

Françoise Vergès
**Capitalocene,
Waste, Race,
and Gender**

01/13

the difference between you and me
is as I bent
over strangers' toilet bowls,
the face that glared back at me
in those sedentary waters
was not my own, but my mother's
brown head floating in a pool
of crystalline whiteness

she taught me how to clean
to get down on my hands and knees
and scrub, not beg
she taught me how to clean,
not live in this body

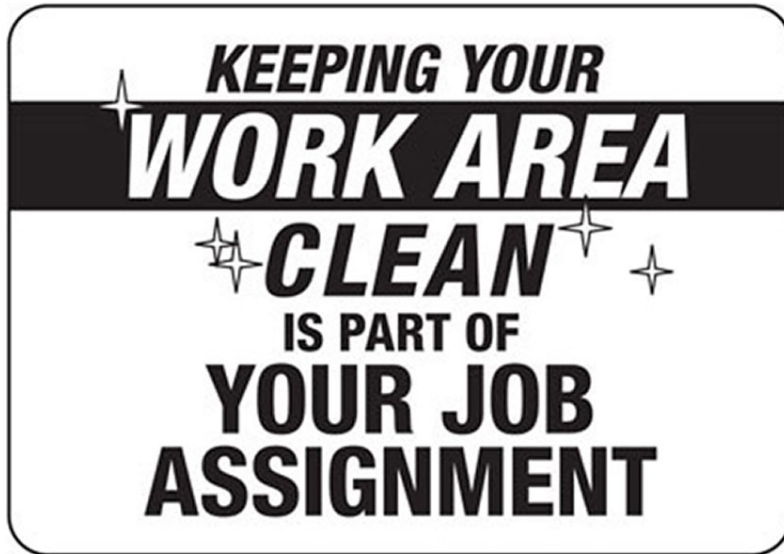
my reflection has always been
once removed.

– Cherrie Moraga, “Half-Breed”¹

**Race, Gender, and Exhaustion as a
Condition of Existence**

Every day, in every urban center of the world, thousands of black and brown women, invisible, are “opening” the city. They clean the spaces necessary for neo-patriarchy, and neoliberal and finance capitalism to function. They are doing dangerous work: they inhale toxic chemical products and push or carry heavy loads. They have usually travelled long hours in the early morning or late at night, and their work is underpaid and considered to be unskilled. They are usually in their forties or fifties. A second group, which shares with the first an intersection of class, race, and gender, go to middle class homes to cook, clean, and take care of children and the elderly, so that those who employ them can go to work in the places that the former group of women have cleaned. Meanwhile, in the same early hours of the morning, in the same big metropolises of the world, we can see women and men running through the streets, rushing to the nearest gym or yoga center. They follow the mandate to maintain healthy and clean bodies of late capitalism; they usually follow their run or workout with a shower, an avocado toast, and a detox drink before heading to their clean offices. Meanwhile, women of color try to find a seat for their exhausted bodies as they return on public transit from cleaning those gyms, banks, insurance offices, newspaper offices, investment companies, or restaurants and preparing meeting rooms for business breakfasts. They doze off as soon as they sit, their fatigue visible to those who care to see it. The working body

