# BLACK DISABILITY AFF

## AT: Afropess

### AT: Social death

#### Disabled, racial bodies have been derealized, an ontological limbo manifested in an infinite paranoia unexplainable with their broader ontological claims

Omar **Zahzah 20** [A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature, Undercover and Hyper-Visible: Security Poetics and Pacification Prosaics in African American and Arab American Literature, UCLA, 2020, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2404384586?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=trueM>, -ekh-]

Judith Butler’s notion of derealization may very well have become one of the premier analytics for considering the epistemological ravages performed by the so-called “War on ‘Terror’” upon countless racialized bodies and collectives (this is, of course, contemporaneous to the physical ravages of bombs, bullets, metal cages and attendant tortures). Butler qualifies the status afforded the Muslim “Other,” the enemy of the interminable “War on ‘Terror,” as a kind of ontological limbo, one fully admitted neither to life nor death:

If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never “were,” and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness… The derealization of the “Other” means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. (Precarious Life 33-4)

Michael Malek Najjar’s gloss of Butler’s concept cleanly emphasizes how the notion of “spectrality” ensures the endlessness of both the paranoia of and against the Arab subject as well as the interminability of the so-called “war” waged against the “terror” with which they are both suddenly and transcendentally coupled (152). In fact, this “war” is not only interminable; Najjar’s resuscitation of Butler’s 2004 framework also implies that, in a very real sense, the beginning of this “war” in earnest is inevitably deferred, for: “the derealization of the Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (Butler 33-4), an insight of Butler’s that Najjar expands to surmise that “Interminable spectrality is a state where subjects are forced into a liminal position where they are not allowed to live freely and instead become victims of an infinite paranoia… they are left in a state where they cannot be freed until the socalled “war on terror” is realized” (ibid, emphasis mine).

This understanding of the “war on ‘terror’” as a state offensive that is simultaneously endless and also only ever about to begin couples a framework for racial and epistemological precarity with paradoxical temporal inflections. That this split temporality is rife with strategic benefit is patently obvious via the similarly contradictory ensemble of legal neologisms its perpetuation has generated (e.g., enemy combatant, a construct endemic to the timeless time of the “war on ‘terror’” that simultaneously marshals the full, exceptional weight of the Law against an implicated subject that is inoculated against any of its typical precautions). With no fixed end—or beginning—locatable, the “war on ‘terror’s’” pacification prosaics enact their violence through a chronological assault that exceeds the presumed finality of notions such as Fukuyama’s “end of history”75 and Jameson’s cultural “schizophrenia.”76

The players in this killing farce, then, are not only geopolitics, nor racial politics, and not even these combined with epistemological politics alone. For the stage is also haunted by a politics of time, a chronopolitics that constellates the workings of each of these components with fatal precision and nimble contingency.77 I argue that, just as the pacification prosaics endemic to the “war on ‘terror’” are effectuated via a politics of time, so too do security poetics likewise utilize their own textual politics of time as a means of staging their dissent. But there is a crucial distinction: while the “war on ‘terror’s” pacification prosaics are assembled around tropes of a single Time, a mono-Time, resistant security poetics upend this para-Time via a temporal pluralization that is irreducible in its complexity. What follows will therefore be an attempt to illuminate the nature and significance of the chronopolitics found within three particular texts: two plays by Ismail Khalidi—Truth Serum Blues (2005) and Dead Are My People (2018, and still in process) and a novel by Mohja Kahf, The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006). I find it important to note that the choice of texts is simultaneously intentional and arbitrary, by which I mean that any number of texts with similar topical concerns might have worked for the purposes of this analysis. And yet, analytical intentionality is cohered through the texts’ temporal orientations (by which I refer to the date of publication for Kahf’s novel and Khalidi’s earlier play, and the historical setting of Khalidi’s most recent theatrical work). On this point, I find it both conceptually humorous and intellectually perfect that Khalidi slightly attempted to dissuade me from using Truth Serum Blues, his first play, within my dissertation because, as he wrote in an email, “it is nearly fifteen years old.” After all, what is a decade or more when hegemonic registers continue to police and restrict collective access to time and history?

