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Empire of Demands: Sacrifice and Accommodation at the Interstices of Personal and Planetary Crisis

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Grounded in the experience of my young autistic child's chronic illness-related crisis coinciding with the still-ongoing genocide in Palestine, this creative essay considers themes of grief, care, sacrifice, and temporality at the interstices of intimate and planetary crisis. Pulling at threads of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, it intervenes in autistic knowledge production that centers individual identity-formation and accommodation as its most worthy subject/object. It asks if and how autistic and larger neurodivergent movements can align with movements challenging settler colonialism, climate catastrophe, state violence, and myriad forms of disablement in the context of rising fascism and authoritarianism.

> Nothing drives Mindimooyenh more crazy than "self-care."
> "We are self-caring our way to fascism," they yell.
> I try and explain.
> "That's not a thing," they reply. "It is just care."
>
> – Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies,* 86

In the summer of 2023, my 4-year-old child descended into neurological collapse. Though we had increasingly wondered if Sky was autistic and/or ADHD and were in the process of an assessment, she had until that point been "typical" in many ways and we'd had a fairly ordinary parenting experience, global pandemic notwithstanding. Suddenly, everything changed. My partner and I understood this drastic shift through the lens of AuDHD burnout (specifically, PDA: pathological demand avoidance or persistent drive for autonomy), what we have since learned was likely compounded by long COVID and/or an autoimmune disease called Pediatric Acute-Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS). This is as awful as it sounds.

My partner, AJ, had just taken leave from their job as a healthcare provider at a trans clinic to "recover" from long COVID. Before Sky's burnout, I'd planned to spend my salaried fellowship year building a self-employed life as an editor, an off-ramp from the tenure track that I'd been working towards for years. I'd desperately longed to slow down after three years of parenting during a pandemic, finishing my PhD during lockdown, and adjusting to the toll of AJ's long COVID and my own newly discovered autism. But our family was in crisis. By September, Sky was no longer able to attend school and what we'd hoped would be a period of marginal rest became one of intensive caretaking for our vulnerable young child.

And then October 7th happened.

Al Aqsa Flood, the anti-colonial uprising of the Palestinian resistance waged during the 75th year of the ongoing Nakba and 18 years into the settler siege on Gaza.

Suddenly my young child's acute disability and chronic illness-related crisis coincided with the (still-ongoing) genocide in Palestine. Both required me to drop everything. One crisis was intimate, familial, and in some ways very private; the other was planetary and cataclysmic. At the time of this writing, Israel and the United States, with the condonation of the leaders of the so-called Western world, have been perpetrating genocide against the Palestinian people for 27 months. This prism of protracted personal and political crisis grounds my reflections on grief, the meanings of sacrifice, and some of the limitations of the emergent "neurodiversity movement," at least in the anglophone Global North. Indeed, following the advice of autistic advocates would have had us ignore the genocide to prioritize our nuclear family's comfort at the expense of all else. But as organizers, we knew that to turn our backs on Palestine would mean turning our backs on the world.

In this essay, my aim is to intervene in autistic knowledge production that centers individual identity-formation and accommodation as its most worthy subject/object. Engaging with women of color feminism, queer of color critique, and theories of racialized and gendered caring and reproductive labor, I suggest that the epistemic and political limitations of the neurodiversity movement are mired deeply in neoliberalism, illustrating how seemingly "non-normative" frameworks can do the work of stabilizing white supremacy, racial capitalism, and other normalizing logics even as those logics are ultimately bound to our collective immiseration. It asks if and how autistic and larger neurodivergent movements can align with struggles against settler colonialism, climate catastrophe, state violence, and myriad forms of disablement in the context of rising fascism and authoritarianism. I consider the meanings of *sacrifice*—a sometimes-dirty word for disability politics—to offer a queer praxis for meeting our current political moment, between accommodation and sacrifice.