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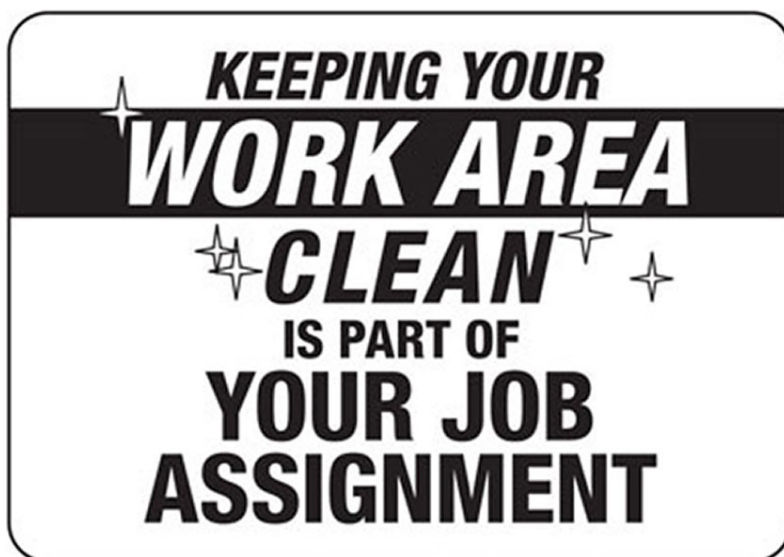
that is made visible is the concern of an ever growing industry dedicated to the cleanliness and healthiness of body and mind, the better to serve racial capitalism. The other working body is made invisible even though it performs a necessary function for the first: to clean spaces in which the “clean” ones circulate, work, eat, sleep, have sex, and perform parenting. But the cleaners’ invisibility is required and naturalized. This has been happening for at least five hundred years, but I want to argue that looking at invisible/visible racialized cleaning/caring labor today, which is driven by the needs of finance capital and new forms of middle class living, brings together multiple intersecting issues that go beyond the division of chores within a couple or the calculation of what domestic labor adds to general growth. What I want to explore here is the dialectical relation between the white male performing body and the racialized female exhausted body; between the visibility of the final product of the cleaning/caring and the invisibility, along with the feminization and racialization (both going hand in hand), of the workers who do this cleaning/caring; between the growing industry of cleaning/caring and conceptions of clean/dirty, the gentrification of cities, and racialized environmental politics. To do so, I will discuss cleaning/caring through a different framework than that of labor (i.e., housework or domestic work).

Without the work of women of color, which is necessary but must remain invisible – literally and in valuative terms – neoliberal and patriarchal capitalism would not function. Upper class, white, neoliberal, and even liberal people must enter these spaces without having to acknowledge, to think of, to imagine, the work of cleaning/caring. It is a global situation and it is primarily white women who act as supervisors and regulators of this labor done by black and migrant/refugee women.

The contradiction and dialectic between the neoliberal bourgeoisie and these exhausted bodies illustrate the connections between neoliberalism, race, and heteropatriarchy. It also uncovers new borders that have been drawn between cleanliness and dirtiness in an age in which concerns are growing for clean air, clean water, clean houses, clean bodies, clean minds, and green spaces. The growing concern for a healthy/powerful body and mind is built on the New Age ideology of the 1970s, which appropriated Eastern and indigenous conceptions and practices, or esoteric Western ones. It has developed into a major and lucrative market, offering meditation and herbal teas, yoga and exotic whole grains, gyms and massages for every age, founded on class privilege and that very cultural appropriation. Its

aim is personal efficiency and a maximization of physical and mental power. It has even fed a desire to outlive human constraints, and led to research programs for life extension, antiaging, and “solving the death problem,” financed by the theocracy of Silicon Valley.² The owner of the performing body (white and male) is expected to demonstrate his willingness to spend long hours at the gym and in the office, to work late at night and during the weekend, this capacity being the sign of his success, of his adherence to the dominant order, his exhaustion the proof of his triumph over the basic needs of mere mortals. He performs neoliberal masculinity in a proudly under-rested body perpetually speeding through many tasks. The owner of the invisible body is female and a person of color. Her exhaustion is the consequence of the historical logic of extractivism that built primitive accumulation and capital – extracting labor from racialized bodies. Women who clean, whether they live in Maputo, Rio de Janeiro, Riyadh, Kuala Lumpur, Rabat, or Paris, speak of the very little time they sleep (three to four hours), of the long hours devoted to their commutes, and of the work they have to do once they return home. Women who perform caring/cleaning jobs all talk about being *exhausted*. The *economy of exhaustion* has a long history in the modern world: it started with colonial slavery, mining human energy to death; the Industrial Revolution adopted this logic, exhausting the bodies of white workers and children until they finally obtained a reduction of work hours and hard physical labor thanks to the exhaustion of racialized bodies in the colonies. Liberal and neoliberal countries still rest on mining to exhaustion the bodies of migrants and people of color (processes of racialization also occur in the countries of the Global South – Filipinas and Indonesian women cleaning/caring are racialized in Southeast Asia, as are Thai and Malagasy women in Beirut; one even hears wealthy Africans in Dakar speak of their “African” domestics).³

The performing male neoliberal body has another kind of “phantom” body that enables his limitless performance. Even when a married white woman does her own housework and takes care of her own kids, the work of women of color must not be overlooked: they clean the spaces where white mothers do their shopping, buy their groceries, go the gym, drop off their children at daycare. This racial and gendered construction rests on a long history of the exploitation of black women in particular, of their bodies and souls. To be clear, I do not mean to make a rigid distinction between cleaning and caring. Cleaning is about caring, and caring about cleaning: black women who care for children and the elderly, and clean their bodies also take care of the environment by



cleaning human waste and rubbish. The bodies of black women have long been commodified, made into capital; their exploitation is inseparable from primitive accumulation, from social reproduction (as so many black feminists have shown), and from the new need for a clean world in which the neoliberal economy can function.

