# Artificial Intelligence and Apocalypticism

*with Robert M. Geraci and Simon Robinson, "Introduction to the Symposium on Artificial Intelligence and Apocalypticism"; Beth Singler, "Existential Hope and Existential Despair in AI Apocalypticism and Transhumanism"; Michael Morelli, "The Athenian Altar and the Amazonian Chatbot: A Pauline Reading of Artificial Intelligence and Apocalyptic Ends"; Victoria Lorrimar, "Mind Uploading and Embodied Cognition: A Theological Response"; and Syed Mustafa Ali, "'White Crisis' and/as 'Existential Risk,' or the Entangled Apocalypticism of Artificial Intelligence."*

## "WHITE CRISIS" AND/AS "EXISTENTIAL RISK," OR THE ENTANGLED APOCALYPTICISM OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

*by Syed Mustafa Ali*

*Abstract.* In this article, I present a critique of Robert Geraci's Apocalyptic artificial intelligence (AI) discourse, drawing attention to certain shortcomings which become apparent when the analytical lens shifts from religion to the race–religion nexus. Building on earlier work, I explore the phenomenon of existential risk associated with Apocalyptic AI in relation to "White Crisis," a modern racial phenomenon with premodern religious origins. Adopting a critical race theoretical and decolonial perspective, I argue that all three phenomena are entangled and they should be understood as a strategy, albeit perhaps merely rhetorical, for maintaining white hegemony under nonwhite contestation. I further suggest that this claim can be shown to be supported by the disclosure of continuity through change in the long-durée entanglement of race and religion associated with the establishment, maintenance, expansion, and refinement of the modern/colonial world system if and when such phenomena are understood as iterative shifts in a programmatic trajectory of domination which might usefully be framed as "algorithmic racism."

*Keywords:* algorithmic racism; apocalypticism; Apocalyptic AI; existential risk; posthumanism; race; religion; transhumanism; White Crisis; whiteness

In a series of works exploring the mobilization of apocalyptic themes and ideas drawn from the Western religious—more specifically, and significantly, Judeo-Christian[1]—tradition in contemporary discourses addressing

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the alleged convergence of so-called GRIN /NBICS technologies[2] in a singularity phenomenon, Robert Geraci (2008, 2010a, 2010b) has drawn attention to various important entanglements of science, technology, and religion which need to be engaged when considering the rhetoric and reality of contemporary concerns about existential risk associated with the phenomenon he refers to as "Apocalyptic AI."[3] Notwithstanding the importance of such explorations, I want to suggest that they are marked by certain shortcomings which become apparent when one shifts interrogating the phenomenon of Apocalyptic AI from the perspective of religious studies to the perspective of *critical religion studies*, the latter field of inquiry being underpinned by the understanding that "race and religion are thoroughly entangled, perhaps starting with a shared point of origin in modernity, or in the colonial encounter [such that] religion and race is not just another token of the type 'religion and,' not just one approach to the study of religion among many. Rather, [that] every study of religion [and/or race] would need to be a study of religion and race" (Lloyd 2013, 80).[4] Geraci's (2010b) approach is anthropological and informed by a commitment to engage with history on a *synchronic* basis revealing "the web entangling robotics and AI and academic, literary, gaming, legal, governmental, and ethical communities based on various strands of one religious ideology: Apocalyptic AI." On his view, adopting such a New Historicist line of critique necessitates emphasizing "the organic connections among texts, social structures, gender, sexuality, class hierarchy, ethnicity, family relations, work relations, and so on." Yet, Geraci goes on to state that he does not engage with most of the aforementioned phenomena, focusing instead on "the connection between scientific work and a number of contemporary religious, political, entertainment, and literary concerns." For him, "the integration of religion and science in Apocalyptic AI reflects many of our traditionally religious concerns while at the same time recasting those concerns with a techno scientific aura" (5). I want to suggest that bracketing race—Geraci uses the term *ethnicity*—results in an account of Apocalyptic AI that is Eurocentrically/West-centrically *particular* yet presents itself as universal—what Immanuel Wallerstein (2006) refers to as a "Eurocentric universal." Put simply, I maintain that Geraci's invocation of the inclusive first-person plural "we" in his reference to "our traditionally religious concerns" needs to be subjected to interrogation in order to make sense of Apocalyptic AI from a critical race theoretical and/or decolonial perspective—that is, in terms of the implications of Apocalyptic AI for "the Rest" (that is, non-Europeans, nonwhite people, those located in the periphery of the world system, "the Wretched of the Earth," and so on).

