Cleaning up Westminster: Understanding Racial Capitalism Through Ethnographies of Racialised and/or Migrant Night Cleaners in UK Parliament.

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Abstract

This paper is an ethnography of racialised and/or migrant night cleaners in the Houses of Parliament who are unionising at the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU) against outsourcing. It explores the experiential dimensions of night cleaning in relation to themes such as (in)visibility and exhaustion and considers cleaners' strategies of coping that unsettle ontologies of suffering/agency. It adds to literatures on racial capitalism which have not studied night work. By spotlighting male cleaners, it also addresses a gap in feminist work on racialised cleaning/care labour. The case does not explicate the exceptionalism of Parliament's night cleaners, but highlights context-specific variations in racial capitalist modes and the generative possibilities destabilising foreclosed social separateness. Connecting the 'local' and the theoretical, therefore, I argue that racial capitalism could be better understood by grounding theory in lived experience and focusing on the differentiated processes through which groups operate within it.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

"Who walks alone in the streets at night? The sad, the mad, the bad. The lost, the lonely. The sleepless, the homeless. All the city's internal exiles." (Beaumont 2015: 3)

Technological transformation and post-Fordist, flexible structures of work are increasingly eroding the temporalities of the nine-to-five working day. These trends have been catalysed by the rise of the platform-based gig economy and global communications technology such that night working has become normalised across the labour market. The term '24/7-city' now celebrates the convenience of continual production and consumption. At the same time, there is a generalised sense of anxiety over collective exhaustion and a lack of time. Trends towards labour flexibilization heralded as a benefit to workers are often coercive measures that force people to work during previously protected personal time (Crary 2013). The modern 'injury of sleep', Jonathan Crary argues, is inseparable from the neoliberal dismantling of other welfarist social protections in the late-twentieth century, signalling the prioritisation of profit over rest (*Ibid.*).

The notion of work-life balance is a manifestation of the persistent pressures facing workers and families. Among the affluent, it has created the need to import more labour for tasks such as childcare and cleaning. Culturally, it has also tended to flatten ontologies of exhaustion. Travelling on London's night buses and tubes, however, our journeys are more likely to be shared with a nurse, careworker, maintenance personnel, or cleaner, than a white-collar professional. 15.1% of employees in UK night time industries are in low-paid roles, compared with 10.5% as a whole, and night work is disproportionately carried out by foreign-born workers. (Fernandez-Reino and Rienzo 2022). It is often migrants, refugees, and displaced persons, who lack access to daytime labour markets, taking on night work; those with little or no language skills, limited education, or coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, which suggests that night work reinforces existing inequalities (Duijzings and Dusková 2022). Cleaning, especially, is dominated by migrant workers. 53% of cleaners on London's underground were born in Ghana or Nigeria, whilst 28% of those cleaning London's offices were born in Latin America (Datta et al. 2007). Much of this work happens 'out of hours', unseen by daytime workers. When we arrive in the morning onto London's streets, universities, hospitals, and transport, it is often without thinking that our ability to do so is made possible by another person's labour – because someone has cleaned and cared for that space overnight and in the early hours of the morning.

The idea for this research was initially provoked by a discomfort over these very conditions. As a student, I did platform-based gig work, bartending until late at night in various venues around London. At the end of a shift at the London Stadium, I passed a queue of women at the exit, seemingly middle-aged or older, all Francophone-speaking, two who were visibly pregnant, being signed in to begin night cleaning shifts. As Matthew Beaumont (2015)

reminds us in the epigraph to this working paper, despite the onset of artificial lighting and 24-hour cities, there is, residually, something both intriguing and unsettling about activity at night.

Historically, walking around London at night was criminalised through legal curfews guided by cultural associations between the night and a variety of moral transgressions, including prostitution and idleness. This perceived danger persists, and curfews continue to target an assumed criminality posed by night's occupants, such as those imposed in American cities during 2020s Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. Night has always, therefore, been differentially lived.

It is often deemed unsafe for women to commute at night, yet thousands of female cleaners do so daily. Shift work is detrimental to health (Wang et al. 2014) and cleaning a very physical job, yet older women and pregnant mothers are among those carrying it out. The stadium was not used the next day, yet night cleaning is deemed necessary and requires a large workforce. These were matters I was inclined to focus on when I approached the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU) in June 2023 with my research proposal – to interview night workers. Inspired by the wave of strikes by outsourced cleaners and security guards at my own university, I wanted to collaborate with an independent trade union given cleaning's recent vulnerability to labour organisation, particularly inside large institutions, which the Houses of Parliament uniquely epitomised.

