptions they engender, the worlds they seek to protect, and those they work – intentionally or not – to preclude.

Much of the power of white apocalyptic futurisms derives from their sense of urgency, and their assertion that there are no alternatives to ‘saving’ and/or regenerating existing power structures. To contest this assumption, we engaged with just a few contributions to the vast, multi-disciplinary sphere of BIPOC futurisms, focusing in particular on contributions to Afro-, Indigenous-, East Asian-, and Desi-futurisms. These narratives center diverse, plural forms of subjectivity attuned to other life forms and earth itself and work to create solidarities in the face of overlapping but distinct experiences of ongoing collective oppression. They embrace nonlinear and plural temporalities, making it possible to approach ecological crises as sources of open-ended renewal and regeneration rather than either decline and extinction, or the resurgence of whiteness. Further, many BIPOC futurisms embrace mobilities and geographies in which migration, nonlinear motion, adaptation *and* attachment to unique places crystallize in fluid, adaptive forms of community. In short, where white futurists *foresee* ‘the’ end of ‘the(ir)’ world, many BIPOC thinkers, makers and actors are already (and have long been) generating new worlds in the wake of the apocalypse of white domination. We need to be clear that we do not refer to the work of BIPOC futurists as resources for ‘saving’ or recuperating existing power structures. As mentioned above, our aim is not to instrumentalize these futures toward the project of ‘holding together’ IR or any other aspect of dominant power structures. On the contrary, we point to these works as evidence of the always-already active labor of world-building and flourishing that exceed the apocalypse predicted by white thinkers. As ecological crises intensify – and with them, radical right and ‘white nationalist’ movements – we urge the next century of IR scholars to interrogate the underlying anxieties that drive mainstream futurisms, and to consciously divest from systems of oppression affirmed by these imaginaries. We also encourage future IR scholars to work toward solidarities with the plural worlds that BIPOC are creating beyond ‘the end of the world’, without expecting or demanding to be ‘saved’ or even necessarily welcomed. And we urge the ‘next century’ of IR scholars to stop viewing the flourishing, resurgence, adaptation or even survival of BIPOC worlds as intolerable threats. Instead, white scholars working in this field need to begin imagining worlds beyond the apocalypse of whiteness – worlds not entirely ‘without us’, but in which oppressive constructs of ‘humanity’ are transcended, and in which other worlds can flourish.

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## Notes

1. We focus on materials that are influential inside and outside of academia, including appearing on bestseller lists in at least one country; receiving extensive press coverage and/or citation; or attaining ‘viral’ status online, which attests to their ability to shape public culture and policy thinking on a global scale.

2. We use the term BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) to refer to people and communities who self-identify as such or are assigned this label within the racial taxonomies imposed by ongoing (settler) colonialism, capitalism, and other Euro-centric projects of domination.
3. Amy Niang, 'The Slave the Migrant and the Ontological Topographies of the International', *International Relations*, 34(3), forthcoming.
4. Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).
5. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Race and Globalization', in R.J. Johnston, Peter J. Taylor and Michael J. Watts (eds), *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World* (London: Blackwell, 2002).
6. Cheryl I. Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1993, pp. 1707–91; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
7. Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018).
8. 'Whiteness' refers to the structures and processes that construct certain people as 'white', and others as 'non-white', and which distribute benefits, privilege, and life chances along those lines. White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to non-white people in a number of ways. Although the latter is often associated with extreme movements such as the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazism, it in fact permeates everyday forms of racism – for instance, discourses that treat BIPOC children *prima facie* as 'under-educated' or 'at risk' without reference to their individual circumstances; or institutional cultures that treat BIPOC people within workplaces as less qualified than their white peers.
9. DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.
10. Within settler colonial states, the term 'settler' refers to members of the dominant society – that is, the people who benefit from historical and ongoing practices of land theft, exploitation, and oppression of BIPOC, including slavery. We use this notion here as a descriptor for a variety of scholars, including ourselves, for the following reasons. When citing BIPOC scholars, specifying their self-identified community is an important form of recognition (see Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 2007, pp. 149–68). We identify authors who are settlers as such to avoid a dynamic in which white scholars are assumed to be 'just humans' (and therefore members of a universal 'humanity'), or to stand as individuals, while BIPOC scholars are particularized and/or collectively homogenized. We recognize that this practice may, for some readers, seem surprising, delimiting, and inconsistent with their own modes of 'self-identification'. Yet, in light of the aims of this piece, and scholarship on BIPOC perspectives more widely, we use this term to ensure that the discussion recognizes that scholars who do not necessarily recognize or explicitly reflect on these dynamics are nonetheless situated in dynamics of oppression, including colonization and enslavement. It also recognizes that others' interpretations of how we are situated in these histories may differ from our own self-identifications in important ways.
11. Harris, 'Whiteness as Property'.
12. See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 2012, pp. 1–40.
13. Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*.
14. Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Cirkovic (eds), *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
15. For instance, Indian-British economist Partha Dasgupta has played a substantial role in the management of the CCSER.