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It is difficult to put into words—something I have struggled many times to do—how isolating, scary, exhausting, and painful it is to witness and care for one's young child whose already-vulnerable nervous system has been pushed beyond the brink, whether by the day to day demands of life (autistic burnout), long COVID, and/or a neuroimmune disease that causes swelling in the brain (PANS). We know now it was likely a combination of these. Sky lost much of the ability to communicate verbally, was extremely dysregulated, vastly restricted the types of food she would eat, and was unable to feed herself or use the toilet, activities she had been doing without difficulty for two years. "Regression" as it's called by child development professionals and medical doctors; a "loss of skills" by autistic advocates. In either case, it is terrifying to watch one's young child in distress and struggling to cope with the day-to-day demands of life.

In the days and weeks and months after October 7th, despite the grief, overwhelm, and bewilderment, we threw ourselves into urgent organizing to end the genocide, guided by our long-held anti-colonial commitment to the full liberation of Palestine. We watched in horror with millions around the world, as Israeli Occupation Forces slaughtered Palestinians under the aegis of the cruel, cynical weaponization of anti-semitism. We planned and participated in protests and actions on a near-weekly basis for several months, alternating between the streets, meetings, and the intensive caregiving our child needed. Those early months of crisis were a blur. I spent dozens of hours in court and in meetings with co-defendants in a warehouse after being targeted by mass arrests in November and again in June. Our political convictions guided us. But there was also something about the duality of having a young child in crisis—not due to bombardment, starvation, or torture, but due to the demands of everyday life—while watching Israel slaughter masses of children with enthusiastic ideological and material support from the U.S., that pushed us to go beyond what we thought was possible as we navigated disability and burnout ourselves. We were already cracked open. I'd already given up my career in academia. We were already sleep-deprived and relying on adrenaline to get through the day. Not showing up for Gaza never crossed our minds.

When my child's incredibly sensitive threat response threw her into panic because I had to leave her side to go to the bathroom, I thought of children in Gaza. Children *like her* in Gaza, who wouldn't be able to stay still or quiet while their families hid from IOF soldiers roaming the neighborhoods of Rafah with snipers. Children for whom the framework of PTSD is nowhere sufficient for describing the terror of gathering a sibling's strewn limbs; learning that every one of one's relatives has been killed in an air strike; being trapped alone beneath the rubble; abducted and tortured in a camp (Jabr 2025). This constant titration between the witnessing and responding to the genocide and caring for our distressed child organized our lives. Not out of guilt or self-flagellation or a negation of how difficult our own circumstances were, but out of a deep sense of urgency, responsibility, and resolve. Palestinian people, land, and futures are alone worth fighting for. And as the last two years have revealed to so many around the world, Zionism is a threat to our collective survival.

Through all of this, one of the only mirrors of our family's experience—and just a fraction of a mirror, at that—was in autistic/PDA parent educators and the communities they cultivated. However imperfect, they were the only real source of affirmation and guidance we found in the first weeks and months of Sky's burnout and onset of chronic illness. It was through their platforms that we learned of the thousands of other families like ours—completely illegible and largely invisible—whose children were in a period of acute neurological burnout and distress, often physically aggressive, and unable to participate in the day-to-day functions of life (eating, hygiene, play), let alone attend school, be cared for by a childcare provider or family member, or access the array of educational/recreational activities that parents rely on to be able to participate in waged work.

The grief and loss we felt is not the grief "Autism Moms" speak of. This is the grief of fully witnessing and accommodating dysregulation and distress; of grieving everything our child and family had so suddenly lost. I read PDA parent advocate Amanda Diekman's newly published book, *Low-Demand Parenting*, through tears. Part memoir, part parenting book, it recounted her young children's periods of autistic/PDA burnout alongside her own autism discovery. I was grateful to have found this partial reflection, if deeply unrelatable, with "Low Demand Amanda" and others like her. On the outside, "letting" your kid sit on the couch in underwear watching TV and eating popsicles all day looks like "permissive" or "lax" parenting at best, neglectful parenting at worst. But if you've been on the inside of it, you know—heartbreakingly—that is all they *can* do.

Sky wasn't (and still isn't) able to participate in the "family-friendly," kid-centered protests organized by movement parents. We didn't even really understand what was happening ourselves, let alone be able to narrate the experience in a legible way to those on the outside. When people asked about Sky at protests or in meetings, I'd usually land somewhere between full-on masking—she's great!—and something about how she's having a tough time and homeschooling this year. How do you casually tell someone your kindergarten-age child is in crisis?