Here (or now, if you will), it is necessary to sketch out some important distinctions between time and history, though the two are certainly interrelated. Along with “events,” time is conventionally understood as a unit of history, with the latter accommodating various strategies of explicit reflexivity regarding the passage of time and the transpiring—and subsequent schematization—of variously significant occurrences. Hayden White grasped as much when he argued that historiography is perceived as approaching the quality of “reality” the more it reveals the trait of “narrativity,”78 that history is considered history proper only insofar as it reveals the sequential ordering of events over a given period into the form of a story. The implications of this argument are, of course, a blow to the “objective” character of history. If history is a story, or series of stories in form rather than in essence, other stories—or “Other” stories—can be told over, above, in between, and in place of hegemonic (hi)stories.

Of course, history entails more of a sense of entanglement than time. It is for this reason, as Eagleton notes, that it is by no means incidental that Heidegger titled his study Being and Time rather than Being and History:

My own personal history is authentically meaningful when I accept responsibility for my own existence, seize my own future possibilities and live in enduring awareness of my own future death. This may or may not be true, but it does not seem to have any immediate relevance to how I live ‘historically’ in the sense of being bound up with particular individuals, actual social relations and concrete institutions… ‘True’ history for Heidegger is an inward, ‘authentic’ or ‘existential’ history—a mastering of dread and nothingness, a resoluteness towards death, a ‘gathering in’ of my powers—which operates in effect as a substitute for history in its more common and practical senses. As… Georg Lukács put it, Heidegger’s famous ‘historicity’ is not really distinguishable from ahistoricity. (57)

Yet even as history implies more of a sense of interrelatedness and complicity to others, its narrativation can retain a hegemonic, exclusionary function. C. Riley Snorton describes the implications that race and racialization have for these conversations in building upon the insights of Tavia Nyong’o:

[O]ne might also consider that race is a history of theory that functions to express what is un/thinkable across complex temporalities… history becomes less a program for examining change over time and more an examination in disruptions in linear time. Race, then, becomes a way of thinking history doubly, or of thinking about the history of historicity. (Black on Both Sides 8)

The security poetics employed by writers under analysis in this chapter, then, are under a double-bind: on the one hand, they must challenge the presentist exceptionalism of the “war on ‘terror’s’” pacification prosaics. But in doing so, they must also be careful not to reinscribe hegemonic historical narritivations that evade “disruptions in linear time.” Rather, their challenges must simultaneously dismantle artificial temporal exceptions and overly-exclusive conceptions of temporality and history.

The preceding comments suggest how the “war on ‘terror’” insinuates a perpetual present vis-à-vis derealization. Perhaps naturally enough, if a perpetual present is what is at issue, the solution might seem to be a historicization of this perpetual present. Yet a few further comments on the chronopolitics of both the “war on ‘terror’” as well as dissenting literatures will help clarify why this would be an ultimately misguided endeavor, according to the terms of this analysis.

The “war on ‘terror’” edifies its perpetual present via several temporal technologies, the first of which I am presently terming “terrorist exceptionalization.” Simply put, this refers to the phenomenon by which the currently racialized figure of the “terrorist” is imbued with a transhistorical omniscience, conscripted as an “enemy combatant” of fearsome existential proportions and the subsequent ability to upend not only individual (white, “freedom loving”/“dutiful citizen”) life, but also to rend the very fabric of hegemonic Western democratic “enlightened” civilization beyond repair. A symptomatic reading of the current terms of presentist racial-imperial anxiety make these dimensions evident enough. But equally as important as the current adumbrations of terrorist exceptionalization is a consideration of the forms it has taken in the past. For example, though the so-called “Islamic fundamentalist” is inextricable from the category of “terrorist” today, 19th century American racial anxieties told a far different story, one of Eastern Europeans with dynamite ever-ready to obliterate key sites of capitalist production. For this reason, Jeffory Clymer argues, racialized anxieties about “terrorism” are indissociable from paranoid vigilance surrounding the integrity of the capitalist system (America’s Culture of Terrorism 13). Furthermore, even following intense government scrutiny of Arab- and Arab American activism and uprising during the Cold War era, Sarah Gualtieri importantly reminds us that Arab American activists such as the members of the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) were accused of being “godless communists” for their championing of the Palestinian freedom struggle, while today they would be far more likely to be condemned as “Muslim terrorists” (Between Arab and White 173). The “terrorist,” then, is not and never has been transhistorically coherent, but rather contingently overdetermined by capitalist, geopolitical and racial fixations and anxieties.

