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Dreams of atomic genocide: The bomb, racial violence, and fantasies of annihilation

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of nuclear weapons on fantasies of racial violence. Specifically, it argues that weapons impact the emergence of social formations, producing unique patterns of thought, desire, anticipation, and identity. While the effects of nuclear power have been central to disciplinary debates in international studies, existing critical commentary has largely focused on the discriminatory nature of the global nuclear hierarchy. By focusing on the productive impact of weapons on cultural registers, this article demonstrates that nuclear power not only reinforces global structures of racism and colonialism but also creates new articulations of white supremacy. It argues that a specific fantasy of nuclear genocide, seizing nuclear power as a means for executing a global race war, is an expression germane to the nuclear age. This article concludes by arguing that this fantasy plays an important role in white supremacist approaches to politics and existing forms of racist hierarchy.

Nuclear weapons development, use, and policy is the subject of an incredibly rich critical dialogue.[1] This literature demonstrates multiple ways in which nuclear weapons contribute to forms of racist violence, including the slow destruction of Indigenous peoples, the maintenance of a discriminatory, racialized global order, and the execution of many racist acts of war.[2] Scholars have revealed

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[1] Anna Stavrianakis, 'Towards a postcolonial, anti-racist, anti-militarist feminist mode of weapons control', in Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura Shepherd (eds), *New Directions in Women, Peace, and Security* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), pp. 153–68; Catherine Eschle, 'Gender and the subject of (anti)nuclear politics: Revisiting women's campaigning against the bomb', *International Studies Quarterly*, 57:4 (2013), pp. 713–24, https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12019; Anne Harrington de Santana, 'Nuclear weapons as the currency of power', *The Nonproliferation Review*, 16:3 (2009), pp. 325–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700903255029; Shampa Biswas, '"Nuclear apartheid" as political position: Race as a postcolonial resource?', *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 485–522, https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540102600406; Carol Cohn, 'Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12:4 (1987), pp. 687–718, https://doi.org/10.1086/494362.

[2] Shampa Biswas, *Nuclear Desire: Power and the Postcolonial Nuclear Order* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2014); Anthony Burke, 'Nuclear time: Temporal metaphors of the nuclear present', *Critical Studies on Security*, 4:1 (2016), pp. 73–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2016.1162394; Anne I. Harrington, 'Power, violence, and nuclear weapons', *Critical Studies on Security*, 4:1 (2016), pp. 91–112, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2016.1177784; Ritu Mathur, 'Sly civility and the paradox of equality/inequality in the nuclear order: A post-colonial critique', *Critical Studies on Security*, 4:1 (2016), pp. 57–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1106428; Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (Chicago: Zed Books, 1998); Valerie L. Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Hugh Gusterson, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Mohammed Ayoob, 'Making sense of global tensions: Dominant and subaltern conceptions of order and justice in the international system', *International Studies*, 47:2–4 (2010), pp. 129–41,

the role of racism in the networks of scientific and industrial production that led to nuclear weapons development, the construction of objects of nuclear targeting and annihilation, and the long-term residues of nuclear waste. As Himadeep Muppidi's contribution to this forum shows, nuclear violence emerges as part of a legacy of colonial 'thingification' that obliterates human suffering and denies the horrors of the bomb.[3]