Building on earlier work exploring reflexive relations between race and information (Ali 2013), information and Orientalism (Ali 2015), and more recent work exploring race—more specifically, whiteness—and/as

transhumanism in connection with the phenomenon of "white crisis" (Ali 2017a), and the entanglement of various strands of apocalypticism in information society discourse (Ali 2017b), in what follows I propose to explore the theme of existential risk associated with Apocalyptic AI in relation to the phenomenon of white crisis which I suggest should be understood as a modern racial phenomenon with premodern religious origins. By *apocalypticism*, I refer to the originally religious belief that there will be an *apocalypse*, a term which originally referred to a revelation of God's will, but which now tends to refer to the belief that the world will come to an end very soon, even within one's own lifetime. Significantly, this belief is usually accompanied by the idea that civilization will come to a tumultuous end due to some sort of catastrophic global event such as might be associated with nuclear war, biotechnology, climate change, and/or AI (Future of Life Institute 2018). In this connection, I want to explore the possibility that Apocalyptic AI, along with the attendant discourse of existential risk, is a strategy, albeit possibly one that is merely rhetorical, for maintaining white hegemony under mounting nonwhite contestation. I further suggest that this claim can be shown to be supported by the disclosure of continuity through change in the *long-durée* entanglement of race and religion associated with the establishment, maintenance, expansion, and refinement of the modern/colonial world system if and when such changes are understood as iterations in what might be described as a programmatic trajectory of domination, the continuity or historical essence of which might be framed as "algorithmic racism."

## "The World," Whiteness, and White Crisis

In order to motivate my argument, I need to begin by setting out my understanding of three terms: the world, whiteness, and White Crisis.

By "the world"[5] I mean the world system which emerged in the *long durée* of the sixteenth century following the so-called Columbian voyages of discovery to the New World commencing in 1492 CE, a global hierarchical system whose dominant core lies in the West and whose subaltern periphery is constituted by the Rest (Hall 1992). Although the modern world system is often characterized as capitalist in orientation, I suggest that this framing is at best incomplete and at worst a mischaracterization insofar as it obscures what decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2011) refers to as "the dark underside" of modernity: the fact that it was forged through violence[6] as an imperial-colonial undertaking with religious *cum* racial foundations, and that the structuring logics (ontological, epistemological, cultural, political, economic, and so on) of this project—what is referred to as *coloniality*—persist in the postcolonial era notwithstanding the formal end of colonialism with the national independence movements of the 1960s. Yet, while centering 1492 CE

and race in relation to the formation of the world system—where race should be understood as involving processes of exclusion, taxonomization, reproduction, and naturalization—it is necessary to emphasize the contribution of antecedent historical phenomena that informed this enterprise, and whose structuring logics were embedded in the constitution of this system (Ali 2017c). In this connection, the anti-Islamic(ate) foundation of the Crusades commencing in 1095 CE stands out as of perhaps decisive significance *vis-à-vis* its role in Christian polity formation—that is, the emergence of Christendom *cum* Europe *cum* the West—and as providing a template for later imperial-colonial ventures (Mastnak 1994a, 1994b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2010).[7] In addition, recent scholarship in critical medieval studies suggests that racialization processes were operative in the European Middle Ages, while others have attempted to make the case for the presence of "proto-racism" in Ancient Greece and Rome (Isaac 2004; McCoskey 2012), both of which point to the need to think beyond the historical-geographical horizon of sixteenth-century Atlantic-centrism when thinking about the entanglement of race and religion.

Regarding the matter of "whiteness," here I draw upon the sociological account of the phenomenon presented by sociologist Steve Garner (2007, 2010) amended by way of insights drawn from the work of geographer Alastair Bonnett (1998). According to Garner (2007), use of the term "white" to describe people[8] has sixteenth-century New World origins, functioning in that context as merely "one of a range of labels, and not the one most frequently used." On his view, "religion [more specifically, terms such as 'Christian' and 'heathen'], nation, social class were all deployed more than color" (64). Bonnett (1998) presents a slightly different view, referring to the arising of a triple conflation "White = European = Christian that imparted moral, cultural and territorial content to whiteness" (1039), thereby pointing to the entangled nexus of race and religion in the colonial setting; furthermore, and crucially, he insists that "modern European white identity is historically unique" (1043) on account of its naturalization and centralization of whiteness. Broadly concurring with Bonnett, yet drawing on what was stated earlier regarding the history of Western polity formation, I suggest that the triple conflation—White = Christian = European— should be complemented with an understanding that these terms have also been deployed chronologically as a sequence of "master signifiers": Christian → European → White,[9] and latterly → Western, the shift from White to Western being explored by Frank Füredi (1998) and Bonnett (2003, 2005, 2008) among others. What remains somewhat obscured here is a long legacy of conflation of the aforementioned terms with the category of the human, which, I suggest, becomes highly significant when attempting to think through the implications of transhuman and posthuman *shifts* in relation to Apocalyptic AI.[10]