Related to terrorist exceptionalization is another cultural technology of the “war on ‘terror’” that I refer to as “Muslim Exceptionalization.” Here I refer to the “war on ‘terror’s’” current occlusion of Muslim identity that historically preceded post WWII Arab immigration, spanning all the way back to Antebellum Muslim slave identity as well as the activism of organizations such as the Nation of Islam during the Black Power movement. The negative idealization of the “terrorist” as ultimately Arab, even while it does not exculpate Black bodies from ongoing interpellation into the framework of “terrorism,”79 nevertheless symbolically levels important histories of resistance, thereby fracturing the capacity for dissenting collectivities to more naturally gravitate towards mutual uplift and joint struggle.80

The final cultural technology of relevance for this investigation is what I am terming “securitization’s disciplinary tautology.” This concept is intended to capture the more individualized leveling of past and present that occurs when the charge of “terrorism” is deployed against a suspect. By way of a strategic, syntactical inversion, the objectified subject of such a charge is suddenly deprived of any narrational or temporal recourse for exculpation. Any and all responses to the charge merely confirm its elastic accuracy. For, according to this disciplinary tautology: one already always-was a “terrorist” because one is accused. One is accused because one already always-was a “terrorist.”

I opt for the term disfiguring in place of historicizing to refer to these text’s resistance to the “war on ‘terror’s” chronopolitics because to claim these texts “historicize” would be to imply one single, coherent notion of time and history, a construct these texts in fact elude and destabilize as part of their imaginative insurgency. Disfiguring simultaneously both the possibility of “disfigurement”—of scarring the illusionary veneer of the perpetual present to reveal glimpses of the time-worlds surging beneath—as well as “figuring,” meaning a textual representation of the “war on ‘terror’s” temporal assaults.

## AT: Cap K

### Perm

#### Perm – Cripistemologies create spaces to critique neoliberal governance while ignoring the coercion of state politics the alt alone doesn’t resolve

Jess **Whatcott 21** [Crip Collectivity Beyond Neoliberalism in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower, Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present, Issue 10.1 (Spring 2021), <https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/>, -ekh-]

In the 2013 special issue of the Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies, Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer identify cripistemologies as forms of “prohibited knowledge” that emerge out of the experience of disability.[10](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-10) Johnson and McRuer’s essay contributed to ushering in a critical form of disability studies, joining other work such as earlier issues of Lateral that featured Julie Avril Minich, Jina B. Kim, and Sami Schalk.[11](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-11) Johnson and McRuer’s contribution to this conversation was to coin “cripistemology,” as a way of dismantling the expectation of knowledge from disability “experts,” and prioritizing instead the knowledges of those whose bodyminds cannot or will not be cured into normativity. Johnson and McRuer are insistent on taking a capacious view of what experiencing disability means, and consequently who is capable of producing knowledge through cripistemological methods; Johnson and McRuer include, importantly, the knowledge gained from being in relation with another who has been disabled.

Decentering the disability expert explodes the conventional disability studies canon. In a section called “Sensational Crips,” Johnson and McRuer ground their theory in women of color feminisms and queer theory.[12](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-12) What distinguishes expertise on disability (conventional disability studies) from their conceptualization of cripistemology (critical disability studies), is this specific genealogy that insists on reading disability in and through imbrications with gender, sexuality, class, and race. For example, Jina B. Kim imagines a “crip-of-color critique” that links together women of color feminist texts that explore themes of chronic illness (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa), with recent disability scholarship that foregrounds race (Jasbir Puar, Therí Pickens), through a coalitional framework of queer of color critique (Cathy Cohen, Rodrick Ferguson).[13](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-13) In the present study, I pick up on the radical political economy thread within critical disability studies that also marks it as a distinct formation. Just as feminist of color and queer of color theory is grounded in Marxist political economy, Johnson and McRuer’s conceptualization indicates that critical disability studies offer a unique critique of formations of capitalism, and specifically the disabling conditions of precarity under neoliberalism.[14](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-14)