This article takes a different approach from the existing critical literature on nuclear power by examining how these weapons impacted the articulation of racist fantasies and, subsequently, white supremacy. Specifically, it argues that nuclear weapons bolstered a racist discourse on the 'disappearance of the lesser races', because they created the fantasy that, through the acquisition and use of the bomb, the dream of eliminating lesser races could be historically achievable at a planetary scale. While this fantasy has not directly changed nuclear posture, it is nonetheless significant because it influences the strategies of mobilization and antidemocratic politics of white supremacy. Indeed, as Lester Spence points out in his contribution to this issue, subcultural influences have often been overlooked in the study of international politics.[4] Where Spence demonstrates how the cultural transmission of Black subculture was a precondition for emerging global challenges to racist hierarchy, here I show how the production of nuclear weapons helps to regenerate racist subcultural fantasies of extermination and rejuvenate the genocidal ambitions of white supremacy. Indeed, the cultural influence of the bomb partly accounts for why nuclear power and proliferation have often been central to a variety of nationalist, racist, and xenophobic movements.[5] In the case of white supremacy, nuclear power creates an illusion of finality in racial conflict and effectively supports a contestation internal to white supremacist discourses, one that paradoxically indicts existing global racial hierarchies, despite their horrific violence, as inadequate relative to the possibility of what I call 'atomic genocide'. This term refers to a fantasy of using nuclear capacity to exterminate racial minorities and permanently entrench racial hierarchy. While many studies have demonstrated the degree to which race and colonialism constitute the conditions of possibility for international studies,[6] and the existing critical literature aptly documented the discriminatory features of existing nuclear orders, the influence of nuclear weapons on the articulation of white supremacy has not received similar analysis. The contribution of this article is to open this point of convergence to further analysis, to show how nuclear weapons, a long-standing object of fascination and analysis in international studies, in turn, influence the articulation of fantasies of racial conflict, domination, and extermination, and to use this convergence as a reflective opportunity to pose questions about international studies, which historically has also focused much of its discourse on the role of nuclear objects in global politics.

The paper starts by describing how weapons, as material agencies, construct desire, fantasies, and social systems. Second, it turns to white supremacist discussions of nuclear weapons in literature, specifically *The Turner Diaries*, to show how nuclear power may support specific fantasies of racial extermination. Finally, the article argues that the connections between nuclear power

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[3] Muppidi citation.

[4] Spence citation.

[5] Robert Jay Lifton, 'Nuclearism', *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 9:2 (1980), pp. 119–24.

[6] Anna M. Agathangelou, 'On the question of time, racial capitalism, and the planetary', *Globalizations*, 18:6 (2021), pp. 880–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1906006; Alexander Barder, *Global Race War: International Politics and Racial Hierarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Racism in Foucauldian security studies: Biopolitics, liberal war, and the whitewashing of colonial and racial violence', *International Political Sociology*, 13:1 (2019), pp. 2–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/oly031; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: Racism in international relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 71–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.710585; Sankaran Krishna, 'Race, amnesia, and the education of international relations', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24.

and white supremacy have important disciplinary implications, since central terms and objects of analysis may contribute to the consolidation of these fantasies of racialized violence.

Weapons, desire, politics

Given their importance in armed conflict, weapons, as objects, have received little sustained critical attention in international studies. With important exceptions,[7] current scholarship views weapons as tools that amplify the power of individuals, organizations, or states. This perspective has several problems. First, it treats weapons as solely subordinate to human intentions and ignores an irreducible gap between weapons, as material things, and human perceptions.[8] This gap means that some aspects of weapons are always beyond human access and, consequently, weapons have, at minimum, some capacity to influence humans beyond intentionality.[9] Second, weapons are not wholly a result of human ingenuity.[10] Rather, weapons development occurs because of pre-existing properties of specific organizations of matter.[11] For instance, while human intentions certainly led to the development of the atomic bomb, the underlying properties of the nuclear force that make the bomb possible are potentials immanent to matter. Human intentions may shape the form and content of weapons, but they are also constrained by underlying physical properties of materials that, in turn, shape human designs. Technology is, at best, always co-constructed with non-human agencies. Third, weapons presuppose a specific relationship between contingency and futurity. By point of contrast, a tool works based on a purposive or teleological future insofar as it produces something for a particular goal or end. Unlike tools, weapons involve an explicit anticipation of potentiality, since they presuppose the possibility of both desirable and undesirable encounters with others and, more specifically, the potential for these encounters to occur in contingent ways. If a paradox of technology is that it generally exists to reduce contingency while producing unintended and contingent effects, partly because human intentions destined tools for only particular ends, then weapons almost reverse this relationship, because they presuppose the problem of contingent futures where intention, the building and use of weapons, only has a limited ability to ensure the realization of a desirable future. As such, weapons involve a different relationship to the future and, moreover, change the character of intentionality, since their utility can never be fully determined in advance. Put differently, weapons pose different questions about the limits of perception and fantasies about hypothetical future potentials.[12]