This research also responds to work highlighting the political economic and associated structural problems of precarity in capitalism, a condition said to weaken the collective possibilities of labour. The most relevant literature to this study is that concerned with racial capitalism, which, though diverse, explores how capital accumulation relies on the racialised expropriation of labour that divides and hierarchises labour-power. In the context of cleaning/care labour, feminist literature has explored the gendered dimensions of cleaning and care work, to which black feminists have added the triple oppression faced by black working-class women. Yet, despite a conceptual correspondence between darkness, night, (in)visibility, and the cultural renditions of racialised 'others', the night's racialised and/or migrant workforce has not been the subject of focused study. Nor has male labour featured heavily in conceptions of feminised cleaning/care. This ethnography, therefore, attempts to nuance these literatures by spotlighting male night cleaners. Its ethnographic approach also facilitates the foregrounding of everyday agentive strategies of coping and managing among night cleaners, as well as processes of formal unionisation. In doing so, it moves beyond implicit ontologies of dichotomised suffering/agency, privilege/oppression, and connectedly, free/forced labour that can create a determining sense of the everyday under theoretical rubrics of oppression. Rather, Parliament's night cleaners are politicising precarity on more complex terms. Their struggle to manage the effects of nocturnal work and contest public sector outsourcing brings together many intersecting issues: (in)visibility, precarity, (im)mobility, the economy of exhaustion, gender, class, capitalism, institutionalised inequality, and democracy. Recourse to racial capitalism alone, therefore, is insufficient in explicating these entangled and continually evolving inequalities of race and gender, which are latent

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or 'slippery to name' (Puwar 2004: 23). Working through this entanglement, I suggest that Parliament's night cleaners illuminate a dimension of politicised struggle at a particular time and place. This is not, therefore, an overview of night work or the politics of unionisation generally. Rather, Parliament's night cleaners can be considered a localised but globally resonant condition of racial capitalism, being contested by everyday strategies of coping and formal broad-based, multi-ethnic unionisation. In connecting the local to the theoretical, I make a wider argument that racial capitalism could be better understood (and thereby contested) by grounding theory in lived experience and focusing on the differentiated processes through which groups operate within it.

I begin by briefly outlining the scholarship advancing theories of racial capitalism that might be applicable to the case study and suggest some other theoretical strands relevant to describing the economic position of night cleaners, such as Marxist feminism. Conscious of the localised nature of the night cleaners' campaign, I then briefly consider what has been written of Westminster as a state-affirmed, material elaboration of racial inequality. Finally, I outline the study's methodology and chapter plan.

Who works nights?

Drawing on strands of Marxism, racial capitalist scholars have argued that capital accumulation and class-making rely on human inequalities enshrined by race (Robinson 2000). These stratifications render some workers valued, and with a greater stake in capitalism, and others devalued (Virdee 2019), a fissure preventing the progressive homogenisation of the proletariat that Marx predicted. Engaging this insight, I suggest that the disproportionate burdening of night work by racialised and/or migrant workers is another manifestation of these stratifications.

Racialisation is one process of differentiation through which contingent hierarchies of labour power are created, that is, it provides the justificatory logic deciding which bodies are suited to particular kinds of work. 'Race', here, does not denote static categories of difference, but describes 'the constitution of difference through assigning particular characteristics and value to visible 'Others'', mediated 'through discourses and practises that operate across different spatial scales' (McDowell, 2009: 74). Techniques of embodied othering thus shape, and are shaped by, 'race'. Labour-power becomes similarly organised by the mapping of 'others' with certain characteristics and value onto certain kinds of work, in this case cleaning. Cleaning then acquires a social value through its association with the racialised bodies carrying it out – designations consolidated through discourses around aptitude (Anderson 2022) and legal form (Hall 1997), for instance. The designation of cleaning to racialised and/or migrant workers, and its removal to anti-social hours, is one instantiation of this. Cleaning is deemed 'unskilled', whilst night work is valued as work which 'resets' space in the service of daytime employment; 69% of night workers earn less than £15 an hour, roughly the UK median wage (TUC 2022). Thus, whilst low-wage, 'unskilled' labour is work that anybody can do, not *any body* can perform it, because aptitude for night cleaning is

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rarely separated from the labourer's body – naturalised associations which cast racialised and/or migrant labour as 'unskilled' (Anderson 2022: 9). Marx was attentive to how capital's exploitation of wage labour relied on 'relay systems' of day and night shifts. Prolonging the proletariat's day, he wrote, was an 'inherent tendency of capitalism' (Marx 1887: 59). However, Marx's account, unencumbered by racism's consequences, does not consider the *kind* of worker carrying out night work. Nocturnal labour therefore generates a productive encounter at the intersection of Marxian insights on night work and racial capitalist literatures yet to engage with night work.