Crips and mad people offer knowledge that emanates from their position as a “surplus” class whose presence threatens the political and economic order.[15](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-15) As other scholars have elaborated, society has developed the ideology, since at least the end of the nineteenth century, that bodyminds that carry disease, illness, and impairment are a “menace.”[16](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-16) This ideology, that I would label as eugenics, promises a future of human perfection through scientifically guided interventions that dispose of diseased, ill, and impaired bodyminds. During the so-called eugenics era of the 1890s to 1940s, state and federal policies were implemented in the name of saving the human race and western civilization from rapid degeneration caused by the reproduction of those from so-called defective bloodlines.[17](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-17) Eugenics policies, including institutionalization, sterilization, restrictive immigration, and deportation, articulated disabled and mad bodyminds as crises that threatened the imagined future of human perfection.[18](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-18) However, these policies fluctuated between contradictory impulses. On the one side, the crisis of tainted bloodlines called for the state-sanctioned neglect and premature death of those inside eugenics institutions, those whose bodyminds could not be made to conform to normative standards of health. On the other side, paradoxically, the state also promised to create perfect human health through experimental treatments, rehabilitation programs, and cures, including reproductive sterilization on the very same bodies that were neglected and exposed to death.[19](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-19)

The surplus class of disabled and mad bodyminds constructed in the eugenics era programs was gendered and racialized.[20](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-20) The sociotechnical imaginary of eugenics conjured a specifically “female” threat, relying for justification on fears of unruly people with uteruses  whose reproductive capacity required containment. Eugenics programs had specific effects on people with uteruses  including longer recovery from sterilization surgeries like the salpingectomy. The threat of unfit reproduction was grounded in white supremacist fears of race suicide, and eugenics programs capitalized on long-standing legal regimes (including slavery and colonialism) that deny racialized gendered people bodily autonomy.[21](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-21)

When outright eugenics became outmoded following World War II and the stalling of the Great Society in the United States, new modes of governance were introduced that continued to draw on the eugenicist imaginary. These new modes of governance, including policies of privatization, deregulation, and market liberalization, exploded into what Mia Mingus, Eli Clare, and others call “the medical industrial complex.”[22](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-22) In the medical industrial complex, billions of dollars are funneled into the discovery of new diseases and impairments, while pharmaceutical and technological innovations are promised that can rid society of disease and impairment “once and for all.” As an outcome of neoliberalism, the medical industrial complex continued the eugenicist project of locating crisis within disabled and mad bodyminds, and again promised social health could be achieved by curing disease and disability. This theorization of the medical industrial complex maps onto what political theorist Giorgio Agamben names the “state of exception” as a mode of liberal governance.[23](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-23) According to Agamben, the temporality of neoliberalism justifies the permanently temporary suspension of civil liberties. Similarly, the medical industrial complex’s rhetoric of crisis and recovery justifies the curtailment of bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom for populations including mad and disabled people, poor and racialized women, and bodyminds with diverse genders.

However, despite the rehabilitative promise, neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization are implicated in creating the very conditions of precarity that exacerbate illness, impairment, and mental insecurity. Over the last three decades of the twentieth century, organized government divestment from urban and rural communities that were segregated by race and class from white suburbs left communities of color and poor communities to rely on themselves for access to education, food, and security. The already flimsy social safety net was systematically dismantled through the end of the twentieth century through privatization and disinvestment. At the same time, growing wealth inequality ground down the middle class by pushing all but the super-rich into competition for scarce resources. It was in this context that Butler wrote Parable of the Sower, fictionalizing her portrayal of a multiracial neighborhood forced into extreme self-reliance. The situation has only worsened in the twenty-first century, as the economy rapidly concentrates jobs in low-paying service and gig industries.