[7]Ingvild Bode and Hendrik Huelss, 'Autonomous weapons systems and changing norms in international relations', *Review of International Studies*, 44:3 (2018), pp. 393–413, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210517000614; Nisha Shah, 'Gunning for war: Infantry rifles and the calibration of lethal force', *Critical Studies on Security*, 5:1 (2017), pp. 81–104, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2017.1330600; L. R. Danil, 'Weapons, desire and the making of war: A Lacanian response', *Critical Studies on Security*, 6:3 (2018), pp. 330–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2018.1473670; Antoine Bousquet, Jairus Grove, and Nisha Shah, 'Becoming weapon: An opening call to arms', *Critical Studies on Security*, 5:1 (2017), pp. 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2017.1343010; Caroline Holmqvist, 'Undoing war: War ontologies and the materiality of drone warfare', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 41:3 (2013), pp. 535–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829813483350; Mike Bourne, 'Guns don't kill people, cyborgs do: A Latourian provocation for transformatory arms control and disarmament', *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 24:1 (2012), pp. 141–63; Helen M. Kinsella, *The Image before the Weapon: A Critical History of the Distinction between Combatant and Civilian* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[8]Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 24–30; Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (Boston: MIT Press, 2018), pp. 17, 49.

[9]Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2012), pp. 14–16.

[10]Diana Coole, 'Agentic capacities and capacious historical materialism: Thinking with new materialisms in the political sciences', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 41:3 (2013), pp. 451–469.

[11]Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 406.

[12]A frequent response to this line of analysis is that weapons and tools depend on the context of their use. A hammer, for instance, is a tool when building a table, but a weapon in a home invasion. This is an important rejoinder, one that requires lengthier response than I have space for in this piece. From an object-oriented perspective, weapons and tools are both modes of relation established to an object that can become either. Indeed, the classic problem of 'dual use' is reflective of a deep ontological ambivalence that arguably characterizes all things. This distinction is part of the reason that Deleuze and Guattari

Moreover, as Davor Löffler, John McGraw, and Niels Johannsen argue, there is strong historical, archaeological, and even evolutionary evidence that weapons played a generative role in human cultural development and anticipation of the future.[13] Since weapons incite anticipation in response to uncertain danger, they create pressures to think about the future in new ways, producing new technologic, noetic, and violent developments in a dynamic that becomes self-reinforcing in response to an unknown and hazardous potentiality. For this reason, Löffler, McGraw, and Johannsen contend that weaponry constitutes a primary driver or selection pressure in early human societies beyond the consolidation of state power. As they put it, weapons act 'as key catalyzers for increases in intelligence and foresight […] the need to model and anticipate capacities held by other intelligent entities'.[14] While fully assessing the evidence regarding weaponry and deep history is beyond the scope of this article, their account resonates with the temporal distinction between weapons and tools outlined above.[15] While it is essential to consider, as Muppidi does, the fatal, painful, injurious, and grievable consequence of weapons use,[16] the influence of weapons on fantasy, desire, and social arrangement also plays a potentially significant role in constituting the conditions of possibility for social anticipation, sensation, and thought.[17]

These observations pose serious challenges to a strong model of human intentionality with respect to weaponry, because they indicate that weapons and humans are entangled in a process of biological, noetic, social, and technical co-evolution. Since weapons introduce wayward future potentials, they change human behaviour, desire, and hence, intention well prior to the development or use of any given weapon. I have previously argued that weapons should be viewed as agencies that constitute human desires alongside their capacity for violence or injury. This influence on desire is a product of weapons' thick relationship to potentiality and futurity, which is, I contend, both ontologically real and materially significant alongside the physical damage caused by weapons.[18] This position is not meant to discount the importance of collective and individual decisions about human coexistence with weapons, since these decisions determine the definition of lethality, what counts as a grievable life, how much gendered violence will occur in a community, what forms of suffering should be outlawed, and what constitutes the foundational values of a political community, and so on.[19] Nonetheless, if weapons affect social structures by inciting desire and anticipation, this raises the question of whether they can contribute to the emergence of new forms of racism by making racist imaginaries or practices sensible, enjoyable, thinkable, actionable.[20] For instance, the maintenance of racist hierarchy clearly depends on the violent capacities of weaponry