A key contribution of racial capitalism has been to theorise the racialised inflection of what Marx argued was the 'disposability' and excludability of surplus populations - the unemployed and underemployed (Marx 1887: 698-714). This surplus, he believed, fulfilled a strategic function in capitalism: exerting downward pressure on wages, and providing an alternative pool of cheap workers that employers could discipline and organise (Rajaram, 2018). Racial capitalism suggests that 'disposability' relies on racial ideologies which determine the terms of inclusion and exclusion of certain populations in economic activity (Hall 1996). Surplus labour's disciplinary function, designed to fragment labour-power, then serves to intensify racial divisions amongst workers, preventing the coming to consciousness of the proletariat (Du Bois 1935). Whereas Classical Marxism argues that collective exhaustion from night work gives rise to class consciousness, Du Bois would argue that the allocation of precarious, anti-social work to racialised and/or migrant workers serves to stratify, not homogenise, labour-power. Considering that daytime work is often public facing, requires Anglophone speaking skills, and contingencies such as an ability to afford childcare, the theory of surplus populations is helpful in describing the relative position of night workers in capitalism.

In Britain especially, these exclusionary logics are entwined with migration politics, whereby exploitable populations are also managed through categories of '(il)legality' and '(in)authenticity' that work to control migrants' mobility. This essay engages an important contribution from migration-mobility studies that explores the role of temporal control in racialised border regimes. Work on temporality has highlighted the arrythmia of lifecourses and lived time engendered by temporary visa and working arrangements (Rotter 2016). Despite the dominance of foreign-born workers in night-time sectors, and its occurrence during exhausting, anti-social hours, night work is rarely the focus of studies. Unlike displaced persons on the move, Parliament's cleaners possess the right to work in the UK and have been settled for some time. However, short-term contracts, manual, and highly-mobile work, alongside the (im)mobility of exhaustion and dependency on low-paid service work, speak to how 'mobility flux' (Ahmad 2008) continues to reproduce inequalities even after migrants settle at their point of arrival. Night work also contends with heteropatriarchal constructions of the night that restrict women's mobility compared to men (Patel 2010). Meanwhile, night can ease the mobility of some, such as London's necessarily hidden 'illegal' migrant economy wanting to avoid state surveillance (Ahmad 2008). Mobility is not, therefore, always disciplined from above. Rather, there is a need for political readings of mobility that see how night

cleaners find strategies of coping and managing which explicate emerging forms of subjectivity (Andrijasevic and Anderson 2009). Placing literatures of mobility and racial capitalism in dialogue, therefore, Parliament's night cleaners attune us to how labour-power is also stratified by a spectrum of (im)mobility, inflected through race and gender.

Alongside race and migration, the other important stratification of labour deciding 'who cleans' in global capitalism, is gender. Marxist feminists have highlighted that capitalism tends to devalue labour associated with feminine capacities for care. Capitalism often refuses to acknowledge forms of social reproduction as productive 'work' for the market, rendering women's work 'invisible', despite being indispensable to capital accumulation (Katsarova 2015). Black women like Hazel Carby (1997), however, have challenged these white feminist rubrics, pointing out the triple oppression faced by working-class black women. Indeed, as some white feminists liberated themselves from "backward" domestic tasks and entered waged work, other women, often racialised and/or migrant, were imported to do the job (Vergès 2019). This critique remains relevant to today's cleaning/care industry (Anderson 2000; Chang 2000). Literatures on the (in)visibility of feminised work are pertinent to the experiential dimensions of working during the naturalised invisibility of the night. Postcolonial feminist Francoise Vergès (2019) has discussed the dialectical relationship between the invisibility of racialised female cleaners and the visibility of the white, male, bourgeois body. Verges' dialectic is acutely politicised and materialised in this context, which reflects upon localised calibrations of racial capitalism at the institutional heart of democratic power. In considering a masculinised gender configuration, and wider trends of professionalisation, toughened workloads, and nocturnality in cleaning, it updates theoretical work on feminised cleaning/care.