Finally, by "White Crisis" I refer to a situation in which a hegemonic whiteness is subjected to increasing contestation by the nonwhite "other," engendering a heightened sense of anxiety and threat among those raced as white expressed through various discursive formulations, and prompting a variety of responses.[11] In this connection, it is suggested that the recent election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the Brexit phenomenon in the United Kingdom, and the continued rise of Far/Alt-Right politics in the United States and Europe can—and *should*—be seen together as *one* response to the re-emergence of the phenomenon of White Crisis, almost fifty years on from the antiracist struggles of the 1960s, and almost a century on from when White Crisis was first being discussed in the West (specifically, Britain and North America). According to Bonnett (2008), "whiteness and the West . . . are both projects with an in-built tendency to crisis. From the early years of the last century . . . through the mid-century . . . and into the present day . . . we have been told that the West is doomed" (25); examples of such periodically manifesting White Crisis discourse include Lothrop Stoddard's alarmist *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy* (1920), Ronald Segal's more ambivalent *The Race War* (1966), and in the contemporary "post-racial" era Douglas Murray's *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (2017). Commenting on the emergence of White Crisis literature in late nineteenth – and early twentieth-century Britain, Bonnett (2003) maintains that "the period when 'the white race' was represented as undergoing a grave crisis was . . . *also* the period when white supremacism was most fully and boldly incorporated within public discourse [emphasis added]." Crucially, according to Bonnett, "this relationship is unsurprising, for the one is the flip-side of the other" (322).

In drawing attention to what appears to be a recurrent—and *ambivalent*—phenomenon, I want to suggest that it might be useful to think about White Crisis in terms of its providing a lens or frame through which to see—and thereby *disclose*—race as Janus-faced, informing both premodern manifestations of Western Christian apocalypticism in the medieval period and contemporary secular apocalypticism; or, more specifically, the phenomenon of existential risk entangled with Apocalyptic AI. In this connection, I suggest that we think about apocalyptic end of world scenarios in relation to my earlier discussion of "the world"—that is, the modern/colonial world system of global white supremacy—notwithstanding the ways in which existential risks are presented in mainstream discourse. Yet, if there is a parallel between apocalypticism and White Crisis, what of the latter's flip side, white supremacy? In offering an answer to that question, and following the lead of other commentators such as James Hughes (2008, 73, 84), I want to draw attention to millenarianism and/or millennialism—that is, the expectation that while the end of the world is near, a new earthly paradise is at hand[12]—and

suggest that, while presented as a potential existential risk, AI (and related technologies) are simultaneously framed in millenialist terms (Davis 1998, 301–02)—for example, as ushering in a fourth industrial revolution promising super-intelligence and super-abundance (Carrico 2013).

### THE ENTANGLED APOCALYPTICISM OF APOCALYPTIC AI (AAI)

While Geraci has usefully explored premodern religious experiences of alienation and threat in terms of their contingent relation to early Jewish and Christian apocalypticism and related strands of thought such as Christian millennialism/millenarianism, and the persistence of these concerns in Apocalyptic AI, I want to suggest that his exploration is problematic on at least two counts.

First, Geraci has rightly drawn attention to the positing of a mind/body dualism in the context of setting out a series of binary oppositions underpinning the Apocalyptic AI worldview; as he states, Apocalyptic AI "resolves a dualistic conflict between the mundane physical and the transcendental virtual in a cyberspace future inhabited by disembodied super minds" (Geraci 2010b, 24). This eschatological scenario is framed in terms of what is considered good (knowledge, machine, mind, virtual) and bad (ignorance, biology, body, physical) by proponents. Notwithstanding the significance and correctness of this line of argument, Geraci's near nonengagement with race[13] and its entanglement with religion arguably results in tacit invocation of a Eurocentrically universal, "de-raced" or race-less conceptualization of the "purified" body, thereby forestalling disclosure of the racial underpinnings of Apocalyptic AI as a modern/colonial phenomenon. Consider, for example, Geraci's (2006) characterization of Euro-American Apocalyptic AI as working with a "misembodied" sense of information pointing to what he describes as "the odd nature of embodiment in AI. [On this view,] the immortal salvation of the future requires a kind of embodiment (some computer housing for the informational self) but the human body, itself, becomes irrelevant. In particular, a virtual body becomes more significant than a human body. Misembodiment refers to the move toward a purified body; purified, in this case, of its humanness" (241). He goes on to state, "the body counts for nothing in the Apocalyptic AI community [being] irrelevant to considerations of what it really means to be human; only the mind counts" (242). Granted, yet to what extent can the human body be understood *as a human body* absent the epidermal layer (or skin) that marks the boundary of the body, and which constitutes one preeminent marker of race (Ali 2014)? In this connection, mention must be made of the important work of Dilan Mahendran (2011) exploring mind-body dualism in terms of the modern/colonial opposition of race (as embodied) and computation (as rational), the former correlated with subhumanity, the latter with humanity.