emphasize that it is the assemblage that makes things into weapons or tools, rather than static, preformed types of metaphysical conditions.

[13]Davor Löffler, John McGraw, and Niels Johannsen, 'Weapons in and as history: On the ontogenerative function of materialized preemption and intelligence in weapons technology', *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, 16:1–2 (2019), pp. 68–77.

[14]Ibid., p. 76.

[15]Debra L. Martin and Ryan P. Harrod, 'Bioarchaeological contributions to the study of violence', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 156:S59 (2015), pp. 116–45, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.22662; Keith Otterbein, *How War Began* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

[16]Cite Himadeep; Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2003); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[17]For an explication of the impact of the virtual as real, see Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[18]Benjamin Meiches, 'Weapons, desire, and the making of war', *Critical Studies on Security*, 5:1 (2017), pp. 9–27.

[19]Nisha Shah, 'Death in the details: Finding dead bodies at the Canadian War Museum', *Organization*, 24:4 (2017), pp. 549–69, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417700403; Cynthia Cockburn, *Antimilitarism: Political and Gender Dynamics of Peace Movements* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Kinsella, *The Image before the Weapon*; Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[20]Derek Hook, 'Racism and *jouissance*: Evaluating the "racism as (the theft of) enjoyment" hypothesis', *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 23 (2018), pp. 244–66; Julie Welland, 'Joy and war reading pleasure in wartime experiences', *Review of International Studies*, 44:3 (2018), pp. 438–55; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20th Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

in many instances, such as the use of racialized police use of tear gas, batons, firearms, and raids, as Marta Fernández implicitly describes in the case of anti-Black Covid-19 responses in Brazil.[21] Indeed, Frantz Fanon highlighted the importance of weaponry, much like land and education, in the constitution of the colonial world: 'and at the very moment when [the colonized] discover their humanity, they begin to sharpen their weapons to secure its victory'.[22] However, if weapons are understood as affecting potentiality, then their influence on racial hierarchy goes beyond the application of force, because they change social systems, including explicitly racist ones, in ways that are irreducible to human intentions. Put simply, weapons theoretically have the potential to contribute to new formations of racist structure, practice, and imaginary.

Atomic genocide: When racial fantasy goes nuclear

Existing nuclear policy, posture, and use is deeply connected to racialized violence and hierarchy. Nuclear testing and use occurred within the context of racialized warfare in the United States' conflict with Japan and spawned an intersectional protest to nuclear dominance.[23] After this period, as Shampa Biswas and Joseph Masco illustrate, the sprawling expansion of nuclear operations impacted virtually every element of governance and political life in the Global North and Global South, with insidious consequences for colonized and Indigenous peoples.[24] Urban design changed in response to nuclear power and promoted segregation, ghettoization, and white flight.[25] However, the politics of the atom were not exhausted by the onset of new practices of militarization and securitization, nor by analytical engagement with the outcomes of a hypothetical nuclear war. As the late William Chaloupka contended, the bomb is also a site of ambivalent infatuation.[26] Cheer, festiveness, and humour about the bomb may coexist with a visceral and, at times, unconscious horror of the implications of nuclear explosion.[27] In Chaloupka's account, nuclear weapons create this ambivalence because of the distinctive intensity of their destruction, one that is spectacular and surreal when understood articulated as a problem of fantasy. By breaking with existing aesthetic registers for comprehending violence, nuclear weapons often become an object of terror, fascination, and allure.[28] As Muppidi's contribution describes, even amongst the victims of gratuitous nuclear violence, there is almost a traumatic limit for words or images to effectively convey the pain of the event.[29] This cultural politics of nuclear power is symptomatic of the tremendous influence weapons may have on human constituencies outlined in the previous sections of the article. Many of the well-known effects of nuclear power, such as various models of deterrence or the terror of imminent nuclear war, also result from this underlying relationship between nuclear weapons, desire, and anticipation of potentiality. It is also at this level that nuclear weapons change the politics of white supremacy, since they spawn new fantasies of atomic genocide.