16. See Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness'.
17. Audra Mitchell, 'Is IR Going Extinct', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23(1), 2016, pp. 3–25.
18. Audra Mitchell, 'Decolonizing Against Extinction, Part II: White Tears and Mourning', *Worldly*, 7 November 2017, available at: <https://worldlyir.wordpress.com/2017/12/14/decolonizing-against-extinction-part-iii-white-tears-and-mourning/> (accessed 18 January 2019).
19. David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (London: Allen Lane, 2019).
20. adrienne marie brown, *Emergent Strategy* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2017).
21. Gilmore, 'Race and Globalization'.
22. Tony Barnosky and Elizabeth Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth: How Close Are We to the Edge?* (New York: MacMillan, 2016).
23. Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007).
24. See Andrew Brooks, *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-Hand Clothes*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed, 2019).
25. Oil and gas extraction and the creation of pipelines – often through military force against Indigenous nations – has long been, and continues to be, a central economic and political pillar of settler colonial states, including, but not limited to, the United States and Canada.
26. Annalee Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction* (London and New York: Penguin, 2013).
27. For instance, Saskatchewan hospitals performed coercive sterilizations on Indigenous women until 2017; Indigenous people are disproportionately imprisoned across the province – see: <https://thestarphoenix.com/opinion/columnists/cuthand-too-many-indigenous-people-in-saskatchewan-prisons>; and the province made international news in 2018 when Gerard Stanley, who shot dead a young Indigenous man, Coulton Boushie, was acquitted of all charges.
28. Mabel Gergan, Sara Smith and Pavithra Vasudevan, 'Earth Beyond Repair: Race and Apocalypse in Collective Imagination', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 38(1), 2020, pp. 91–110.
29. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*, np.
30. Laura Pulido, 'Geographies of Race and Ethnicity 1: White Supremacy vs White Privilege in Environmental Racism Research', *Progress in Human Geography*, 39(6), 2015, pp. 809–17.
31. Kyle P. Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises', *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1–2), 2018, pp. 224–42.
32. The term 'all lives matter' refers to pushback, largely by white men, against the Movement for Black Lives and its guiding slogan, 'Black lives matter', which speaks to specific, disproportionate, and targeted experiences of violence against Black people living in white-dominated societies. 'Color-blindness' is a value that emerged in the 1980s to 1990s, largely in the United States, in which white people claim that they 'don't see color' or allow it to affect how they treat people, effectively denying structural racism.
33. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*, np.
34. Gergan et al., 'Earth Beyond Repair', p. 93.
35. Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt and Remember*, p. 13.
36. See Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
37. Alan Weisman, *Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2013), p. 47.

38. Weisman, *Countdown*.
39. Quoted in Weisman, *Countdown*, p. 114.
40. Paul Demeny, 'Population Policy Dilemmas in Europe at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century', *Population and Development Review*, 29(1), 2003, pp. 1–28.
41. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*.
42. James H. Cone, 'Whose Earth Is It Anyway?', *CrossCurrents*, 50(1/2), 2000, pp. 36–46.
43. 'Survivance' is a term coined by Anishinaabe thinker Gerald Vizenor to describe the combined survival and resistance (or survival *as* resistance) of Indigenous peoples in the face of colonizations and genocides. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).
44. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*.
45. Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
46. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 78.
47. Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (London: Virgin Book, 2008); Weisman, *Countdown*.
48. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*.
49. Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*.
50. See Mitchell, 'Decolonizing Against Extinction, Part II'.
51. Hamish Dalley, 'The Deaths of Settler Colonialism: Extinction as a Metaphor of Decolonization in Contemporary Settler Literature', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8(1), 2018, pp. 30–46.
52. Elizabeth Finneron-Burns, 'What's Wrong with Human Extinction?', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 47(2–3), 2017, pp. 327–43.
53. Nick Bostrom, 'Existential Risks: Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards', *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 9, 2002, pp. 1–36; Nick Bostrom, 'Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority', *Global Policy*, 4(1), 2013, pp. 15–31.
54. See Noah Theriault and Audra Mitchell, 'Extinction (Porn)', in Cymene Howe and Anand Pandian (eds), *Lexicon for the Anthropocene to Come – Cultural Anthropology* (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2020), pp. 177–82.
55. Robin Hanson, 'Catastrophe, Social Collapse and Human Extinction', in Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Cirkovic (eds), *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 363–77.
56. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*.
57. Rachel Nuwer, 'How Western Civilization Could Collapse', *BBC News*, 18 April 2017, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170418-how-western-civilisation-could-collapse> (accessed 11 November 2019).
58. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*, pp. 109–10.
59. John Leslie, *The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 137.
60. Bostrom, 'Existential Risks', pp. 18–9.
61. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*, p. 82.
62. Hanson, 'Catastrophe, Social Collapse and Human Extinction'.
63. Erica Lorraine Milam, 'The Hunt for Human Nature', *Aeon*, 2018, available at: <https://aeon.co/essays/we-still-live-in-the-long-shadow-cast-by-the-idea-of-man-the-hunter> (accessed 8 November 2018).
64. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*, p. 80.
65. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*, pp. 55, 65, 255.
66. Oreskes and Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization*.