In desperation, we dove into what seemed to be a new and emergent culture of parent advocates, content creators, coaches, and educators who sought to provide neurodivergent-affirming frameworks for understanding and accommodating their children's PDA and "seasons" of PDA burnout. We joined Facebook groups, bought courses, consumed Instagram content, and watched webinars originating primarily in parent/peer-advocacy. These approaches rightly rejected the pathologizing, ableist culture of medicalization, research, and advocacy characterized by the trope of the "Autism Mom," a pearl-clutching fixture of white nuclear heteronormativity who laments her child's disability and selflessly dedicates her life to searching for a cause and a cure. Emergent neurodivergent-affirming approaches to parenting center accommodation, reject the widespread use of ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) to discipline autistic people into complying with neurotypical norms, defer to autistic adults, and include many parent advocates who are themselves autistic. But the vast if not exclusive majority of the resources we could find, at least then, were created by straight married white women, including many who had left careers to care for their autistic/PDA children during burnout and began to monetize what they'd learned as "coaches." I relied on them despite the deep chasm between them and my life, my values, and my communities.

As the genocide raged on, this chasm could not have felt wider. I felt increasingly angered and betrayed by the silence of the neurodivergent parenting resources I relied on. My Instagram feed was filled with images of dead, maimed, and dying adults, children, and elders. Endless child-sized shrouds. Israel has now brutally extinguished the lives of likely *hundreds of thousands* of Palestinians in Gaza, exterminating 2,700 bloodlines, and violently maiming, disabling, and debilitating thousands more (Aljazeera 2026; Puar 2017). I have witnessed, as have millions of others around the world, things I never thought I would. During this time, accounts from Gaza alternated with straight white women crusading against Autism Speaks and explaining how to accommodate a child's sensory needs. When autistic or neurodivergent parent voices were challenged on their silence, many would obfuscate and say that it's been too difficult a season of parenting to look at what's going on. It was enraging. Though not focused on neurodiversity, one of the most resonant parent voices has been Robina Khalid (@smallthingsgrow), a Pakistani American midwife, writer, and parent/birth educator. In May 2025, three months into Israel's intensified starvation campaign and continued bombardment in Gaza, she wrote, "if your favorite parenting influencer can ignore 14,000 babies being intentionally starved to death perhaps it's time to reconsider that they don't have much to teach you about parenting."

The silence of so many autistic and neurodivergent adult and parenting voices in the face of a livestreamed genocide revealed so much. It is not only that these authors, activists, advocates, and creators are not moved to speak out. It's not only the violent erasure of autistic and/or neurodivergent Palestinians. It's that the single-issue frameworks they offer emerge from reservoirs of unexamined whiteness, benefitting only the most privileged among us. The basic thrust of a "low demand parenting," as posited by autistic/PDA parent educators, is "dropping" or letting go of demands on children: schooling, screen time limits, the expectation of "politeness," wearing clothes or shoes, eating at the table, cleaning up after themselves, and an infinite number of norms that parents, teachers, and other adults force all children to comply with, whether developmentally appropriate or not. Sometimes this is about neuronormativity, pervasive social norms, or class conditioning; other times this might also be about protecting one's Black child from state surveillance, criminalization, discipline, or even theft.

I am critical of any framework that relies on privileged white women outsourcing "demands," as they're called in the lexicon of the "low-demand lifestyle," to domestic workers, delivery drivers, and other members of a vulnerable, right-less, racialized, often migrant and/or undocumented class of workers (Glenn 2012; Nadasen 2023). What of the "demands" on these laborers and their bodies, their families, and their children? While parents who are fulltime caretakers of disabled children may understandably rely on the labor of domestic workers, whether paid by the state, the private household, or a combination, I don't think we can call this "dropping a demand." It is outsourcing the demand while leaving the violent, racialized relations of capitalism and the private household intact. As crip of color disability scholar Jina Kim (2025) asks, "which racialized and gendered subjects, through the exploitation of their unseen and unvalued labor, become the living infrastructure for others' fantasies of independence?" (6).