Adopting a decolonial perspective wherein considerations of body-politics and geopolitics of knowledge—that is, *who* gets to construct knowledge, from *where* in the modern/colonial world system and according to what frameworks—are foregrounded readily discloses the racialized nature of Apocalyptic AI because, notwithstanding the international nature of its movements and institutions, and granted the need to take seriously the hybrid nature of endeavors involving the contributions of various ethnicities, genders, and nationalities, it is empirically demonstrable on demographic grounds, both quantitative and qualitative, that the Apocalyptic AI community is hegemonically white, male, and Western (that is, Euro-American) (Carrico 2010a, 2010b; Ali 2017a, forthcoming). Furthermore, it is a project whose trajectory is arguably traceable, genealogically, to a specific historical and geographical experience: that of Western Judeo-Christianity and the European Enlightenment as informed by various rationalistic, but also esoteric and/or occult currents (Zimmerman 2008; 2009, 70, 76). On this basis, and in terms of its entanglement with race, I want to suggest that Apocalyptic AI should be identified and understood as a Eurocentric/West-centric modern/colonial racial phenomenon. In this connection, it is interesting to note that while careful not to generalize "to all of Euro-American culture," Geraci (2006) insists that "there is no question as to whether . . . apocalyptic trends are common to researchers in both the US and Europe" (241). Yet, while drawing attention to this shared apocalyptic orientation among Euro-American researchers, Geraci fails to identify the overwhelming *whiteness* of this community.

Second, Geraci's nonengagement with the *long-durée* role of the Islamicate "other" in Western identity formation—that is, the formation of Christendom (*cum* Europe *cum* the West) against the backdrop of the perceived/constructed "existential threat" posed by the Islamicate polity—results in a bracketing (occlusion, silencing, erasure, and so on) that has implications for how to think about the significance of historical transformations within Western apocalypticism including its more recent incarnation as Apocalyptic AI. Although Geraci (2010b) *does* engage with the Islamicate, I suggest his engagement is unfortunately rather superficial, purely historical, and in terms of the latter as a source of ideas—specifically, those of the homunculus (or artificial humanoid) and alchemy—which are held to inform the genealogy of Apocalyptic AI. Nowhere is the Islamicate engaged as a historically persistent relationally constitutive antagonistic political "other," or as a contemporary site to be interrogated *vis-à-vis* positions on Apocalyptic AI. While it might be argued that this has to do with the near absence of Islamicate meditations on Apocalyptic AI phenomena (Farzad Mahootian [2012] and Hamid Mavani [2014] constituting notable exceptions in this regard), I suggest the need to consider *other* reasons for the relatively lightweight treatment of the Islamicate, especially

since it contrasts somewhat with Geraci's engagement with "other" non-European, non-Judeo Christian traditions such as Japanese Buddhism and Shinto (Geraci 2006), and his more recent engagement with Hinduism (Geraci 2016, 2018). Reference to the Islamicate "other" in relation to the matter of Christian (*cum* European *cum* Western) polity formation should not be taken to preclude consideration of other "others" including those that are "internal"—for example, the Jews—and those that are "external"—for example, the indigenous of the Americas and Africans—to the polity; however, insofar as the Islamicate polity was distinct in being perceived as posing a *military* threat to the Christian (*cum* European *cum* Western) polity, and insofar as Apocalyptic AI is arguably at least partly driven by a militaristic/war logic, I would suggest that the threat posed by the Islamicate, irrespective of whether real or rhetorical, has a unique significance *vis-à-vis* how to think decolonially about both Apocalyptic AI and the attendant discourse of existential risk. Regarding the implications of bracketing (occluding, silencing, erasing, and so on) the role of the Islamicate *vis-à-vis* thinking about the latter in relation to transformations within Western apocalypticism, consider the following. Although Geraci (2010b) cites David Noble's (1997) reference to the role of technology in the war against the Antichrist, and the Antichrist is an apocalyptic figure within Christian tradition, the Antichrist remains unidentified in Geraci's oeuvre. This omission is somewhat puzzling given that Noble refers explicitly to Cistercian monk Joachim of Fiore's (c.1135–1202 CE) apocalyptic and millenarian identification of Saladin as an Antichrist figure (Daniel 1993, 211–18; Conklin Akbari 1999, 299; Boyer 2002, 320), a view informed by Joachim's embrace of a Crusader worldview, as well as to later identifications of the Antichrist – for example, by the Protestant reformer Martin Luther – with the Catholic papacy. Joachimite apocalypticism and millennialism and its entanglement with anti-Islamic crusading takes on added significance once it is appreciated that Christopher Columbus, who launched the so-called New World voyages of discovery (actually *conquest*), thereby ushering in the modern/colonial racial world system, held Joachimite views, styling himself as a messianic figure committed to liberating Jerusalem from the infidels (Noble 1997, 33; Delaney 2006, 271). In short, there is an entanglement of race, religion, war, and the apocalyptic around the figure of Joachim of Fiore (Nájera 2010; Cardinal and Mégret 2018), which seems to imply one in the movements that historically trace from his millenarianism, including Apocalyptic AI.