These neoliberal governance policies have a particular impact on disabled and mad people, particularly those who are also racialized and gendered. The process of closing or reducing the size of state psychiatric hospitals and institutions for people classified as intellectually/developmentally disabled beginning the 1960s—known as deinstitutionalization—was one of the first acts of privatization in the neoliberal model in the US. Subsequently, the US has created a bifurcated neoliberal system where the minority, typically white and wealthy, disabled people receive care only through private medical insurance or family members, while many more disabled and mad people of color have been criminalized and warehoused in jails and prisons. Even when public funds are invested in care, the neoliberal state has repeatedly refused to invest in treatments and services that would keep people alive, well, and out of institutions, funneling public money into private industries like nursing homes and to the carceral system rather than directly to sick, disabled, and mad people, or to the programs we want, such as in home support.[24](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-24) Preventable deaths of high-profile disability activists, such as Carrie Ann Lucas, attest to the tragic consequences of neoliberal governance, which is focused more on cutting costs than supporting life.[25](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-25) How many other lives have been cut short due to the combination of conjured crisis, emphasis on cure, organized neglect, and the displacement of blame onto disabled and mad bodyminds?

In addition to what has now become almost routine, systematic, premature death, neoliberalism has increased vulnerability to disaster, especially in the face of capitalism-induced rapid climate change. From supercharged hurricanes to wildfires entering urban spaces, mass death and injury are the consequence, and disabled and mad bodyminds are at increased risk.[26](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-26) As these disasters show, government aid for communities made vulnerable to disasters through neoliberal economic policy is not a realistic expectation. The rolling power shut-offs orchestrated by Pacific Gas & Electric company in northern California in the name of preventing wildfires illustrate that neither local or state governments, nor the private companies granted authority over critical infrastructure, take any responsibility for ensuring the safety of disabled and chronically ill people.[27](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-27) Further, neoliberal governance absolves the state from blame, pointing the finger on disabled bodyminds ourselves for any suffering and premature death that results from conditions of precarity.

As “situated knowledge” growing out of the experience of precarity, cripistemologies expose how neoliberal governance simultaneously creates and deflects responsibility for disabling conditions.[28](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-28) The perspectives of racialized and gendered disabled bodyminds surviving precarity offers distinctive analysis of how the twin violences of cure and neglect operate under neoliberal governance. When cripistemological texts shift attention from the “broken” bodymind to the disabling structure of neoliberalism, they are capable of undermining the urgency within which it is claimed that crises can be solved by state-led, scientifically driven efforts of cure. Resisting the temptation to counter premature death with calls for increased and expanded state interventions, cripistemologies are positioned to theorize the routes to survival and flourishing within and against neoliberalism. Cripistemologies are forms of what Chela Sandoval names as “oppositional knowledges” that can counter the eugenicist sociotechnical imaginaries of the neoliberal state.[29](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-29)

### Ext- aff solves + turn

#### We create models of crip-collectives, anti-neoliberal spaces that reject eugenicist impulses their movements inevitably collapse into

Jess **Whatcott 21** [Crip Collectivity Beyond Neoliberalism in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower, Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present, Issue 10.1 (Spring 2021), <https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/>, -ekh-]

Octavia Butler’s novel Parable of the Sower exemplifies a cripistemological critique of neoliberal governance. Butler has a created a Black femme protagonist with a disabling impairment. Devalued under the terms of neoliberalism due to her impairment, racial status, and gender assignment, this protagonist gains specific knowledge about how to survive disabling precarity. Further, the character critiques the solutions for crisis proffered by neoliberal governance—namely, privatization and deregulation that facilitates medical industrial cure. In Parable, the Black feminist cripistemologist protagonist orchestrates the emergence of a collective that offers a powerful alternative to reliance on the eugenicist solutions of the neoliberal state.

Parable follows Lauren Oya Olamina, a teenager living with her family in a walled-off community near Los Angeles in the year 2024. Outside of the neighborhood walls awaits starvation, rape, sexual exploitation, addiction, and murder. Olamina (as she was called by Butler) lives in a neighborhood that has banded together to survive by rigging up security systems, growing food, collecting water, schooling children, and worshipping together at a makeshift church. When Olamina’s family is murdered and the neighborhood burned down, she forges a new destiny. She creates a multiracial chosen family that she encourages to walk from Los Angeles to the far northern part of California, with the promise of building a more intentional community on more secluded land.