Indeed, the uneven structural immiseration of individuals and families in the United States—both preceding and amplified by the present ascendency of fascism and authoritarianism—is intimately bound to the violence of global racial capitalism, settler colonial plunder, and genocide. These are the complex, contradictory conditions that structure all of our lives. Is it possible to strive for as low a demand life as possible while shifting the conditions that produce grossly inequitable demands in the first place?

Neuronormativity as Analytic

Like many, I discovered my own ADHD first. But, like a good scholar and (unbeknownst) autist, I dove into research on the history of racialized and gendered disparities in diagnosis. The more I learned, the more that AuDHD helped make sense of a lifetime of mental health struggles, social and relational challenges, constant misperception, difficulty with emotional regulation, and what felt like an unwarranted need for rest, recovery, and "downtime," let alone struggles with executive functioning or the ability to follow a recipe. I'd spent my life in painfully self-aware trans/queer communities preoccupied with trauma and relational/attachment patterns. I was 23 when my first-ever therapist told me I had symptoms of PTSD. Over the next decade, a dozen well-meaning, explicitly politicized queer therapists located the source of my life's challenges in complex trauma rooted in childhood. For the next decade, I read all the books on the variously named *complex* trauma, *relational* trauma, *developmental* trauma, *attachment* trauma, believing that if I just got better at healing, I would finally outgrow my self-loathing and be able to do all the things I saw others do with ease. That I hadn't done so was of course my fault. While most autistics and arguably most *people* have complex trauma, it just never added up. If I just take one more somatic therapy course, if I just stop eating gluten and tend to an altar, if I become a morning person and learn to garden. Whatever the story was. Like many late-diagnosed autistics, I felt—and continue to feel—immense relief. I am grateful to know that there is another paradigm. Not because of an uncritical acceptance of the DSM, but because I have permission to meet my own needs instead of trying to contort myself to fit into something I can't. This has resourced me to keep fighting.

And still, I am continuously unsatisfied with the self-help thrust of the emerging "neurodiversity movement." This matters because it articulates itself as a movement of minoritized people. What I observed—almost ubiquitously a couple years ago and largely now still—is the universalization of white, speaking, seemingly otherwise privileged autistic people politicized by their own individual experiences of autism realization. Current neurodivergent frameworks offer individual solutions to structural problems. In books, podcasts, memes, and Instagram reels; in support groups and other fora, I hear white autistic adults constantly repeat the refrain that "the world isn't built for us." *It is maddening*. Who is the world built for? Certainly not Black or Indigenous peoples, certainly not physically disabled people, hyper criminalized communities, migrants who have lost their homelands to climate chaos kidnapped by ICE, people in Palestine, or the neurodiversity that exists within and across these communities. As much as Sky's and my autism diagnoses were challenging so many long-held beliefs and helping me make sense of my own life, I longed for liberatory frameworks. I wrote the following in May of 2024:

> The willful silence about the nearly nine-month U.S./Israel genocide in Palestine among neurodivergent content creators and neurodivergent parent educators has been piercing.
>
> When white neurodivergent educators prioritize their comfort or emotional or cognitive "capacity" over engaging with the deathly conditions of racial capitalism and colonialism we foreclose any pretense of solidarity or relational autonomy with anyone different than ourselves.
>
> When white autistic influencers opine that the "world wasn't built for us," yet refuse to so much as condemn genocide, we insulate ourselves from developing any meaningful political lens.
>
> As long as dominant autistic & neurodivergent voices are invested in myopically identifying the ways we are uniquely and singularly oppressed, we will never dismantle neuronormativity or create the kind of worlds needed for ourselves and our kids to thrive.
>
> As long as neurodivergent and specifically autistic movements are mired by individualism, I wish no part. Public preoccupation with the minutiae of accommodations while refusing to use that same platform to speak out against genocide is unconscionable.