67. Martin Rees, *Our Final Hour: A Scientist's Warning* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
68. Bostrom, 'Existential Risks', pp. 1–36; Bostrom, 'Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority'.
69. Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt and Remember*.
70. A large literature on 'critical peace and conflict studies' suggests that such strategies are often thinly-veiled forms of neo-colonialism carried out by Euro-American states (see, for instance, Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell (eds), *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).
71. Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down*, p. 282.
72. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*, np.
73. Edward O. Wilson, *Half-Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019).
74. Weisman, *Countdown*.
75. Weisman, *Countdown*, p. 92.
76. Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*.
77. Hanson, 'Catastrophe, Social Collapse and Human Extinction'.
78. Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2017).
79. Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene'.
80. Oreskes and Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization*, p. 33.
81. See Daniel Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 2011).
82. Stefanie Fishel and Lauren Wilcox, 'Politics of the Living Dead: Race and Exceptionalism in the Apocalypse', *Millennium*, 45(3), 2017, p. 335–55.
83. Madhu Dubey, 'The Biopolitics of Race in Futureland', *Social Text*, 33(2 (123)), 2015, pp. 29–55.
84. Gergan et al., 'Earth Beyond Repair'.
85. Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*.
86. Oreskes and Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization*.
87. Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
88. See Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene'; Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, 'On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene', *AMCE*, 16(4), 2017, pp. 761–80.
89. Fishel and Wilcox, 'Politics of the Living Dead', p. 337.
90. It is common in mainstream Western IR and conflict literature to refer to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda simply as 'Rwanda', a move that flattens the complex histories – including brutal colonization – and futures of that region and its peoples into one period of horrific violence.
91. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*, p. 94.
92. See Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*.
93. Weisman, *The World Without Us*.
94. Barnosky and Hadley, *Tipping Points for Planet Earth*.
95. Nuwer, 'How Western Civilization Could Collapse'.
96. Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*, 1st ed. (Woodstock, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2019).
97. Yvonne L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi and Fantasy* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2013); Alondra Nelson, 'Afrofuturism: Past-Future visions', *Color Lines*, 3(1), 2007, pp. 34–37.
98. See Grace Dillon, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2012).
99. See, for instance, Louise Ehrdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (New York: HarperLuxe, 2017); Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*.

100. For instance, since 2015, the International Studies Association has hosted a section on Science, Technology, and Art in IR.
101. Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Sydney: Giramondo, 2015).
102. "Dreaming" is a (deeply inadequate) Anglified umbrella term for the complex bodies of law, governance and history that resonate in distinct ways across Indigenous communities in what is currently known as Australia.
103. brown, *Emergent Strategy*.
104. See Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015).
105. Dawn Chan, 'Tomorrow Never Dies: Dawn Chan on Asia-Futurism', *Artforum International* (Expanded Academic ASAP, Summer 2016).
106. Danielle Wu, 'Do Androids Dream of Whiteness?', *Unbag*, 10 September 2018, available at: <http://unbag.net/reverie/do-androids-dream-of-whiteness> (accessed 8 November 2020).
107. See Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*.
108. See Ryan Arron D'Souza, 'An Exploration of How Desi-Futurism Has Always Already Been Happening', *The Teal Mango*, 13 June 2018, available at: <https://www.thetealmango.com/latest/an-exploration-of-how-desi-futurism-has-always-already-been-happening/> (accessed 8 November 2019).
109. See, for instance, Wu, 'Do Androids Dream of Whiteness?'; brown, *Emergent Strategy*; Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.
110. Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor'.
111. Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
112. See Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*.
113. Danis Goulet (dir.), *Wakening*, 2013.
114. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).
115. Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene'.
116. Ehrdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*.
117. D'Souza, 'An Exploration of How Desi-Futurism' Has Always Already Been Happening'.
118. Chan, 'Tomorrow Never Dies'; Wu, 'Do Androids Dream of Whiteness?'.
119. See Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
120. Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene'.
121. D'Souza, 'An Exploration of How Desi-Futurism Has Always Already Been Happening'.
122. Wright, *The Swan Book*.
123. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*.

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