Olamina has a fictional impairment known as hyperempathy syndrome, which causes her to physically feel the pain or pleasure of any person she can see. Throughout the novel, she experiences the gunshot wounds, sexual violence, and starvation of others she encounters. Layered on top of Olamina’s hyperempathy syndrome are symptoms of what might be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), including symptoms of hypervigilance and insomnia. However, in her context, some of these PTSD symptoms are practical assets. Entering debates about whether Olamina’s hyperempathy is a gift or an impairment, Sami Schalk reframes the syndrome as a disability given the specific social, political, and economic context of Olamina’s life.[30](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-30) As Schalk points out, even the ability to share pleasure becomes twisted in the dystopic future that Butler created for Olamina. Olamina suffers from—and, in several terrifying instances, is completely debilitated by—her nervous system’s response to witnessing both pain and pleasure.

One reading of the novel might argue that it is a story about crisis, and consequently, that it inhabits the same temporality as neoliberal governance. Indeed, Butler intended for the novel to depict the interlocking crises of the neoliberal present. Butler sought to imagine where “our current behaviors and unintended problems might take us,” honing in on patterns in the United States of extreme wealth inequality, the abjection of low-wage and surplus workers, carceral expansion, disinvestment in social resources, and the effects of human-caused climate change.[31](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-31) Of interest to the present essay are Butler’s additional concerns about pharmaceutical drug abuse and declining access to life-saving medical treatments. Both trends are effects of the neoliberal medical industrial complex that prioritizes profit over life and health—and the latter trend is a specific crisis for Black women.

Olamina’s impairment, for example, is caused by her mother’s abuse during pregnancy of a fictional drug called Paracetco, so-called “Einstein powder.”[32](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-32) Mirroring current real-life conditions facing pregnant Black people, in the novel such pharmaceuticals are apparently the only form of medical care readily accessible, while other needs suffer, including maternal health. This racialized and gendered neoliberal contradiction plays out in the text when, after apparently causing hyperempathy syndrome in her child due to drug use, Olamina’s mother dies during childbirth. In 1993, when Parable was published, the number of pregnancy-related deaths had already jumped to 11.1 per 100,000 live births from a low of 7.2 in 1987; the number steadily climbed to 17.3 in 2017.[33](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-33) Olamina’s mother’s death represents the specifically racialized dimension of this problem, as non-Hispanic Black women experienced a pregnancy-related mortality rate that was almost three times that of non-Hispanic white women between the years of 2014 and 2017. A participatory research justice study of Black women’s maternal health concluded that numerous barriers have been erected that prevent Black women from accessing prenatal care, including “inadequate health insurance coverage,” “distrust of and poor treatment by prenatal care providers,” “structural inequities” that produce stress that contribute to poor health outcomes, and “institutional budget constraints” that prevent providers from offering adequate care.[34](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-34) Each of these trends, I argue, can be directly attributed to the ramped up neoliberalization of medical care in the United States over the past thirty years.

Common responses to these disabling conditions are either to cling to the neoliberal promise of recovery through more privatization and deregulation leading to market solutions, or to demand a return of government investment in the social safety net. Parable rejects both the neoliberal and liberal impulses, enacting a cripistemologically grounded critique that emphatically resists the assumption that recovery will come through either more advanced capitalism or state interventions. In the case of market solutions, Butler imagines the return of an indentured servitude in a kind of company town, where able-bodied individuals forfeit their freedom to the corporation in exchange for shelter, food, and protection from outside violence. In this extreme version of privatization, it is as if the state does not exist. Consequently, all human value is reduced to the ability to work, a status that Olamina recognizes as excluding disabled bodyminds like hers.