Parliament: A Material Elaboration of Racial Capitalism?

An ethnography of Parliament's night cleaners, therefore, pushes us further in analysing both racial capitalism and Marxist feminism, unsettling the use of theory as a point of arrival. It reminds us of the need to *ground* theoretical insights and consider how they are embodied in specific social relations, times, and locations. Ethnographic writing can help to highlight the embodied reality, strategies of coping, and resistance, among night cleaners. In this case, attention to the local has added significance, centred around the institutional heart of British political power. Emphasising Parliament as physical space, and cleaning as manual work, can remind us of the materiality of labour and racial capitalism. This is important work in the aftermath of the BLM movement where anti-racist activism has coalesced around monumental and institutional space. When searching for critical work on Westminster, Emma Crew's ethnographies of parliamentary staff made a compelling argument for ethnography's value to democracy: deepening our understanding of Parliament and enhancing our ability to think critically about institutions. Writing before BLM, Crew regrettably pays little attention to race. This deficit is ad-

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dressed by Nirmal Puwar's *Space Invaders,* in which ethnographies of female and non-white civil servants and MPs explicate the sensation of 'being of and inside Parliament, but not belonging to it' (2004). This research extends Puwar's work by considering the spatial and temporal marginalisation of outsourced workers – who are inside, but do not formally belong, to parliamentary space. Doing so deepens understandings of racial capitalism by imbricating the state-affirmed spatial practises that authorise it.

Material in this working paper is principally drawn from consultations with the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU) between June and September 2023, a period during which they were assisting the unionisation efforts of cleaners at the Houses of Parliament looking to settle contractual disputes, increase pay, and abolish outsourcing. I conducted two semi-structured interviews of around one hour with night cleaners, and gathered an additional six responses from cleaners using a self-administered questionnaire. One interview, with 'Cleaner X', took place in-person at CAIWU's office, and the other 'Cleaner Y', took place via Zoom. All participants were male, born in West Africa, and have been settled in the UK for varying lengths of time; some over twenty years, some for less than ten. Interviews were guided by a set of questions, however interviewees raised different themes and ideas. All provided consent for their answers to be recorded, with face-to-face interviews being audio-recorded and then transcribed. Questionnaires were effective in achieving higher response rates among night cleaners who would otherwise have been inaccessible given work schedules. Semi-structured interviews, meanwhile, have the advantage of providing more complex answers than questionnaires whilst still being time-efficient, however they were impractical for some cleaners who slept during the day. Material such as articles, media reports, and policy documents are also used for further context on Parliament.

Studying night shift work poses methodological problems given its naturalised invisibility. The anti-sociality of nocturnal working hours and restrictions on public access to the Houses of Parliament present an impediment to face-to-face research. This is, however, one of the reasons why night shift work deserves dedicated study. If ethnographies are 'works of recognition' (Scheper-Hughes 2020: 28), then the lack of scholarly work on night shift workers authorises the same visual avoidance that produces their invisibility in the first place. Given I do not share a socioeconomic, occupational, or migratory history with participants, what emerges is only a fragmentary and impressionistic record of the lives cleaning Parliament, a record left open-ended, as ethnographies should be. As such, the following should be seen as one part of a wider research project to be expanded upon in the future during a much longer period of fieldwork.

The sections that follow each address different dimensions relevant to the experience of cleaning Parliament at night. Section 1 grounds the earlier conceptual discussion of workforce stratification in the everyday lives of night cleaners. It foregrounds subjective experiences of labour, working conditions, exhaustion, and sociality relating to night work which deepen our understanding of modes of inequality. Section 2 considers the material and institutional relevance of the Houses of Parliament. Stepping back from the testimony of

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cleaners to introduce the world of formal political representation in which they work is essential if we are to grasp the structures of inequity and power they are navigating and struggling against. Finally, Section 3 considers night cleaners' move towards unionisation in the face of racial capitalist modes that, according to some politically defeatist rubrics, fracture labour-power. The energies of multi-ethnic, broad-based collectives among night cleaners and others inside 'indie' unions are countering subjectivities of exhaustion.