Geraci's nonengagement with Joachim of Fiore is further significant insofar as the latter has been identified by Noble (1997), Erik Davis (1998), John Gray (2007), and others as a figure of *abiding* importance in the genealogy of Western apocalypticism, including Apocalyptic AI,[14] on the basis of his projection of the Christian Trinity onto the stage of history via his "Theory of the Three Ages." The last of his three ages, "the age of The

Son," points to a spiritual—and, in contemporary Apocalyptic AI terms, *informational*—mode of existence, leading futurist Kevin Kelly (1999) to assert that "when you hear people talk about information, they could be talking about the Holy Spirit" (391).[15]

Returning to the entanglement of race, religion, war, and the apocalyptic, if crusader anti-Islamism indeed characterizes the contingent yet historically sedimented *long-durée* dispositional background structuring logic (ontological, epistemological, and so on) informing Western perceptions of Islam (and Muslims)—including those operative within the horizon of the post-Christian West (Daniel 1993, 302, 306–07; Ali 2017c)—and if this background includes apocalyptic perceptions/constructions of Islam wherein the latter is understood as a heresy—the Prophet Muhammad seen, on occasion, as herald or manifestation of Antichrist, and Muslims (Saracens, Moors, Turks, and so on) as the hordes of the Antichrist (Daniel 1993; Almond 2010; Arjana 2015) and a perennial, threatening enemy "other" (Conklin Akbari 1999, 297–98)—what might this mean in terms of the entanglement of race, religion, and war in the contemporary moment of White Crisis, arguably generating a variety of apocalyptic responses from whiteness including conservative/reactionary Alt-Right populism (nativism, fascism, and so on) with its attendant Islamophobia, but possibly also Apocalyptic AI in the form of proactive trans-/post-humanism? While Geraci (2010b) maintains that "military funding played no role in the development of Apocalyptic AI" (166), in an earlier work he draws attention to Cold War anxieties about nuclear proliferation informing the worldview of Apocalyptic AI proponents (Geraci 2008).[16] While conceding the latter point, I want to suggest that the facts are somewhat more overdetermined than as presented by Geraci in that there is a contextual dark underside of coloniality that needs to be considered in relation to such late modern technological developments ostensibly triggered by Cold War concerns, not to mention the relatively transitory nature of Soviet Communism as an Orientalized "other" emerging *within* Europe when compared to the *long-durée* Oriental "other" represented by the Islamicate both preceding and succeeding "the Red Menace" (Boyer 2002, 326–28). Furthermore, and again, these developments are entangled with the modern phenomenon of White Crisis—that is, perceived threat posed by the nonwhite "other"—which has a premodern precursor in theo-political anxieties: a perceived threat posed primarily by the Islamicate "other."[17]

In arguing along such lines, my position should be differentiated from the "clash thesis" as articulated by contemporary neo-Medievalists such as Orientalist Bernard Lewis, and international relations theorist Samuel Huntington. Numerous attempts have been made to debunk this thesis by pointing to a complex *long-durée* history of interaction and engagement between Western Christian and Muslim polities that has taken various forms, some of them hostile and others marked by more conciliatory if not

convivial relations (Blanks and Frassetto 1999; Adib-Moghaddem 2008; Quinn 2008; Tolan 2012). The clash thesis, in crude, transhistorical form pointing to a *metaphysical* condition—what some have referred to as a "cosmic war"—is a naturalizing/de-politicizing position founded on an erasure of historical realities in pursuit of a political agenda. However, drawing on the seminal work of Norman Daniel (1993), Tomaz Mastnak (1994a, 1994b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2010), Luna Nájera (2010), Pierre-Alexandre Cardinal and Frédéric Mégret (2018), and others, I want to suggest that the thesis, *reinterpreted* as shorthand for a contingent yet historically sedimented *long-durée* dispositional bias manifesting structurally and systemically is, in fact, well-founded, and that anti-Islam(ism), as an ontological background horizon, remains operative, periodically erupting under certain conditions—for example, nineteenth-century Orientalism and contemporary Islamophobia (Feldman and Medevoi 2016, 1; Ali 2017c). Crucially, according to Arshin Adib-Moghaddem (2008), this clash is arguably a "competition over history and temporal sequences of humanity" (220), an issue of fundamental relevance to Apocalyptic AI in terms of its fundamentally futurist orientation.