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[21]Fernández citation; see also Anna Stavrianakis, 'Controlling weapons circulation in a postcolonial militarised world', *Review of International Studies*, 45 (2018), pp. 1–20, https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0260210518000190; Anna Feigenbaum, *Tear Gas: From the Battlefields of World War I to the Streets of Today* (New York: Verso, 2017).

[22]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, reprint ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2005), p. 8.

[23]Vincent Intondi, 'Reflections on injustice, racism, and the bomb', *Arms Control Today*, 50:6 (2020), pp. 12–15; Abby J. Kinchy, 'African Americans in the atomic age: Postwar perspectives on race and the bomb, 1945–1967', *Technology and Culture*, 50:2 (2009), pp. 291–315; Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[24]Biswas, *Nuclear Desire*; Masco, *Theatre of Operation*.

[25]My thanks to Martin Coward for pointing out this relationship.

[26]William Chaloupka, *Knowing Nukes: The Politics and Culture of the Atom* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[27]Ibid., pp. 7–21. Chaloupka's work dovetails with more prominent accounts of the ambivalent ease with which nuclear discussions happen, notably Carol Cohn's famous work.

[28]Calum Matheson, *Desiring the Bomb: Communication, Psychoanalysis, and the Atomic Age* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018), pp. 10–12.

[29]Muppidi citation.

According to Patrick Brantlinger, by the late 19th century European discourses on race consistently articulated a belief in the inevitable extinction or disappearance of the 'lesser races' whether because of necessary progress of civilization or a 'fantasy of auto-genocide'.[30] The discourse legitimated a variety of techniques of colonial domination and extermination by ascribing a *telos* to the life of 'primitive' and 'savage' peoples. The certain disappearances of lesser races justified both 'necessary' and incidental racist massacre, since violence only contributed to the eventual destruction of colonized peoples. However, the 19th-century articulation of this theme hinged on an untenable claim about teleology, one structured such that the supposed inevitability of white supremacy falls apart when its premises are wrecked by encounter with anti-colonial resistance, democratic contestation, and historical contingency. As Alexander Barder documents, during this period white supremacy continually articulated a need for racial war, including annihilation, but this discourse also produced anxieties about the eventual success of white supremacy, which worked against the teleological certainty and, hence, the coherence of this vision of white supremacy especially when confronted, successfully, by a variety of challenges from supposedly subhuman communities.[31] It is in relation to the theme of racial disappearance and racial war that nuclear weapons exert underexplored effects, because they give rise to a unique version of the fantasy of racial disappearance and the eventual permanence of white supremacy. Specifically, nuclear weapons render thinkable a scenario in which global nuclear use could unilaterally, finally, and permanently eliminate nonwhite peoples, thereby supporting a new version of the racial disappearance theme made real by the non-teleological means of atomic genocide.

The best example of this fantasy is *The Turner Diaries*. Written by William Luther Pierce under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries* presents a future in which violent revolution against the United States federal government is necessary to undermine Jewish control of the state and the multiracial democracy it supports.[32] The book is one of the key references for modern white supremacist movements, and, as scholars of white supremacy frequently note, nuclear weapons play a central part in the narrative.[33] At a crucial point of this narrative, the text's protagonists, the Organization, clandestinely seize control of some of the American nuclear weapons in order destroy New York City, Israel, and other sites of racial equity, thereby facilitating a capture of the state apparatus and progress towards eventual white supremacy. The narrative concludes with widespread nuclear weapons use as part of the culmination of white supremacy in the destruction of all non-white peoples.