1   Visit to CAIWU office, 19 June 2023.

2   Interview with cleaner, 26 June 2023.

3   Interview with cleaner, 27 June 2023.

Section 1:
Night Cleaning and Distributions
of Time in Racial Capitalism

Night shift cleaning is strenuous and physical work. In Parliament, night shifts typically start at ten in the evening and can finish eight to eleven hours later. Considering all the cleaners in this study spend over one hour travelling to and from work, what should be an eight-hour shift can elongate into a ten-hour shift. Whilst much of the rest of the country shuts down, nocturnal service workers commute late at night and in the early hours of the morning. Once cleaners arrive for the night shift, they begin an overnight 'deep clean' of the almost-deserted Palace of Westminster. They clean all the spaces in which it would be impractical or disruptive to clean during daytime use, such as the kitchens or commons debate chamber. As one former cleaner told me when I visited CAIWU's office in June, 'night cleaning is the *worst*, because you have to clean *everything*'.[1] Asked how frequently they felt their workload overnight was excessive, all cleaners responded with 'often' or 'very often', with one commenting that 'working in the kitchen at night is very hard and physical, [more] than any other job'.[2] This work is professionalised, cohesive, and almost exclusively male. The unbending pressure to reopen Westminster's doors, removing both the mess and cleaners from view, breeds an exhausting efficiency. Rest breaks are felt to be inadequate, and there are no designated facilities for cleaners to eat (canteens are closed), change, or store their belongings – all the things 'that make life easier' for daytime, in-house parliamentary staff.[3] Once finished, cleaners emerge onto the almost-deserted streets of Westminster, and commute home in the early hours of the morning using the generally reduced-service offered by London's night transport network. All but one respondent reported feeling unsafe during their solitary commute. Night cleaning is made more exhausting by a lack of sleep. For most respondents, night work allows them to carry out daytime caring responsibilities, studying, or housework, and time to sleep is scheduled around this. All report suffering from sleep deprivation, whilst two cleaners over the age of 55 say they experience health issues related to night working.

Fatigue has long been a weapon of capitalism, a system wanting to 'fill-up the pores of the working day' (Marx 1887: 175). In migration studies, the 'politics of exhaustion', refers both to the way exhaustion is employed as a tool of border regimes and to the ways it is experienced day-to-day by displaced people faced with forced removal and constant uncertainty (Welender and De

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Vries 2016). Whilst Parliament's cleaners, many from West Africa, might be well-settled in the UK, histories of exhaustion and bodily depletion arising from experiences of transnational migration remain helpful in thinking through the temporal and spatial mobility of migrants once at their point of arrival. MacQuarie (2019) has done important work showing how manual work at night depletes bodily resources through pain and exhaustion. Putting these two insights together, I argue that the disproportionate number of racialised and/or migrant workers occupying night shifts reveals how Britain's labour market is characterised by a spectrum of spatiotemporal mobility; there is employment with privileged forms of mobility, such as the capacity for remote working or control over working hours, and there is precarious employment that can constrain mobility, for instance by immobilising workers in specific locations, or imposing uncertain and hypermobile working hours (Hewison and Kalleberg 2013; Frydenlund and Dunn 2022). Night cleaners in this study experience a mobility 'flux' (Ahmad 2008). They commute long distances across London to access work at a time when others stay in yet lack time outside of work to move freely through the city. Characteristic of many in precarious employment, night cleaners experience an immobility consequential of a dependency on low-paid service work. In response, they have developed strategies of coping and managing that unsettle ascribed ontologies of suffering/agency commonly arising from ethnographies and analytics of structural oppression.

Time and Bodily Management

> 'We have to manage ourselves because the retirement age is sixty-seven. That is why you need enough hours' [rest] - to manage your body'.[4]

When Cleaner X arrives home at three in the morning after a shift, he wakes up four hours later for the school run, as his wife has already left for work. He returns home to rest but is usually unable to sleep again. Outside of work, he says, 'we don't try and do anything more than have a rest'. All respondents reported that nocturnal work impedes their ability to socialise with friends and family and carry out tasks such as housework. Antisocial hours and tiredness mean that cleaners struggle to care for themselves in the same ways that they carry out care/cleaning for others. Cleaner X explains his exhaustion in terms of bodily depletion. Were he to work until retirement (67 years old), he says, he would find himself in a hospital bed. He is concerned about the impacts of the job's physicality, the dangerous chemicals he handles daily, and sleep deprivation. His current job, however, is the result of a high degree of job turnover. Previously, he worked in construction, at a restaurant, and later trained to be a bus driver, however put the latter on hold when his third child was born; 'right now whilst they're at school I can't move on. When they reach college then I will move on for sure'. Job turnover reflects a hypermobility in search of optimal working conditions but is time-restricting in limiting longer-term opportunities for promotion or up-skilling. Like with others interviewed, night shifts are one strategy he uses to balance reproductive and productive