Who Cleans the World?

Though it is always problematic to speak of “a” group of women, to lump together so many different situations – residing in the home you clean, or cleaning public spaces for an agency; being undocumented or a citizen, or a migrant whose passport is confiscated; being married, living alone, or in a collective; being in a queer, lesbian, or heterosexual relationship; speaking the language of the society in which you work or not; being aware of your rights or not – I will, for the purposes of my argument, speak of black and brown women who clean and care as a group, in order to explore links between cleanliness and dirtiness in the age of neoliberalism and the so-called Anthropocene.

In this symbolic and material economy, black and brown women’s lives are made precarious and vulnerable, but their fabricated superfluity goes hand in hand with their necessary existence and presence. They are allowed into private homes and workplaces. But other members of superfluous communities – such as the families and neighbors of these workers – must stay behind the gates, unless they are willing to risk being killed by state police violence and other forms of the militarization of green and public spaces for the sake of the wealthy. For these workers, the special permit to enter is based both on the need for their work and on their invisibility. Women of color enter the gates of the city, of its controlled buildings, but they must do it as *phantoms*. Racialized women may circulate in the city, but only as an erased presence.

In their essay “Bio(necro)polis: Marx, Surplus Populations, and the Spatial Dialectics of Reproduction and ‘Race,’” Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast introduce the notions of “bio(necro)polis” and “necro(bio)polis” to emphasize the geographical fluidity of accumulation and racialized difference.⁴ They study how surplus populations “are the effect of racially striated regimes of biological reproduction,” arguing “that the workings of capitalism must be understood in terms of the linked contradictions of reproduction and race.”⁵ They go on to write that

racial marking of lands and bodies continues to be a way of rendering certain

bodies superfluous. Canalized, criminalized, ostracized, stigmatized, the necropolis – that spatiality through which the necropolitan is defined or constituted – becomes a reserve of multifarious material proportions: of negative symbolic potential and death’s liminal pleasures; a reserve of labor (as noted in chapter 25 of *Capital*); a nature reserve open for appropriation; a reserve of potentially fecund land for settlers; and a reserve of waste land for colonialism’s human and environmental detritus.

They add: “Members of the surplus laboring population working long hours for low wages are resented for undercutting white workers’ wages.”⁶ In the racial marking of the city, black women’s lives are superfluous *and* necessary, but their presence in the cleaning/caring industry has not in fact fueled resentment for taking white workers’ jobs or undercutting their wages. Indeed, the racial/gendered element of this workforce has not produced the kind of white resentment that we have observed in other industries. There is no nationalist, racist, anti-migrant movement built on the argument that “women of color are stealing white women’s jobs.” If the Islamophobic feminism that we witness in Europe has mobilized against veiled women in public spaces and daycare centers, it has not protested against veiled women who clean these public spaces or offices, hotel rooms, restaurants, and gyms. At the same time, there exists no protest movement *in support of* impoverished women who work cleaning/caring jobs – none. On the contrary, black women in particular have had to fight to get domestic work recognized *as work* by governments and unions. The fight is far from over.⁷

Feminist Theories of Cleaning/Caring

At the risk of being blunt, I will summarize certain feminist responses to housework: a demand for better sharing of this burden and for wages; the theory that showed how female domestic workers facilitate white and middle class women’s entry into the paid labor market in increasingly larger proportions; the Marxist feminist theory of reproductive labor and capital; the exploitation of migrant women doing the work caring/cleaning ; the critique by feminists of color worldwide of a white feminism that framed white women’s liberation in terms of “freedom from housework” and pushed for removing legal and social barriers to women entering wage labor, thus cementing the racial divide.