Pierce's work is an example of Chaloupka's politics of the atom in which an infatuation with nuclear power resonates with racist discourses on the inevitable extinction of lesser races through racial war, linking the destruction potential of nuclear weaponry to fantasies of mass racial genocide.[34] Indeed, absent the capacities associated with nuclear power, major aspects of Pierce's narrative fall apart, since it is the destructive capacity of the atomic bomb that enables a small cadre of supremacists to hypothetically exert control and destroy the 'lesser races' in spite of their comparative weakness as a constituency within a democratic state. While the text's images of nuclear policy and devastation are fictional, they constitute a form of 'desiring production', articulating a new version of a reality made possible through nuclear weapon. *The Turner Diaries* thus offers a set of cultural scripts that help to organize white supremacist enjoyment by cultivating pleasure

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[30]Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 4.

[31]Barder, *Global Race War*, pp. 41–4, pp. 83–4.

[32]Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries* (Washington, DC: National Alliance, 1980).

[33]Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Michael Barkun, 'Millenarian aspects of "white supremacist" movements', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1:4 (1989), pp. 409–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546558908427037; Charles Goehring and George N. Dionisopoulos, 'Identification by antithesis: The Turner Diaries as constitutive rhetoric', *Southern Communication Journal*, 78:5 (2013), pp. 369–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2013.823456.

[34]William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 39.

in the intensities of mass violence, a common theme in fascist desire.[35] The plot participates in the types of anticipatory patterns of thought that Löffler, McGraw, and Johannsen contend emerge from weapon–social entanglements, but inflected by the resonance of racial genocide, which seeks to realize racial conflict through a new means of atomic genocide. Indeed, as the late Lee Ann Fujii brilliantly made clear, enactments of extreme violence are cruel performances that produce identity through the act of witnessing acts of gratuitous violence.[36] While *The Turner Diaries* and other works are texts, they perform a parallel function by graphically constituting the audience as witness to a vision of racialized mass killing at an otherwise literally unintelligible scale. In doing so, they contribute to the consolidation of racist role performances surrounding the enactments of nuclear violence as described in these texts. In this script, nuclear violence operates as the most fully realized, most intense possibility of racialized violence.

The Turner Diaries is far from the only white supremacist text to fantasize about nuclear violence.[37] This bundle of fantasies is significant not only because they articulate a hypothetical desire for instantaneous genocide, but because they also contribute to the consolidation of white supremacist identity and aspirations. The fantasy of unilaterally seizing control of the nuclearized state apparatus and immediately employing nuclear devices becomes an imagined blueprint for political action, one that contrasts with the slower, more common articulations of racist ideas about replacement theory in recommending an imminent, violent seizure of the state apparatus in the interest of expanding racial hierarchy. In short, this literature intensifies the antagonisms underlying fantasies of racial conflict by articulating a belief in the desirability and realizability of a future secured through atomic genocide. These fantasies include blatant errors on subjects ranging from the nature of sovereign control of nuclear weapons, the survivability of global thermonuclear war, to the stability of racial identity. However, the fact that these are fanciful constructions, filled with mistakes about nuclear power, does not make these fantasies any less potent.[38] Indeed, the tendency toward annihilation, the nearly suicidal elimination of existing conditions is a characteristic of incipient fascism, one in which the intensification of a line of flight seeks to destroy an entire assemblage.[39] Many scholars have argued that racist practice and white supremacy created a new model of anti-politics that refuses any premise of democratic negotiation in the effort to capture political power.[40] Nuclear weapons enhance this position because they provide a mechanism, a site of attachment, that open the possibility of bypassing, and ultimately ending, pluralist, democratic negotiation.