Returning to the issue of White Crisis and its entanglement with apocalypticism and anti-Islamism, Cardinal and Mégret (2018) point out that war with Islam was motivated by "salvation of souls and millenarian Christian-centric universalism" (1). In this connection, it is interesting to note that according to Michael Zimmerman (2008), "post-humanist discourse, including Ray Kurzweil's, represents at least in some respects the Western salvation narrative" (356), a view with which Geraci appears to concur (Geraci 2006, 234–35). Crucially, Cardinal and Mégret maintain that salvation, in its *political* form, has its origins in medieval crusading as an activity with a religious *institutional* basis (Cardinal and Mégret 2018). In this connection, one might question the *secularized* "sacerdotal" power of those scientists, philosophers, futurists, and other proponents of Apocalyptic AI advancing what is arguably a rhetorical disciplinary narrative of salvation—a narrative overwhelmingly shaped by "white saviors" self-tasked with finding solutions to the apocalyptic problem of existential risk, a problem arguably of their own making.[18]

## ALGORITHMIC RACISM

Granted the above entanglements of race, religion, war, and the apocalyptic/millennial, how can—*should*—sense be made of such entanglements with the phenomenon of Apocalyptic AI? In this connection, I suggest recourse to the idea of *algorithmic racism*, a methodological framework for conceptualizing the relationship between processes of racial formation (or racialization) within Western historical experience in relation to

its (various) "other(s)" (Ali 2016, 2017a, 2017b, forthcoming). Although algorithmic racism *can* be—and *has* been—understood as referring to algorithms as sites for embedding, and means for expressing, racial bias, it should be understood here as invoking the figure of the algorithm as a metaphor for thinking coherently about the relationship between different discursive formations—religious, philosophical, scientific, cultural, and so on—as race is *paradigmatically* articulated at different periods within the history of colonial modernity; in fact, such *trans*formations should be seen as constituting re-articulations or "re-iterations" of the difference between the European (white, Western) and the non-European (nonwhite, non-Western) along what decolonial scholars have referred to as the "line of the human."[19] While it is common among proponents of Apocalyptic AI—more specifically, transhumanists and technological posthumanists—to historically (and geographically) frame the category of the human with reference to European Renaissance and Enlightenment humanist thought (Hughes 2012, 757; Ferrando 2013, 27; Bostrom 2014, 1), I suggest that this move tends to obscure the origins of the human as a Eurocentric religious-racial category forged through a process of hierarchical negative dialectics on the basis of an antagonistic relation with the non-European "other" as the subhuman during the *long durée* of the sixteenth century, if not earlier (Wynter 2003; Mills 2005).

Against this backdrop, concerns about the existential risk posed by Apocalyptic AI should be understood as entangled with a shift *from* the distinction between subhuman (non-European, nonwhite) and human (European, white) *to* that between human (non-European, nonwhite) and transhuman (European, white), such shift being intended to *maintain* the relational and hierarchical binary between the European and non-European, and prompted, at least partly, by certain kinds of critical and decolonial posthumanist contestation of Eurocentric conceptions of the human[20]; furthermore, that such a shift is occurring against the broader background or horizon of a resurfacing of the phenomenon of White Crisis. I want to suggest that it is the very apocalyptic nature of the phenomenon of White Crisis—that is, perceived threat to white supremacy under mounting contestation from the nonwhite "other"—that contributes to engendering the "algorithmic" transformation of humanism into technological posthumanism via transhumanism as an iterative shift within the historically sedimented onto-logic of Eurocentric racialization. By framing the issue in terms of contribution rather than causation, I recognize that the transhumanist/posthumanist project is overdetermined in terms of its historical motivations and causes (Zimmerman 2009, 68–69). I further suggest that such techno-millenialist currents fed into the emerging technology of race at the onset of colonial modernity which commenced with the Columbian voyages in 1492 CE. In short, insofar as ideas of leveraging technology to achieve utopian and/or apocalyptic purposes have a long history, I am *not*

suggesting that the transhumanist project is driven solely by a postracial crisis of whiteness; rather, I argue that, under contemporary conditions of White Crisis, the transhumanist project gains a sense of urgency as a techno-scientific resolution—or "fix"—to such an anxiety-ridden state of affairs and that it is prudent from a critical race theoretical and decolonial perspective to think about the discourse of existential risk in this way. To briefly recapitulate: humanism, transhumanism, and posthumanism should be understood as iterations within the structural—that is, *relational*—logic of algorithmic racism, and of Apocalyptic AI, in both its transitional form (transhumanism) and final form (posthumanism). It should be understood in relation to the project of maintaining structurally asymmetric power relations between the (formerly) human (white, Western, male, and so on) and its subaltern "other," even as the latter contests the Eurocentric terrain of the human. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Geraci (2010a) cites historian of religions David Chidester's definition of religion as "the negotiation of what it means to be human with respect to the superhuman and the subhuman" (1011), yet fails to explore this in terms of *iterative* positional shifts around the racial figure of the human as (European) "Man." I argue that this reading is supported by Zimmerman's (2008) highly perceptive observation that "posthumanists often regard humans as *relay runners* about to pass the baton to oncoming others, who in turn will race toward a summit that surpasses all ordinary human understanding [emphasis added]" (363). Perhaps most provocatively, I suggest such shifts along the line of the human and their entanglement with White Crisis and/as existential risk should be understood in terms of the idea of "race war" (Zimmerman 2008, 366), and that this decolonial reading of the phenomenon holds true irrespective of whether Apocalyptic AI is framed in a liberal democratic techno-progressive register or in more elitist libertarian terms.[21]