Since writing this essay, I have found Black autistic content creators, including @blackspectrumscholar, a Rwandan Canadian autistic person, who are calling out white autistic bullshit. This is an immense labor, and I appreciate their complex, critical perspectives and mocking humor that so succinctly illustrates the absurdity of a singular focus on autistic oppression, especially among the most protected among us.

Screenshots of Stories on @blackspectrumscholar's Instagram Page

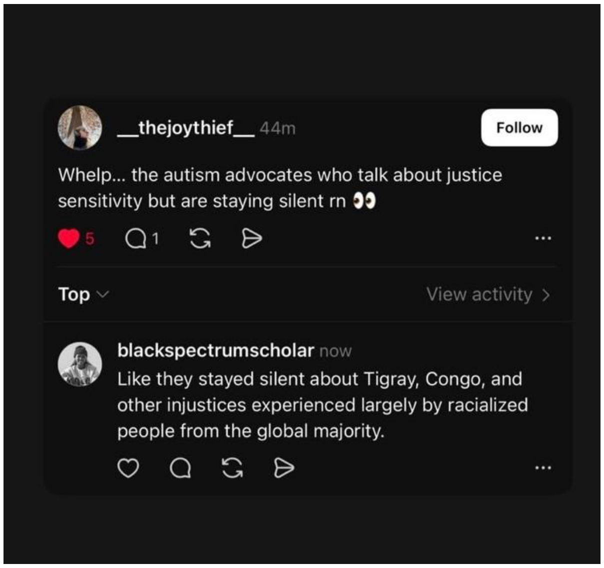
theonlysonkoi 16h

Autistic people (specifically lvl 1) have to be the most bullied and abused group of people on this planet.

blackspectrumscholar now

L1 Autistics not turning their suffering into a competition challenge: level Impossible

Figure 1: Screenshot of @blackspectrumscholar's Instagram story depicting an exchange on social media. User @theonlysonkoi states: "Autistic people (specifically lvl 1) have to be the most bullied and abused group of people on this planet;" @blackspectrumscholar replies, "L1 Autistics not turning their suffering into a competition. Challenge: level impossible."



__thejoythief__ 44m

Whelp... the autism advocates who talk about justice sensitivity but are staying silent rn 👀

blackspectrumscholar now

Like they stayed silent about Tigray, Congo, and other injustices experienced largely by racialized people from the global majority.

Figure 2: A second screenshot depicts @__thejoythief__: "Whelp… the autism advocates who talk about justice sensitivity but are staying silent rn;" @blackspectrumscholar replies, "Like they stayed silent about Tigray, Congo, and other injustices experienced largely by racialized people from the global majority."

My swift immersion into both adult and parenting-oriented neurodiversity culture felt like I was watching an accelerated emergence of the mainstream, homonormative LGBT movement happen in real time. In her widely cited theory of homonormativity, Lisa Duggan (2003) described a new gay politics that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising … a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50). Indeed, despite the ableist, anti-vaxxer elements of the Trump regime that wish to "cure" autism, a normative autistic and/or neurodivergent subject—sometimes queer, always white—has emerged as a legible, coherent, rights-bearing subject. Their horizon is visibility, legibility, and individual accommodation; their single-issue is neurodiversity.

For the last twenty years, I have studied state cooptation, neutralization, absorption, accommodation, and/or capture of social movements as a tool of neoliberal governmentality. (Yes, this was a thread of my 2004 undergraduate thesis; one could call it a special interest). In some ways, I see the "neurodiversity movement" as it is presently articulated relying on some of the most vexing aspects of the neoliberal weaponization of identity and identity politics. Because of this, engagement with women and queer of color theorizations of identity politics, difference, and neoliberal cooptation is essential. Not in an "I know Audre Lorde quotes" way, but in a rigorous engagement with a canon of political thought around multiplicity, heterogeneity, and difference, from the "Combahee River Collective Statement (2017 [1977])" and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) to contemporary queer of color disability scholars including Jina Kim (2025) and Sami Schalk (2022).