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responsibilities. For now, he is content with a pay rise and fairer contractual terms to 'manage' his body better. 'It won't change our life', he says of the campaign, but 'I would feel a bit calmer'.[5]

In a culture of round-the-clock work, night cleaners are called upon to manage their own health and exhaustion. Yet harm is not an individualised *event* in a society that is, for the most part, structured around diurnal work. Testimonies suggest that Parliament offers little, if any, provisions for night workers. Services open to daytime staff are closed, such as canteens and kitchens, however I am told cleaners are not expected to use Parliament's bars and restaurants anyway. One break room is left open for night cleaners, but it lacks single sex changing rooms. The decision is then between changing in front of other, sometimes female, cleaners, or commuting home in dirty, chemical-covered uniform.[6] Across London, services at night are also generally lowered, giving night workers less control over their non-working time. During weeknights, shops and restaurants close by the late evening, emergency services are scaled back, and waiting times are longer for night buses. Post-Covid, London's provision of night transport and services, particularly for night life and leisure industries, have improved. Yet if 'everything that makes life easier' is a little harder to access at night, extra planning is required and new uncertainties arise: 'You know, no one finds you until the morning if something happens to you during the night', one cleaner fears.[7]

Differentially Distributed Time

The term 'management' comes to have two meanings for studies on night work – both bodily and time management. The latter has become a sort of cultural fixation for professional classes, amidst and individualistic privileging of busyness and generalised sense of time-scarcity. This has been abetted, since the turn of the millennium, by an academic fixation on the accelerated speed of capitalist technological modernity, metanarratives that reflect upon *The Coming of Immediacy* (Tomlinson 2007*), 24/7 Capitalism* (Crary 2013), and 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1990). Inequalities have been discussed in terms of the time rich and time poor (Adam 2004), or fast classes and slow classes (Armitage and Roberts 2002). Yet such conceptions cannot account for the lived realities of entangled, uneven, and continually recalibrated time. "24/7 capitalism" announces the seamless extension of the rhythms of production and consumption into the night. For night cleaners, however, lived time of unpredictable shift patterns, occupational im(mobility), time scarcity, disrupted sleep, and the lack of time for preparing to 'move on', in one cleaner's words, is time which is subject to varying degrees of acceleration/deceleration and unevenness.

Amidst neoliberalism's valorisation of round-the-clock productivity, individualised time management denotes a sense of control that conceals its dependency on the labour of others. The cultural fixation on time, and needing to find more time, becomes a conceit that itself produces inequalities in time. It creates the need to import help with cleaning and other forms of service or care work, carried out by workers who lack rights of citizenship,

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fair employment rights, or transferable qualifications, which can limit their horizons under capitalism. There is something collective in the shared blurring of work and private time for both MPs and cleaners; MP Stella Creasy, for instance, was forced to breastfeed in the House of Commons due to a lack of maternity leave (Bowden 2023). The difference is that some time-scarce professionals are better able to 'buy' time, perhaps taking taxis over buses, or employing people to help with cleaning or childcare at home.

The dominance of racialised and/or migrant workers in night cleaning.

Articulating inequalities in time can thicken analytical understandings of labour segregation. The question of who is available or suited to carrying out night cleaning, is invariably conditioned by perceptions of gender and race which can constrain or privilege certain categories of work. The following reflects on two qualities pertaining to Parliament's night cleaners: its masculinised workforce and nocturnality.

Domestic work such as cleaning has long been racialised and gendered. The historical feminisation of cleaning carries forward the devaluation of socially reproductive work from the patriarchal domestic sphere. Precaritisation within the cleaning sector is an extension of the Western, liberal separation of private and public spheres which constructed women's domestic work as economically unproductive, and therefore obscured from the 'public' sphere. The dominance of male cleaners is, therefore, an interesting recalibration of these dynamics. Partly, this relates to prevailing hetero-patriarchal constructions of the night, which have implications for which bodies get to apply for night work. Women's nocturnal mobility tends to be more restricted given moral discouragement of their walking around at night (Patel 2010). Yet Parliament's cleaners have also used attributes of gender and race/ethnicity to their advantage, using a West African employment network to access work, creating a gendered and ethnic clustering. Cleaners were referred to the job by housemates, landlords, and cousins, at the request of their employer who believes the job's high-profile is best served by one network. Employers' demand for certain nationalities because they are associated with personal and physical characteristics is one process through which aptitude becomes mapped, and naturalised, onto certain racialised and gendered bodies (Anderson 2022). Parliament's cleaners have varied educational backgrounds, including one possessing an accountancy qualification, which is not captured by this hierarchy. More notable than this, however, was respondents' desire to have their work recognised as physically demanding, a departure from the gentler, feminine qualities historically associated with cleaning/care work. In understanding this, we must turn to structural changes that have marketised cleaning in recent decades (Rees and Fielder 1992).