One way to further provide evidence for this effect is to contrast the articulation of this form of atomic fantasy with actual, historical control over nuclear power. If existing critiques of nuclear posture, policy, and use have repeatedly pointed out that the bomb creates discriminatory, racist hierarchies, then what texts such as *The Turner Diaries* do is engage in a kind of contestation within the terms of racist discourse, promoting another, more intense model of racial violence that paradoxically reinforces racist hierarchies by fantasizing about the possibility of permanently incarnating racial hierarchy through immediate, genocidal violence at a planetary scale.[41] The bomb

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[35]Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Chris Turner, Stephen Conway, and Erica Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 200–21.

[36]Lee Ann Fujii, *Show Time: The Logic and Power of Violent Display* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

[37]Paul Williams, *Race, Ethnicity, and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. 3, pp. 180–201.

[38]Michael Hardt, 'Nuclear sovereignty', *Theory & Event*, 22:4 (2019), pp. 842–68; Jairus Grove, *Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 11–13.

[39]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p, 221; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the College de France, 1975–1976, trans.* David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 234.

[40]Belew, *Bring the War Home*; Joshua Inwood, 'White supremacy, white counter-revolutionary politics, and the rise of Donald Trump', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37:4 (2019), pp. 579–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418789949.

[41]Shane J. Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

transforms what might be described as a previous, historical fantasy based on the teleological inevitability of white supremacy into a specific, political fantasy based on the historical, rather than teleological, need to seize atomic power to eliminate lesser races. In Löffler, McGraw, and Johannsen's sense it anticipates a contingent scenario in which racial hierarchy might be dismantled and seeks to intervene against this possibility by consolidating white supremacy not through further racist governance, but through unilateral violence. In this fantasy, political order constituted by already existing mass violence against Black, Indigenous, and colonized peoples becomes unacceptable relative to an alternative world constituted by atomic genocide. While nuclear weapons and their attendant fantasies are by no means the sole factor producing contemporary fantasies of racial annihilation, infatuation with their destructive power donates a sense of reality to the possibility of a more ardent, anti-political, and genocidal model of white supremacy.

Discipline, desire, and materiality

International studies has been rightly accused of multiple epistemological, historical, and ethical shortcomings when it comes to dynamics of racialized power. These shortcomings include policing what constitutes a legitimate point of disciplinary inquiry, who gets to be part of the conversation, what histories, experiences, and forms of suffering are grievable, and what forms of mass violation matter. The literature has long identified nuclear power as a site where what may at first appear as simple questions about the dynamics of neutral power politics turn out to be deeply structured by mechanisms of racial power. The contribution of this article is to identify a different approach to exploring the connection between nuclear objects and racial violence, one that begins by exploring how weaponry not just reflects and reproduces racialized hierarchy but may also contribute to the articulation of new modes of racism. The argument that nuclear power introduced the articulation of new versions of racial extermination, racial war, and atomic genocide is a speculative starting point for this analysis. Nonetheless, it is an important point of note, because these fantasies resonate with the metaphysical and anti-political commitments of several dominant variations of contemporary white supremacy. While the examples described here are anything but an exhaustive account of nuclear weapons or white supremacy, they illustrate a need to think about the influence of objects of inquiry in international studies as entangled with and potentially transformative of racist practice, racial violence, and subjectivity. This connection has two implications for scholarly discussions of international studies broadly understood.

First, it underscores that racism cannot be treated simply as an epistemic oversight. Many efforts to combat historical bias and discrimination proceed from the assumption that learning about the historical impact of racism or documenting its role in the history of disciplinary thought is a sufficient starting point to change existing academic dynamics. However, if the consistent objects of disciplinary analysis, such as nuclear weapons, operate as a site of intellectual fascination in a way that parallels the deep allure they have in white supremacist discourse, then a simple exercise of epistemic reflection will never be sufficient to disinter disciplinary commitments to one model of racial hierarchy.[42] Indeed, the belief that reflection is an effective mode of anti-racist strategy is popular precisely because it does not significantly jeopardize the forms of enjoyment at stake in racist hierarchy. This point is pertinent in the context of international studies because weaponized forms of enjoyment also inform the discipline's historical (and contemporary) function as it is practised in the Global North. Disciplinary discussions about nuclear proliferation or models of deterrence are constituted in relation to the continuity of global racist hierarchy. Debates about nuclear policy take place in terms constituted by a position of pleasure opened by these relations. The question of how weaponry affects subjectivity is thus germane not only to the study of explicit white supremacy, where fantasies of annihilation directly support the articulation of racism, but also in a discursive context where sustained discussion of the future is mediated by the intersection