For these thinkers, it is not so much about whether people "identify" as queer or disabled. It is about relations of power. It is about a politics. Cathy Cohen's foundational 1997 essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?", asks us to destabilize if not abandon the queer/straight binary that would position the welfare queen as a privileged sexual subject outside the purview of queer politics. Rather, interrogating relationships to normativity invites new and different analytical pathways and activist practices. Building on this intellectual genealogy, Kim's theory of disability, "might be more accurately described as an analytic of dis-/enablement" (6). Relying deeply on relational and comparative frameworks developed in the fields of queer of color critique and critical ethnic studies (Cacho 2012; Ferguson and Hong 2011; Reddy 2011), I ask what a shift from a focus on neurodivergent identity to a materialist critique of neuronormativity as a system that is imbedded in and productive of other forms of subjugation might engender.

While this essay is not principally interested in charting academic field formations, the emergence of critical neurodiversity studies gestures to the possibility of new and different modes of analysis from within fields long dominated by unremarked upon whiteness and dominant forms of knowledge production. Vishnu KK Nair, Warda Farah, and Mildred Boveda (2024) intervene by asking "Is neurodiversity a Global Northern White paradigm?" calling for a "more nuanced understanding of neurodiversity that is situated at the intersection of racism, ableism, White supremacy, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and other marginalizing forces (2)." While they importantly call for the recognition of subaltern, Indigenous, racialized, and otherwise marginalized knowledges and epistemologies of neurological difference in humans, I am less concerned with a recuperation of such diversity than with the relations of power that produce neuronormativity. Put another way, I am not so much invested in proving actually-occurring neurodiversity within and across diverse communities and geographies, but rather the relations of power that produce this interpretive framework in the first place. It is certainly critical for communities to narrate their own culturally specific knowledges. At the same time, I don't think the field's affirmation or inclusion of those knowledges will remedy the authors' salient critiques of it. For example, without being contextualized in struggles for Indigenous sovereignty, the circulation and celebration of the Te Reo Māori word for autism, Takiwātanga, meaning "in his or her own time and space," by non-Indigenous autistics risks normalizing colonial relations of power by affirming settler possession of Indigenous lands and epistemologies (Moreton-Robinson 2025).

Rather than asking *if* neurodiversity is a white, Global North framework, I ask *how* neuronormativity is embedded in entanglements of ableism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy that have emerged through centuries of conquest, colonialism, slavery, and the development of racial capitalism. In *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism*, Robert Chapman (2023) offers a historical analysis of the pathology paradigm fueled by shifting "cognitive needs of capital" (17), locating post-Fordism as a mass disabling event (66). Recognizing the limitations of a neurodiversity movement that has operated largely within a liberal framework, they call for a "Neurodivergent Marxism," requiring structural change "in ways that are usually left unclarified in existing neurodiversity theory" (14). As I understand it, however, this compelling framework leaves neurodivergent identity intact as a cogent, legible, self-evident category of analysis despite its clear historical production. How might engagement with the relational analyses described above productively unmoor this category altogether? Here, I am thinking with Jasbir K. Puar's (2017) work on debility as a "needed disruption…of the category of disability and as a triangulation of the ability/disability binary, noting that while some bodies might not be recognized as or identify disabled, they may well be debilitated, in part by being foreclosed access to legibility and resources as disabled" (xv).

Ayesha Khan, a scientist, abolitionist organizer, and writer has called for abolishing the neurotypical/neurodivergent binary, emphasizing its entrenchment in Western and Global North frameworks, ontologies, and epistemologies. Much like queer "coming out" narratives or investments in visibility/legibility are mired in white, Western teleological narratives of progress, Khan (2022) writes, "Many collectivist cultures from the Global South do not emphasize unique individual identifiers or labels…What about Black, Brown, Indigenous communities who don't align with neoliberal, western cultures that center individual identity labels? (n.d.)" I share this concern. I also think the neurotypical/neurodivergent binary is simply unhelpful, even in a U.S. context. While I have certainly bitched about painfully neurotypical individuals, this binary is insufficient for apprehending how neuronormativity works and reinforces narratives that position "neurodivergent" people as unique, exceptional, and/or evenly oppressed—the "world wasn't built for us"— and "neurotypical" people as invariably privileged.