The racialization of domestic work inaugurated by colonial slavery has been



extended throughout the world in recent decades. In Europe, domestic work was traditionally done by young white women, and European literature abounds with the figure of the abused, raped, naive, or cunning domestic. At the beginning of the twentieth century in France, this figure was caricatured in the comic strip *Bécassine*; the title character was a stereotyped young Breton housemaid, stupid and slow, in contrast to the more refined women of Paris.⁸ In the 1960s, cleaning/caring became racialized in France and other European countries as governments organized the migration of women of color from their former colonies (this type of work had long been racialized in the colonies themselves). As European women were entering paid jobs, societies were becoming wealthier, and domestic work looked more and more disconnected from the image of the modern woman promoted by these societies.

In the 1970s, as white feminists denounced the boredom and invisibility of unpaid housework, the movement to recruit racialized women for cleaning/caring accelerated. White feminists were not unified in their response to this shift in the organization of social reproduction. Some asked for greater sharing of domestic tasks between women and men, ignoring the racial dimension of housework. Adam Smith's remark that "menial tasks and services ... generally perish in the instant of their performance and seldom leave any trace or value behind them" weighed on the question of the place and role of cleaning/caring.⁹ Being modern meant abandoning tasks that were associated with a backwards femininity and fighting for "valued" work positions. The "invisible hand" of black women would do the unvalued jobs. Marxist feminists offered a trenchant critique, as Rada Katsarova summarizes, identifying "social reproduction as a field of productive, generative activity. For them, patriarchal relationships and the subordination of women in the home appeared as a precondition to capitalist exploitation."¹⁰ Marxist and socialist feminists demonstrated the central role that social reproduction played in capitalism. Yet, it was the pioneering work of black feminists, first articulated in Claudia Jones's seminal 1949 essay "To End the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman," which was deeply revolutionary, that showed the triple oppression of working class black women. Jones demonstrated that black women had never been confined to the "domestic" sphere alone. Hazel Carby, Angela Davis, and so many others followed suit, challenging various dominant white/heteronormative feminisms that criticized the subjugation of domestic (white) women while

ignoring how race and colonialism have been implicated in these histories.¹¹ Black women understood very well what was at stake, and the first union of domestic workers in the world was created in the United States by black women.¹² This critique is still very much relevant today; when some women are freed from cleaning/caring work, other women – primarily women of color – will have to do the job.¹³

Today, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), women are still responsible for 75 percent of all unpaid domestic work, spending up to three hours more per day doing such work than men; this calculation includes fetching water, caring for children and the elderly, and doing housework.¹⁴ According to the United Nations, unpaid care and domestic work is worth 10 to 39 percent of a given country's gross domestic products. The ILO says that there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide, 80 percent of whom are women of color. Everywhere, domestic work is situated at the lower end of the care economy. It is also a booming industry, generating annual revenues of around \$75 million and growing about 6.2 percent per year, with the Asia-Pacific region experiencing the fastest growth. Though commercial cleaning is currently the largest cleaning service market, residential cleaning is expected to grow rapidly. Leading companies in the industry, aware of the negative image of the exploited cleaning worker, insist on legal protections for workers and promote their health and safety. ABM Industries, a leading "facility solutions" company based in the US, declares on its website that "our ThinkSafe culture is about our employees. It is a 'state of mind' and a feeling that should become a part of every workday."¹⁵ The cleaning industry has also adopted surveillance technology that enables the extensive tracking of cleaning staff, with workers complaining about being constantly tagged and followed.

The neoliberal euphemism "service providers" is often used to describe cleaning/caring workers. But these workers have cut through this vocabulary, laying bare the violence hidden behind such expressions. For her book *The New Maids: Transnational Women and the Care Economy*, Helma Lutz interviewed both cleaners and employers to demonstrate why this expression has been useful for women who employ women of color:

Employers like to see their domestic workers as service providers; it is largely a form of exculpatory rhetoric which conveniently diverts the debate away from relations of power and dependence, since the (academically) educated upper-middle-

class clients will usually know that they are not party to a legally safeguarded service-provider contract.¹⁶

Cleaning/caring female workers of color are politicizing their field, showing how and why they are performing indispensable work. They push us to go further in our analysis of that work. Their struggle for better pay and the right to unionize and be protected from abuse is now global.¹⁷ Women of color are showing what a decolonial feminism can be, one that brings together many intersecting issues: migration, the chemical industry, the economy of exhaustion, visibility/invisibility, race, gender, class, capitalism, and violence against women.