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Cleaning's Neoliberal Restructuring and Labour Atomisation

Outsourcing is CAIWU's main grievance, and critical to understanding the working arrangements of Parliament's cleaners. Apart from some more 'skilled' Heritage Cleaners (more on them in Chapter 2), cleaners are employed by a contractor, Atalian Servest. Empirical studies have shown how labour processes in the service sector have intensified under higher competition and marketisation (Adam-Smith et al. 2003). Restructurings to lower labour costs led public and private sectors to outsource services such as cleaning and catering. It has created a competitive tendering market for public sector contracts, incentivising Atalian Servest to, in one cleaner's words, 'squeeze you more and more to make savings', that is, keeping wages low, toughening workloads, and increasing outputs.[8] The result has been an increase in labour precarity, with cleaners on short-term contracts, generally low hourly rates, and no right to sick pay. To save money, for instance, Atalian no longer employs extra people to cover work lying outside of night cleaners' contracts. Two cleaners brought up their workload during the week of the Queen's death. Whilst the public queued overnight to view the Queen's coffin lying in state, cleaners sanitised the gallery's floors every hour, in addition to contracted work. Whilst the contractor was paid extra for this increased workload, cleaners' wages that week did not change.[9]

Outsourcing creates a structural gap by separating employers from employees, and this widens in the context of nocturnal work. Daytime employment at Westminster is often of a different social register, carried out near thousands of parliamentary staff. Like other forms of customer-facing service work, cleaning can take on affective dimensions in more intimate contexts, such that manual labour requires unrecognised degrees of face-to-face emotional labour (Dyer, McDowell, and Batnitzky 2008). Daytime employment is then made more available to those with the English-speaking and socio-emotional skills that 'fit in' to please daytime staff. However, abjection is differently conjugated when night cleaners are interactionally separated from those for whom they clean. Cleaners feel as if their work goes unseen: 'Police forces, people like that receive medals. But we don't get anything'.[10] Previously, when he worked during the mornings, Cleaner X was greeted by MPs who asked how he was and whether there were any problems, but this interaction was lost doing night shifts.[11] Tacitly, this becomes a system designed to value the labour, rather than the lives, of the cleaning force – a social distance that has contributed to a feeling, among a majority of those interviewed, that staff at Westminster do not value cleaners' work.

Atalian advertise their cleaning service as offering 'minimal disruption', in practise marketizing the absence of sociality between cleaner and client. Some areas of work are really isolating, one cleaner tells me.[12] This quality to night cleaning – of hiding the 'hands that served' – is reminiscent of the racialised dynamics of servility deriving from the domestic division of labour under colonialism – of service spaces intended to separate the served from

8   Interview with Cleaner X, 11 August 2023.

9   Interview with Cleaner Y, 16 August 2023.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

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the servant (Atanasoski and Vora 2019: 89). In these conditions, cleaners have found alternative comradery amongst each other. 'Working at night, it's supportive', one cleaner tells me. He struggles to socialise with friends outside of work but has built relationships with the night guards who walk around during shifts. Many of those working at night prefer its solitude. During previous employment at a restaurant, Cleaner X said, he found working with other people claustrophobic. Whilst Parliamentary staff 'do not see our work', he values having control over his work, with there being less managerial oversight at night.

In blurring the lines between accommodation/resistance, activity/passivity, these testimonies remind us that conceptually foreclosing racialised and/or migrant labour inside capitalism's march towards social separateness can create a determining sense of the everyday. Rather, when we ground labour relations in lived experience and everyday scenes of coping, nuances emerge – of the masculinisation of cleaning, and more complex subjectivities of complicity or accommodation. This demonstrates the importance of grounding conceptual frameworks in the context-specific materiality of time, social relations, and location, to which this essay now turns.

