



FIGHTING APOCALYPSE:

The Climate and Disarmament Nexus

The end is nigh and there is nothing we can do about it. Except for everything we haven't tried; embracing an all-encompassing conception that humans are a part of this world, not the rulers of it. Such indigenous beliefs have staved off the apocalypse since time immemorial - and still can.

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Apocalyptic anxiety. Overwhelming? Yes. Over-dramatic? Maybe not. Collective fear of destruction is not new, nor is it unwarranted or unnatural. Throughout the mid- and late-20th century, amidst the Cold War, "apocalypse" looked like death by a Russian nuclear weapon (at least to a Western audience). In the present-day, apocalypse looks like climate change-induced natural hazard and environmental destruction. Climate anxiety is becoming increasingly common and paralyzing, especially among Gen Z and children who are having to process that the world they know today may not exist in its current form for their children, or even in their adulthood. This is eerily reminiscent of the anxiety felt by Cold War children who spent schooldays performing emergency "hide-under-your-desk" drills in the case of a nuclear bombing.

Both the anti-nuclear and the climate justice movements have a common goal: keep the Earth and its people alive. Sustainability has become a 21st-century buzzword, largely associated with the climate crisis and environmentalism. However,

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"sustainability," if it is to be a guiding principle in social justice activism, must be interdisciplinary. This includes building a world that limits its consumption and environmental waste, but that also recognizes and opposes the existential threats of nuclear weapons and hawkish militaries. So, what more do these movements have in common, and how can they be bridged?

First, we must remember that in the cases of both nuclear warfare, military conflict, and climate change, there are widespread top-down exercises of narrative-building. In other words, the story of climate change and the story of nuclear tensions are being told to us by power centres (through media outlets, government press releases, partisan stances, etc.). This means that the values and interests held by those in power can and do dictate public understandings of these conflicts. In the case of nuclear warfare, the "nuclear nine" (the United States, Russia, France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea) have for decades propagated the idea that nuclear weapons - and nuclear expansion - are necessary to deter foreign aggression. In the case of climate change, Western governments and corporations continue to push an individualistic narrative that puts the primary burden of sustainability on the individual, ignoring corporate emissions and global extractives as the primary driver of the climate crisis.

The first step in re-interpreting - or rather, credibly interpreting - these threats is to reverse this narrative-building process to the "bottom-up," centering the perspectives of those most vulnerable to the conflicts at hand.

In January of 2018, as tensions between North Korea and the United States were rising, 1.4 million residents of Hawaii received an alert on their phones reading: *"BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL."* The alert was a mistake. For thirty-eight minutes, though, residents of Hawaii - 300,000 of whom are Indigenous to the island, many of whom have been involved in anti-occupation and anti-militarist movements on their native land - believed their lives were about to end. Mass panic ensued, goodbye messages were sent to loved ones, recipients ran to make-shift bomb shelters. What was a state-to-state conflict was now arriving on the shores of Hawaii, and civilians - not those in military or state leadership, but everyday people - were about to be the collateral damage. The trauma from this 38-minute period has lived on, with social media being filled with 5-year anniversary posts of Hawaiian residents remembering the heart-stopping moment.

In Japan, "Hibakusha" ("person affected by the bomb") is used to describe surviving victims of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hibakusha have dealt with physical, psychological, and community trauma, in addition to lifelong physical ailments and deaths of loved ones. Moreover, the Hibakusha have faced widespread discrimination for misconceptions of their radiation poisoning being contagious, literally being deemed as radioactive. There were 650,000 recognized Hibakusha - in addition to the roughly 200,000 people that died in the bombings themselves. Again, the majority of these victims are not military leaders or decision-makers - they