Capitalism Is Waste

The word “waste” usually refers to rubbish, but it is important also to consider the phrase “laying waste.” Slavery, colonialism, and capitalism have laid waste to lands and people. Instead of answering human needs, slavery, colonialism, and capitalism have constructed desires for things that we do not need while obstructing access to what we do need (clean water, clean air, clean food, clean cities). As defined by geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, capitalism is a global regime of vulnerability to death. The slave trade on which capitalism was built produced humans as waste and destroyed the cultural/natural world of indigenous peoples and of the continents colonized by European powers. The slave trade had a long-term effect on the African continent, its population, and its landscape, bringing filth, desolation, and death. The slave ship was a space of filth, feces, blood, and flesh rotted by the shackles of slavery. It was said that if peoples in the colonies noticed a foul stench drifting onto shore, they knew when a slave ship was coming. Race became a code for designing people and landscapes that could be wasted.

Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans were made disposable. The flesh and bones of their dead bodies mixed with the earth on plantations and in silver and gold mines. They were the humus of capitalism. Black women’s wombs were made into capital and their children transformed into currency. Primitive accumulation rested on the privatization of the commons and the production of wasted lands and people (particularly people of color). In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire wrote about Nazism as the “boomerang effect” of slavery and colonialism. The daily barbarisms inflicted on people of color in the colonies had turned the colonizers into violent, immoral savages, and that violence was now being inflicted on white people back on home. We can

similarly say that what imperialism and capitalism have inflicted upon the Global South and minorities in the Global North is today affecting the West; what had been externalized – all the waste of capitalism – is coming back. Neoliberal capitalism’s necessary destruction knows no borders. The idea that the wealthy can take refuge in fortified enclaves is another illusion bred by the deep sense of *natural* innocence instilled in Europeans, along with their belief in white supremacy.

Waste, as Fred Magdoff and Chris Williams have argued, “is a sign of capitalism’s success.”¹⁸ In 1966, economist Joseph Phillips demonstrated that in the US, the economic surplus – the portion of things produced that serve no socially useful purpose – averaged over half of gross national product. In 2015, advertising, packaging for brand promotion, and e-commerce orders led to the production of 35 million tons of cardboard. In 2016, a thousand ships were dragged onto beaches in the Global South, cut into pieces, and sold for scrap metal (the world’s biggest ship scrapyards are on India’s western coast, at Alang).¹⁹ But rather than putting an end to an economy that needs to produce waste, experts and policy makers discuss whether it makes “economic sense to properly manage waste.” The World Bank and similar institutions include the geopolitics of race and waste in their computer models, but as aggravating elements rather than as inherent structural features.

According to the World Bank, 11 million tons of solid waste are produced every day in the world. In 2016, the world’s cities generated 2.01 billion tons of solid waste. By 2050, annual waste generation is expected to increase by 70 percent from 2016 levels, to 3.4 billion tons. Although they only account for 16 percent of the world’s population, high-income countries collectively generate more than a third (34 percent) of the world’s waste. East Asia and the Pacific region are responsible for generating close to a quarter (23 percent) of all waste. By 2050, waste generation in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to more than triple from current levels, while South Asia will more than double its waste stream. It is not clear if this data takes into account the huge amount of waste generated by imperialism, including what armies left behind, and the countries and bodies that have been *wasted*. Moreover, region-specific data masks the fact that waste circulates (air and water do not know borders). In other words, waste generated by Western imperialism or produced for the comfort and consumption of privileged white people ends up being dumped on racialized people, either at home in impoverished racialized neighborhoods, or in the countries of the Global South.

“The racialization of the world,” Nikhil Pal

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Singh has written, “has helped to create and re-create ‘caesuras’ in human populations at both the national and global scales that have been crucial to the political management of populations.” He adds:

We need to recognize the technology of race as something more than skin color or biophysical essence, but precisely as those historic repertoires and cultural, spatial, and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity for the purposes of another’s health, development, safety, profit, and pleasure.²⁰

Wilson Gilmore has called this “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”²¹ Racialization is created by white supremacy to make its world clean while destroying other worlds. White supremacy creates a clean/dirty divide that posits a clean/civilized Europe against a dirty/uncivilized world, even though archives testify to the fact that non-European peoples were aghast at the uncleanness of whites, at their disregard for personal hygiene. Europeans were often in awe of the cleanliness of cities they entered but then destroyed, and of the peoples they subsequently massacred. By the nineteenth century, building on ideologies of race developed under slavery and colonization, Europeans drew a strong contrast between, on the one hand, a clean Europe and clean European bodies, and on the other, dirty indigenous dwellings, bodies, and sexuality.