As with the mainstreaming and commercialization of queerness, there is a market that capitalizes on and reproduces the legibility of the white, privileged autistic. I will always remember the straight white autistic mom influencer lamenting how challenging it is to fly with her kids. They'd gone on vacation to an unnamed tropical destination, likely very far away from their home in mid-winter Canada. She was feeling resentful that other families didn't have to deal with the additional stress of flying with autistic kids. A challenge indeed. It was January 2025, 15 months into the genocidal campaign of elimination in Gaza and a month into the ascendency of the Trump regime. I just kept thinking, *bitch, read the fucking room*. A month later, she announced a book deal. Again, building on queer of color critiques of inclusion, it is not just that such figures become the *most visible*, it is that, in the words of Puar, "the biopolitical management of disability entails that the visibility and social acceptance of disability rely on and engender the obfuscation and in fact deeper proliferation of debility" (xvi).

Though analogies can be fraught, moments like these remind me of the ways whiteness and queerness have been sutured in the interest of capital. Or the ways the category of woman has been violently inhabited by whiteness, prompting foundational Black feminist texts, from Frances M. Beal's 1969 pamphlet, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," to the 1982 collection, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. So, how did all the autistics become white? While we can locate an obvious answer in the disparities in diagnosis, this must be situated within broader histories of empire, colonialism, ableism, and eugenics out of which psychiatry and the DSM emerge. Just as the asylum emerged in 15th Century Britain alongside capitalism and colonialism (Frazer-Carroll 2023), I am interested in the historical and political economic context that prefigured autism as a diagnosis reserved primarily for white boys who brought shame to their wealthy families. As Robert Chapman has noted, it was in part due to eugenicist gender norms promulgated by the Nazi regime that first "allowed the autism spectrum to manifest as a distinct way of being" (41). I suspect there is much historical work to be done on the racialized logics of the diagnosis, Nazi eugenics embedded in centuries of pseudo-scientific racial knowledge developed through slavery and colonialism.

In conversations with a Black queer parent and fellow late-realized AuDHDer, we have named that at many other times in recent history, certainly in the United States, the normal, expected response to "kids like ours"—defiant, noncompliant, difficult—would have been beating them into submission or institutionalizing them. Of course, many Black and Indigenous children in North America have been subjected to this treatment, and worse, regardless of disability. Our children, mine white and female-assigned, hers Black and male-assigned, both autistic, "aggressive," and unruly, do and will have disparate experiences of neuronormativity as a system developed and enforced in the interests of racial capitalism. This does not mean we abandon neurodivergent-affirming parenting frameworks, but these are some of the complexities that neurodivergent communities and the "neurodiversity movement" must grapple with beyond empty nods to intersectionality.

In March 2024, Ryan Gainer, a Black autistic child, was murdered by the police in San Bernadino, California. Victor Perez, an autistic Latino child with cerebral palsy, was murdered by the police in Idaho in April of 2025. I want a heterogeneity of autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled cultures, communities, and movements that fight for them. Though neuro-affirming frameworks critically dislodge discourses of autism from the medicalized, eugenicist, pathologizing context in which they emerged, we must be vigilant to the ways children and young people are being sorted for accommodations versus criminalization along the axis of race and especially Blackness. What might emerge if the "neurodiversity movement" understood that police and prisons are some of the deadliest enforcers of neuronormativity, even if white people are not its primary targets?

Between Sacrifice and Accommodation

I have thought a lot about the meaning of sacrifice over the last two years. Being in deepened relationship to Palestinian organizers and witnessing the sumud (steadfastness) of the Palestinian people in the face of Israel's intensified genocidal onslaught has changed me and my relationship to sacrifice. Palestinians are in the fight of their people's lives. They keep going because that is the only reasonable response to annihilation. Self-preservation is not a superior ontological position. Sacrifice can be noble. Martyrdom is noble. Martyrdom is not an appropriate metaphor for pushing oneself past one's limits.