Butler also reminds us that under neoliberalism, the state is incentivized and disciplined into accelerating its collusion with capital, producing racialized, gendered, and disabled life as “surplus” through routine forms of governance.[35](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-35) Early in the novel, Butler depicts the election of Charles Morpeth Donner as President of the United States. Exemplifying neoliberal logic by insisting on operating the government like a business, Donner’s proposal for restoring the economy and “putting people back to work” is to dismantle labor protections and environmental regulations.[36](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-36) Olamina wonders, “And what about those suspended laws? Will it be legal to poison, mutilate, or infect people—as long as you provide them with food, water, and space to die?”[37](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-37) Identifying how the disablement of citizens occurs in the name of economic profit, Olamina exposes the fantasy of recovery to something called normal, organized through the mode of neoliberal governance, as a farce and a form of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism.”[38](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-38)

Yet, exceeding mere critique of the interlocking crises of the neoliberal present, the novel also presents alternative possible futures for those who manage to survive neoliberal catastrophe. One other possible future emerges through collective, community-based emergency planning spearheaded by the visionary foresight of Olamina. Butler’s protagonist anticipates the need to prepare materially, psychically, and spiritually for the coming disaster, challenging her parents and other adults who cling to a restoration of normality. Olamina’s differences from her family and community, differences which include but are not limited to her impairment and her unorthodox spiritual vision, force her to grapple with the inadequacy of the status quo for her survival.

Olamina’s impairment has lent her a pessimistic pragmatism forged through the need to make difficult decisions in order to survive through the bouts of sudden and debilitating pain that her impairment brings. Perhaps it is due to these attributes, gained through impairment, that young Olamina has the ability to push past the fantasy of normalcy in order to forge an alternative plan for survival. While her father and other adults in the community worked to shore up the fences that surround the neighborhood in a desperate bid to maintain the status quo, Olamina secretly assembled an emergency kit, saved cash, and studied edible wild foods. Olamina’s preparations ultimately save her life after the neighborhood is attacked, and she is forced to flee alone on foot. Olamina’s anticipation of the failure of the status quo is cripistemological and serves as a vital model of emergency preparedness for crip collectivities facing neoliberal disasters. This is a form of planning based on the crip of color knowledge that, especially in times of crisis, there may not be any government aid to call upon. Olamina’s example is an invitation to pack emergency kits and make collective disaster evacuation plans; to vision with our communities about mutual aid and self-sufficiency; to learn to grow food, harvest wild food, and make medicine; and to craft ethics and principles that can guide our collective decision-making outside and beyond the state. Although categorized under the genre of speculative fiction or science fiction, the text provides an urgent example for developing practical plans to survive the precarious conditions of the neoliberal present.

Powerfully, the novel moves beyond strategizing for crip survival to imagining what Alison Kafer calls “feminist, queer, crip” futures; futures that have until now largely been absent from eugenicist and neoliberal sociotechnical imaginaries.[39](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-39) Similarly, the Sins Invalid performing arts collective of queer and trans disabled people of color articulates “disability justice” as a demand for more than the mere survival of disabled and mad people.[40](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-40) While critique offers the barest minimum necessary for the survival of those devalued under neoliberalism, disability justice also demands a practice of imagining possible futures where queer and trans disabled and mad people of color can “flourish,” in Sins Invalid collective member’s Patty Berne’s terms.[41](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-41)

Parable imagines possible futures for those who have been disabled and made mad by the precarious conditions of neoliberalism. The novel depicts more than mere crip survival, the story imagines crip flourishing through the emergence of the collective. Once Olamina is forced from her domestic space and left with virtually nothing, she cultivates alternative public arrangements of care and intimacy, building a chosen family and community. Butler provides the following description of this collective emergence:

When Olamina’s birth community is destroyed, she begins to build another. She doesn’t know at first that that’s what she’s doing, and she’s afraid—terrified—of potentially dangerous strangers. But she learns to reach out in spite of her fear, to choose the best people she can find and bring them together. With her acceptance of Earthseed, she relinquishes hope for supernatural help . . . She believes that our only dependable help must come from ourselves and from one another.[42](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-42)

Family and community are brought together through Olamina’s visionary creation of an unorthodox spiritual tradition that she calls Earthseed. Earthseed grows into a multiracial and multigenerational community of people who have been impaired, traumatized, and dispossessed by the catastrophe of neoliberal capitalism and abandoned by the neoliberal state. Together Earthseed as an intentional community defies relegation to tragedy, creating possible futures for themselves through interdependence and mutual aid.