## CONCLUSION

In closing, I should like to offer some brief reflections on the question of the rhetorical versus existential nature posed by the existential risk of Apocalyptic AI. For some, such as critical theorist and rhetorician Dale Carrico (2009, 2013), Apocalyptic AI is a distractor from the real challenges afforded by futurist technologies (Carrico 2013, 50–52), a position shared by philosopher Luciano Floridi (2016) in the latter's criticism of what he refers to as the proponents of "AItheism." While sympathetic to their argument that Apocalyptic AI is a distraction, their shared characterization of the modern/colonial world system as capitalist rather than *racial* (capitalist) in orientation, resulting in a failure to adequately foreground racial concerns, forecloses the possibility of analyzing the issue in terms of the framework of algorithmic racism set out herein.[22] In this connection,

trans-/post-humanism can—and from a critical theoretical and/or decolonial perspective *should*—be viewed as a response to the phenomenon of White Crisis, one that is techno-scientific and occurs in parallel with, albeit somewhat obscured by, the more overt phenomenon of conservative "White Backlash" (Ali 2017a). On this view, Apocalyptic AI should *at least* be seen as a rhetorical strategy for maintaining hegemony under contestation, and the lens through which to think about the (im)possibility/(im)plausibility of this phenomenon is political—more specifically, *racial-religious political economy*—and not philosophical, theological, or scientific, notwithstanding the entanglement of these other ways of viewing the issue; further, that the *real* threat might be less one of Apocalyptic AI and more one of Apocalyptic IA (that is, intelligence augmentation) in the sense of deployment of so-called smart technologies in pursuit of a more subtle and diffuse cyborgian/transhumanist agenda than the one presented by techno-Evangelical Extropians and Singularitarians.

## NOTES

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1.    Geraci mobilizes the notion of the Judeo-Christian in various ways in his writings; see, in this connection, Geraci (2008, 141, 151, 159; 2010a, 1003, 1004, 1005; 2010b, 57, 87, 173). On his view, "studies of apocalypticism have shown . . . that Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions are *sufficiently similar* to allow fruitful comparison. The entire cultural legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition is available to modern writers, which is why I will speak of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions in one breath" [emphasis added] (Geraci 2010b, 171).

2.    The acronym GRIN stands for Genetics, Robotics, Information technology, and Nanotechnology, and NBICS for Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology, Cognitive science, and Synthetic biology.

3.    For Geraci (2010b), "Apocalyptic AI names a genre of popular science books and essays written by researchers in robotics and AI [who] promise that intelligent machines . . . will create a paradise for humanity in the short term but, in the long term, human beings will need to upload their minds into machine bodies in order to remain a viable life-form" (1). Crucially, he goes on to state that Apocalyptic AI "integrates the religious categories of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions with scientific predictions based upon current technological developments. Ultimately, the promises of Apocalyptic AI are almost identical to those of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions" (9).

4.    Consistent with this view, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2014a) states that "the modern concepts of religion and race were mutually constituted and together became two of the most central categories in drawing maps of subjectivity, alterity, and sub-alterity in the modern world" (691). In this connection, Keith Feldman and Leerom Medevoi (2016) point to "a pressing need . . . to thicken a transversal critical vocabulary adequate to our political present . . . recenter[ing] religion as an organizing category for the comparative study of race and ethnicity" (13).

5.    "The world" goes by many names articulated with increasing intensity, clarity, and visibility in the contemporary era: coloniality of power (Quijano 1992), racist culture (Goldberg 1993), global white supremacy (Mills 1997), the modern racial world system (Winant 2004), the Orientalist world system (Samman and Al-Zo'by 2008), and the colonial matrix of power or

modernity/coloniality (Mignolo 2011), among others. What is common to all such "namings," if only in terms of a Wittgensteinian shared family resemblance, is the centrality of *race* as a unifying principle in their articulation.

6.    Crucially, Feldman and Medevoi (2016) maintain that "race was born, reproduced, and fashioned in war making, where perpetual war, not the Enlightenment's perpetual peace, comes to mark the very being of modern statehood" (11). In this connection, see also Maldonado-Torres (2008).

7.    According to Tomaz Mastnak (1994b), "Europe as a unity that [emerged from Christendom and] developed a 'collective identity' and the ability to orchestrate action . . . was, as a rule, articulated in relation to Muslims as the enemy . . . [Crucially,] European identity was formed not *by Islam* but, predominantly, *in the relationship . . . to Islam*" (3). In this connection, see also Mastnak (2002, 346), Matnak (2004, 571), and Pierre-Alexandre Cardinal and Frédéric Mégret (2018).