Can we heed the lessons of both slowing down and "dropping demands," as is posited by autistic advocates, and of sacrifice and steadfastness? Mainstream social justice, disability, and neurodivergent cultures of "self-care" warn against the dangers of overextending oneself and of "burnout," shaming or stigmatizing sacrifice. While this is often (though not always) a response to capitalism—"your worth is more than your productivity"—I want to believe that sacrifice and accommodation are not incommensurate. Autism is disabling for me and for my child. Sometimes, I don't have a choice but to shift my commitments. Our disabled family reached a limit after pushing for 18 months with no childcare. But I will never regret giving everything I had. And have.


Figure 3: March 2024 memorial for Ryan Gainer in Oakland, CA, organized by the Anti-Police Terror Project. Photograph by the author. Color photograph of a public memorial for Ryan Gainer. A framed photograph of Ryan Gainer, a Black teen is propped up on the cement in front of Lake Merritt in Oakland, CA. It is surrounded by colorful flowers arranged in a circular formation on the cement, behind which two tables are covered with colorful tablecloths and several vases of flowers. A sign lying flat on the ground reads "Black Autistic Lives Matter." The sky above is cloudy and bluish gray.

In the beginning of the Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza when everyone was being asked to use whatever platform they had to speak out about the genocide, numerous white autistic adult content creators I followed said they didn't address "world politics," opined about low employment rates among autistic people and the risks of speaking up, or the intolerable sensory experiences of protests. *It was just too overwhelming* or simply inaccessible for autistic people to show up for Palestine. Or it was ableist to expect them to. I call bullshit. There were and are notable exceptions, including Jersey Noah and Devon Price, white trans autistics who encouraged other white disabled people to get their shit together. At a march for Palestine last year, I saw an Arab elder, quite frail and likely in his 90s, slowly marching down the street in San Francisco in grey slippers in the rain. He took baby steps, balancing on the arm of an adult woman, the other hand raised in protest. He smiled. While I wish no one the cruelty of ableism, life is not soft, comfortable, or easeful. Fighting fascism and authoritarianism is grueling and dangerous, whether from the streets or from one's bed. Pushing oneself to the brink to protest a genocide is a reasonable choice to make, whether disabled or not. I am not asking anyone to disavow their own needs or push themselves beyond what is possible, but I am asking all of us—autistic and otherwise—to assess our limits and capacities given what is at stake, which is to say everything; a queer praxis for meeting this political moment, between accommodation and sacrifice.

I have not forced my disabled child to go to actions. But I am not going to use her as an excuse to not go when I can. Sometime in 2024, after my partner and I had been planning and participating in frequent protests and direct actions for a year, our child willingly came to a protest. We brought her wagon on public transportation, packed snacks, iPad, and noise cancelling headphones. We made a lengthy stop at a sunglasses vendor at San Francisco's civic center where she tried on several pairs before landing on a blue plastic pair. We approached the growing, noisy crowd gathered in front of City Hall, wrapping around the mass of people to stand in the shade behind the stage and speakers. Once the march started, we made it one block. It was too loud, too overstimulating, too overwhelming. We peeled off to go to a nearby playground and then patiently accompanied Sky up and down the escalator leading to the train tracks below probably a dozen times. But we made it a block. Most of the time this isn't possible.

Participating in organizing has never been easy for me. But my AuDHD realization has helped explain some of why. The complex, forever-changing interpersonal and relational dynamics; the shifting group cultures and norms; the constant change in plans or expectations; the rapid pace; the unspoken rules and hierarchies; the opaque insider knowledge, due both to legitimate security concerns and to cliquish behavior—but all of this is largely understandable given the urgency and the repression. I am grateful to learn about neurodivergence, including my own. I am glad to be autistic, despite my sometimes-ambivalent relationship to the label. I think and feel deeply. I recognize patterns and draw connections that help me see the world for what it is. Seeing it all anew through the lens of neuronormativity has deepened this understanding of the world and challenged long-held beliefs. But a neurodiversity movement that is silent in the face of genocide and espouses individual identity formation and accommodation above all else will benefit only the most privileged among us, and marginally so. I want to build alliances that change material conditions that free us all and know that contending with intimate and collective crises simultaneously will become an increasingly important skill in the years to come.

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