The Earthseed imaginary and the possible futures they create challenge eugenicist strands within neoliberal narratives. As I have discussed, neoliberalism structurally creates disabling conditions through privatization and deregulation, and then continues the eugenicist tradition of displacing responsibility for structural precarity onto surplus disabled and mad bodyminds. The Earthseed community resists this process of disablement, by collectively preparing for changing conditions, building capacity to adapt to changing conditions, and indeed, learning how to “shape” inevitable change. Through her depiction of Earthseed, Butler depicts how building collective crip resilience offers a path for surviving within neoliberalist precarity and creating flourishing futures for those that would otherwise be devalued under the neoliberal status quo.

## AT: Cap good

### Futurity

#### Uniqueness question – neoliberalism is collapsing in on its own problems – that means cripped, mad collectives are necessary

Jess **Whatcott 21** [Crip Collectivity Beyond Neoliberalism in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower, Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present, Issue 10.1 (Spring 2021), <https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/>, -ekh-]

I have argued that as a cripistemological fiction, Octavia Butler’s 1993 novel Parable of the Sower imagines the possibilities for crip flourishing through collective emergence within and against neoliberal precarity. While this parable about crip life beyond the state is generative, I recognize that it is difficult to imagine how to meet the need for modern technologies to keep disabled and mad people alive outside of the market and state models. Currently, the state seems like the best—although not necessarily the only—way to enforce access and to distribute life-saving services and technologies.[43](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-43) It may therefore seem counterintuitive to conclude that a future of crip thriving and flourishing is only possible through a critical perspective of neoliberal modes of state governance. Yet without devoting energies to creating lifesaving services and technologies beyond the state apparatus, disabled and mad people will be stuck in an endless precarious neoliberal loop of crisis, cure, neglect, and scapegoating. The disaster that opens Parable predicts that the neoliberal state is always already imploding under the weight of problems it helped to create, including urban divestment, wealth inequality, and climate change. As the real-life versions of similar disasters have demonstrated, the most acute effect of neoliberal precarity is on racialized communities, on women and gender diverse people within those communities, and on disabled and mad people.[44](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-44) The need to think outside the state is not just speculation—racialized and gendered crip communities are always necessarily creating their own terms of survival and developing communities of flourishing beyond the neoliberal state.[45](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-45)

Such community has emerged among readers of Parable. Readers and scholars of Butler gather digitally, physically, and intellectually, through the creation of such infrastructures as Wildseeds: New Orleans Octavia Butler Emergent Strategy Collective (co-founded by Desiree Evans and Soraya Jean-Louis McElroy), Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute (founded by adrienne maree brown), and the Octavia Butler Legacy Network (founded by Ayana A.H. Jamieson).[46](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-46) In these communities, Butler’s work is treated as a pedagogical, at times sacred, text containing much needed wisdom about survival, healing, and creating a future where communities of color, women, and gender diverse people can flourish. These communities are an example of the kinds of collective emergence that can be scaled up from the imaginary of speculative fiction into the level of the material world.

If, as I join others in insisting, Butler’s fiction is a cripistemological text, then Parable contains knowledge precisely for developing networks of mutual aid through which crip and mad people, specifically, can survive and flourish.[47](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-47) Parable offers a critique of neoliberalism, an essential imaginary of “feminist, queer, crip” “flourishing” (in Kafer’s and Berne’s terms), and, finally, operates as a foundation for real-life community building, as Butler’s readers and scholars connect digitally and in person.[48](https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/crip-collectivity-beyond-neoliberalism-octavia-butler-parable-of-the-sower-whatcott/#fn-9253-48) This last is an example of putting speculative fiction as theory into “practice” in a whole new way. Disabled and mad people in the real world currently face the kinds of rapid climate change catastrophe and abandonment by the neoliberal state presciently imagined by Octavia Butler in Parable of the Sower. Collective crip emergence as praxis, facilitated through the gathering of speculative fiction readers, is an urgent and timely practice for realizing futures for crip and mad people.