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[42]Todd McGowan, 'Pilfered pleasure: On racism as "the theft of enjoyment"', in Sheldon George and Derek Hook (eds), *Lacan and Race: Racism, Identity, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 19–34.

of racism and violence these weapons proffer. Read in this way, challenging disciplinary links to the expression of racism will also require approaches to move beyond long-standing disciplinary infatuations with weapons as a site for understanding global political action, especially since so much of this is bound to the anticipation of violence. Indeed, what is troubling here is not merely the propensity for these dialogues to be apolitical or undemocratic, nor their frequent return to relations of colonial domination in a new garb, but also the deep reluctance to consider how academic analysis draws from the same fantasy space, derives enjoyment from the same fantasy objects, as dominant forms of white supremacy. While the vision of nuclear power in international studies certainly does not reproduce the same model of racist hierarchy as those found in white supremacist movements, it also cannot be analytically decoupled from broader assemblages of racist power.

As the discipline starts to broach the question of anti-racist practice and pedagogy – although the fact that the term 'start' is intelligible at all in this context shows the depth of the problem – it is an error to understand these solely as epistemic deficits, because, in the case of nuclear power, the very terms of epistemic inquiry are enjoyable because they participate in fantasies of power that support racist hierarchy. Instead of approaching anti-racist practice solely as an epistemic deficit, a failure to see or hear, another approach would need to directly address how existing dialogues sustain forms and consider how to contest these, to as it were, 'disarm' the effects of human–nuclear entanglements. This process might entail providing other avenues or strategies of enjoyment, it might involve directly addressing the materials, in this case weapons, that produce and sustain enjoyment. Since a relationship to weaponry is a key part of the inception of the discipline, unpacking the multiple influences of weapons on human life is particularly important to tracking and undoing the discipline's grounding in specific forms of racist hierarchy.

Second, a new topic of disciplinary attention is the emergence of white supremacist, nationalist, and xenophobic movements across multiple global constituencies. Several studies have examined the metaphysical and political commitments of these movements, while others have traced their historical lineage.[43] This piece contributes to these efforts by demonstrating that the aspirations of these movements are structured by forms of enjoyment and anticipation that emerge in relation to nuclear weaponry. Weapons augment metaphysical anxieties and commitments. In this case, nuclear weapons engender a fantasy that it is possible to historically end racial conflict singularly and conclusively through atomic genocide. The anticipation of this possibility shapes white supremacist beliefs about the importance, realizability, and strategy value of the seizure of the state apparatus as a mechanism of racial extermination. If existing critical literature argues that discussions of nuclear power are dialogues on how to best maintain forms of racialized discriminatory power on a global scale, this alternative, more violent vision desires nuclear power not merely to discriminate, but to make a more violent model of racist hierarchy permanent. Nuclear power, in effect, rescues the substance of the 19th-century discourses on racial extinction without embracing its *telos*, but this makes it more dangerous, more prone to lash out because its very historicity means that this possibility is uncertain, requiring more ardent, concrete, weaponized action on the part of white supremacist movements. In a strange way, nuclear politics expose the vulnerability and intensifies the violence of white supremacy. This helps to explain the challenges movements towards democracy face, since they are not confronting a desire to simply restore a tacitly racist liberal democracy, but to produce a form of racist hierarchy that bears at least some resemblance to a world of racial conflict constituted by atomic genocide.

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[43]Helen Ngo, 'Critical phenomenology and the banality of white supremacy', *Philosophy Compass*, 17:2 (2022), pp. 1–15; Chetan Bhatt, 'White extinction: Metaphysical elements of contemporary Western fascism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38:1 (2021), pp. 27–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276420925523; Charles W. Mills, *White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

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