8.    In the context of the argument presented herein, whiteness should be understood as referring to people of European descent. For a useful discussion of how whiteness came to be exclusive to Europeans, see Bonnett (1998).

9.    I suggest that this argument is supported by Bonnett himself (Bonnett 1998, 1039).

10.    In this connection, it is crucial to appreciate that whiteness is a phenomenon that is *both* historical *and* structural/relational. As Garner (2007) states, "whiteness exists only in relation to what it is not" (174), and that it should be understood "processually" in dynamic relational tension to other racialized identities.

11.    While my understanding of White Crisis draws heavily on Bonnett's (2000, 2003, 2005, 2008) exploration of this phenomenon, Bonnett presents a more complex account than my own in which both external (that is, the non-European, nonwhite "other") and internal (that is, the white "masses") factors feature as generative of a *perceived threat* to white supremacy.

12.    In complementing apocalypticism with millenarianism and/or millennialism, it is crucial to appreciate that apocalypticism does not preclude the possibility of paradise, including an earthly paradise as precursor to one that is otherworldly.

13.    In works by Geraci consulted for purposes of writing this essay, reference to race and/or racism appears to be conspicuous for its *absence* insofar as only two references to race were identified (Geraci 2010b, 194; 2006, 231).

14.    Norman Cohn (1957) suggests that the prophetic system inaugurated by Joachim of Fiore came to be the most influential one known to Europe until the appearance of Hegelianism, Comtean positivism, and Marxism. It is important to appreciate that Joachimite "three-ness" persists in all three schemes, as does Hegelian philosophy, albeit transformed under a shift to an informationalist metaphysics, in Apocalyptic AI: according to Michael Zimmerman (2008), "neo-Hegelian theological and eschatological themes abound in posthumanist discourse, even though many posthumanists profess to be atheists" (363).

15.    According to Davis (1998), "the speculative waves from Joachim's work surged beyond theology. By casting history as a self-transcending process, Joachim prepared the way for thoroughly modern ideas about progress, revolution, and social development" (305). Crucially, on his view "Joachim's age of the Spirit pops up in the heart of postwar visions of the information age" (305). In this connection, Richard Jones (2005) maintains that "in the title of one of Kurzweil's earlier books, 'The age of spiritual machines', one can hear the echoes of Joachimite prophecies down the centuries" (12).

16.    In an even *earlier* work, Geraci (2006, 241) acknowledges the entanglement of military goals and objectives with U.S. robotics research. I want to suggest that such goals and objectives need to be understood as at least partially informed by a historically sedimented dispositional logic marked by a Crusader orientation.

17.    In the context of discussing the ethics of military robotics, Geraci (2010b) states that "if the military provides the direction for robotics research, it would seem that military ethics will be those that the machines acquire. This might be a good thing if this means that robots will exercise violence only against *those who threaten peaceful society*. Alternately, a robotic military ethic could glorify control and a will to power" [emphasis added] (163). I want to suggest that what is not considered here is the difference between a *peaceful* society and a *just* society. For example, what if the peace of a peaceful society is forged through the *externalization* of war against the "other" as was the case in the forging of Christendom (*cum* Europe *cum* the West)? In short, what if the two positions—peace and control/will-to-power—are, in fact, complementary,

viz. that a peaceful society in/for the West/core is predicated upon and ensured through control of and a will-to-power exercised over the Rest/periphery? I suggest that Geraci fails to consider such possibilities on account of his bracketing of race *vis-à-vis* its entanglement with religion (and science, technology, and so on).

18.     In this connection, consider the "End of the World" UK edition of *Wired* magazine in March 2017 devoted to an exploration of various existential threats, which contained a telling article entitled "Earth's Guardians" who were/are ostensibly "Here to Save Us" (who is this *we*?) and featured a photograph of six people, all of whom were white Europeans (4 males and 2 females).

19.     It should be noted that Bonnett (2008) appears to concede the iterativity of whiteness in referring to its "re-invention," "well into the twenty-first century," pointing out that "the history of whiteness is one of transitions and changes" (17).

20.     For discussion of such shifts in the context of binary systems of racial representation, see Maldonado-Torres (2014b, 707–08); on the revisable nature of race/racism, see Jones (2005). Crucially, and somewhat anticipating the iterative and relational basis of algorithmic racism, Monirul Islam (2014) maintains that "today's subaltern is tomorrow's human or pre-posthuman" (5).

21.     Against Hughes (2012, 771–72), I suggest that race war is both a real and *extant* phenomenon, and that this is not antiglobalist conspiracy theory, but rather a historically informed critical race theoretical/decolonial analysis of the modern/colonial world system as forged in and perpetuated through religion/race/war.

22.     In pointing to the "inadequacy" of Carrico's framing of the issue, due recognition must be given of his engagement with race as relevant to the debate over transhumanism; in this connection, see Carrico (2012; 2013, 49–60).

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