In the current reworking of the geopolitics of cleanliness/dirtiness, the *invisibility* of the cleaning jobs of women of color creates the *visibility* of clean homes and public spaces. Furthermore, representations of cleanliness/dirtiness in the world construct a racial spatialization. Let us reflect on the accumulation of images of filth and garbage in the Global South and how this fills the Western public with horror: “*Why are these countries so dirty? Can’t they clean their streets? How can humans work in these filthy places? Don’t they see that it’s bad for their health? Look at the children!*” Warnings about hygiene and health when traveling to “these” countries add to the construction of a clean world vs. an unclean world populated by unclean peoples. Images of mountains of garbage, of *dirty* streets, *dirty* rivers, *dirty* beaches, *dirty* neighborhoods, of plastic covering fields, of people – women, children, men – searching through garbage or pushing carts filled with refuse, of children swimming in polluted water, all this in the Global South – such images contribute to the creation

of a naturalized division between dirty and clean. Added to this proliferation of images are reports on efforts by government agencies and NGOs to teach hygiene to “these” people, and reports on the alarming levels of plastic and pollution in “these” countries. But the root causes of all this remain hidden: the legacies of colonialism, of colonial urbanization and the racial restructuring of the landscape; structural adjustment programs that require governments to reduce public expenses; the externalization of polluting industries. The feeling that cleaning “that” world is an impossible task is slowly ingrained. What becomes a pressing issue is how to keep externalized pollution from reaching “clean” areas.

The dominant discourse about cleaning the world has chosen to ignore the fact that neoliberalism overproduces waste and that disposing of this waste is racialized. This discourse has in recent years promoted the notions of “green capitalism” and “sustainable disaster.” The latter concerns environmental catastrophe and its management, and there is a growing body of academic, governmental, and corporate literature on the subject.²² But this literature rarely addresses who will do the work of post-disaster cleanup.

As international institutions, foundations, and governments discuss what to do with waste, a “green” cleaning industry has emerged, with its own experts, engineers, and technicians. In the word of World Bank urban development specialists Sameh Wahba and Silpa Kaza:

It makes economic sense to properly manage waste. Uncollected waste and poorly disposed waste have significant health and environmental impacts. The cost of addressing these impacts is many times higher than the cost of developing and operating simple, adequate waste management systems. Solutions exist and we can help countries get there.²³

The geopolitics of clean/dirty draws a line between areas of dirtiness – characterized by disease, “unsustainable” birth rates, violence against women, crime, and gangs – and areas of cleanliness, which are heavily policed and where children can safely play, women can walk freely at night, and streets are occasionally closed to traffic to allow shopping, dining, and other leisure activities. The clean/dirty division is connected to the militarization and gentrification of cities, with poor people of color blamed for their innate dirtiness and driven out of their neighborhoods in order to make the city “clean.”

Decolonizing Cleaning/Caring and the

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Politics of Solidarity

Neoliberal and “green” solutions remain blind and deaf to the political history of waste, to the laying-waste perpetrated by racism, and to the role of black and brown women. There are many points to be made here, but I will just focus on the question of time. In her fascinating essay “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counter-Factual,” Claire Colebrook writes that the Anthropocene concerns two clashing temporalities: one that opens humans to the scale of geological time, and another that draws them back to the scale of human agency and human historical forces.²⁴ But are these the only temporalities we can think of? If we look beyond the temporalities imposed on indigenous and racialized communities – who have their own conceptions of time – what do we see? Let me try to trace some other temporalities: The time needed to clean the world, to repair what has been broken by slavery and colonialism, which is itself being broken by the ravages of capitalism – so much damage, so many wounds, so many ruins (what Colebrook calls the geological impact of humans – but as we know, not all humans have an equal geological impact). The time taken by women of color to care for their own families, to clean and cook for their own families, and then to commute to the homes of middle class families and clean their houses, care for their world. The time taken for the production of capitalist goods, and the temporality that this production imposes on the bodies of women of color (working long hours in polluted factories, barely eating, having no time to go to bathroom or take care of themselves during menstruation). The time to bring the waste produced by the Global North to the Global South. The fact that none of this work is ever really finished because somewhere, something is being broken, damaged, wounded.

The time for decolonial caring/cleaning (for reparation), for caring and cleaning what has been laid to waste in the past, clashes with the accelerated time of neoliberalism.

As we try to clean/repair the wounds of the past, we must also clean/repair the wounds that are being inflicted today, but whose consequences are either spatialized elsewhere (Puerto Rico, Haiti, Mozambique) or imposed on communities that relegated to the dirty enclaves of the Global North (Louisiana, working class neighborhoods of color). As we repair the past we must simultaneously repairing the current damage that increases the vulnerability to death of millions of people in the Global South. The past is our present, and it within this mixed temporality that futurity can be imagined. The long history of laying waste is racialized, as Kathryn Yusoff has remarked in her book *A*

Billion Black Anthropocenes or None:

If the Anthropocene proclaims a sudden concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities, it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization and capitalism.²⁵

Let me conclude with an example that shows how cleaning/caring can be an emancipatory practice when it is concerned with building solidarity and protecting each other from manufactured vulnerability rather than with cleaning up waste. When I was in Chennai in March 2018, I saw an exhibition titled “Labour: Workers of the World ... Relax!” curated by a young Dalit named C. P. Krishnapriya. Writing about the exhibition, Krishnapriya explained that “labour itself had to be looked at critically, beyond what was in the Western anthropological representation of colonial photo archives and in the valorized post-independence representation.” The show was “a call for collective responsibility,” she stated. Among the pieces being shown, I was keenly interested in a series of works on women who clean the Chennai railway station. Hanging next to these works were three sheets of paper on which a young Dalit man had written:

that older woman that you speak about, who cleans human faeces, i write taking her to be one of my family, my grandfather.

cleaning faeces is not an ordinary thing. for this, you require medical studies, like MBBS;

with bare hands, my grandfather cleans human faeces, that he did, to such an extent, that it is soaked in the lines of his hand, soaked like blood in blood.

in the night, with the same hands, he would feed my father, with the same hands, he himself would eat. With all this, getting habituated to it, because of that, my father also had no hesitation in cleaning faeces, my father also did the faeces cleaning ...

in my view, more than honoring that women [who clean faeces], i think we should show

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that, like everyone else, she is equal;

1. woman should stop cleaning faeces, everyone should clean their own faeces themselves

2. or else, we all should join with the women and clean human faeces. like that, through doing this way, that women can be one of us, as equal, not only by saying it by words of mouth but by feeling it.

x

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1
Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (South End Press, 1983).

2
See Harry Fortuna, "Seeking Eternal Life, Silicon Valley Is Solving for Death," *Quartz*, November 8, 2017 <https://qz.com/1123164/seeking-eternal-life-silicon-vall-ey-is-solving-for-death/>; Adam Gabbat, "Is Silicon Valley's Quest for Immortality a Fate Worse than Death?" *The Guardian*, February 23, 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/22/silicon-valley-immortality-blood-infusion-gene-therapy>; Joanna Zylinska, *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

3
I acknowledge that men of color are doing the dirty job of cleaning as well – digital waste, ships, nuclear facilities, factories, warehouses – but women of color are the backbone of this work.

4
Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast, "Bio(necro)polis: Marx, Surplus Populations, and the Spatial Dialectics of Reproduction and 'Race,'" *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011): 1464–88.

5
McIntyre and Nast, "Bio(necro)polis," 1468.

6
McIntyre and Nast, "Bio(necro)polis," 1471.

7
See the inspiring struggle of home care workers in New York City <https://aintiawomancampaign.wordpress.com/>. See also the struggle of "anganwadi" workers in India (an anganwadi is a rural child care center). They perform essential cleaning/caring but are not paid wages, only an "honorarium": "At the anganwadis, children are served meals and taught songs, the alphabet and basic hygiene. In deprived regions, these meals are a lifeline for malnourished children. Besides, they provide meals to 9 lakh pregnant and lactating women and have programs for 3–4 lakh adolescent girls ... The government order states that it is necessary 'in the public interest' to prohibit strikes in the essential services provided by anganwadi workers, their helpers and the women who run mini-anganwadis. It points out that these workers are engaged in addressing health, nutrition, early learning and development needs of young children as well as pregnant and lactating women" <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/state-bans-strikes-by-anganwadi-work>

ers-invokes-essential-servic es-maintenance-act/articleesh ow/63343113.cms.

8
"Bécassine" was a name derived from the French word for a bird, but was also a way to describe someone who is easily fooled.

9
Quoted in Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 103.

10
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