Section 2:
The 'White World' of Parliament

'If I was somewhere else, I would not focus on this… We have to *bring* them the message, *get* them the message. If they introduce [into] law a night premium, they show their example.'[13]

The incongruence of feeling undervalued and unheard inside the very building designed to protect representative democracy is an inconsistency weighing heavily on the testimony of cleaners and CAIWU. Mounting their campaign inside the legislature, cleaners have a wider agenda in wanting to introduce a night premium and more standardised employment regulations into law, not just to their own contracts. It is therefore as much an institutional campaign as it is individual. Chapter 1 grappled with nuances of subjectivity in racial capitalism and more latent configurations of inequality characterised by a web of actors, manifesting in exhaustion, outsourcing, or feeling "squeezed". This entanglement can be articulated with new materialist approaches that consider agency as distributed across a network of human and non-human actors. This insight is important because both Parliament and cleaning itself draw attention to the materiality of space. Seeing Westminster as a spatial elaboration of the hierarchies discussed in Chapter 1 reminds us that state infrastructure can authorise material inequality. Engaging this insight, the following puts the experience of night cleaners in dialogue with racialised and female MPs in Parliament, drawing attention to how Parliament has invested inequality, while being uniquely democratic and contested ground.

'This establishment was not built for somebody like you in mind'.

When Diane Abbott arrived in Westminster in 1987, as Britain's first black, female MP, one of the immediate problems was space. Abbott had no desk or office, and her black visitors were regularly sent to the Stranger's Gallery rather than sent to her (Bunce and Linton 2020). Like other black MPs, including Keith Vaz, Bernie Grant, and Paul Boateng, she was frequently stopped by security guards when moving around Parliament because attendants did not believe she was an MP (*Ibid.*). Dawn Butler MP (2016) has recalled how, when using an 'MPs only' lift, a white, male MP told her that 'this lift really isn't for cleaners'. These anecdotes speak to the field of marks and racialised coding that black feminist scholars have argued constitute a central conundrum for black women, of being both visible and invisible (Spillers 1987: 65). As Puwar writes, the arrival of bodies who seem 'out of place' in public space is disorientating: 'People are "thrown" because a whole world view is jolted' by the presence of the unfamiliar inside familiar space (2004: 43).

For Sara Ahmed, what Puwar describes – of bodies standing out when out of place – 're-confirms the whiteness of space' (2007: 159). Whiteness here does not denote any ontological fixity, but to the coherence of 'repeated ways of inhabiting space'; Parliamentary space is oriented towards some bodies more than others, guiding them into aligning along certain lines. These lines, Ahmed writes, are drawn from the repetition of bodies following certain paths (Ahmed 2006: 16). However, there are also lines which divide space, so that bodies fall in or 'out of line' (66).

Parliament is characterised by numerous demarcations. Access restrictions operate as sites of exclusion that are important symbolically and literally. Kim Dovey (1999: 93) highlights how the way Parliament defines space is intended to mimic courtly society, regulating the distance between classes of people. Architecturally, it is divided along an axis separating the unelected, hereditary House of Lords from the House of Commons (Puwar 2010: 304). The racial profiling of Dawn Butler inside the lift is partly a result of the way these spatial configurations, of grade and seniority, have restricted access to lifts, toilets, dining rooms, and bars (there are 23 cafes, restaurants and bars). Similar demarcations operate when cleaners feel spatially marginalised, by the shutting of changing rooms at night for instance.[14] A ParliREACH Committee report (2019) unearthed institutional hierarchies and inequalities of access. It led to some (but not all) signage designating areas for 'peers and peeresses only', being removed. The over-representation of racialised and/or migrant employees in lower pay bands has meant that access rules have over time operated as guiding lines orienting space towards white, male bodies in Parliament. While diversity rhetoric may celebrate the progressive inclusion of minorities and women into politics, the embodied experience can be closer to that of a 'space invader' – being of and in a space, whilst not quite belonging to it (Puwar, 2004: 7). As Puwar's interviews found, the sensation of being out of place can lead to performative masquerading to 'fit in', or pressures

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to work harder than white colleagues to gain acceptance (145). It is futile attempting to fit in, writes Dawn Butler MP (2023), when 'this establishment was not built with somebody like you in mind'.

Colonial Space and Heritage: Some Historical Background

With that remark, Butler alludes to Parliament as a world that was already given before her arrival, as if feelings of exclusion were received as an inheritance. It resonates with what Franz Fanon wrote of the non-relationality of space and its intransigence to change – a 'white world' – which is inherited and shaped by colonialism (1967: 122). Without reifying Parliament as an institution, Fanon's insight into inheritance is useful in considering how repeated decisions over time have shaped Westminster.

Inheritance is important in this context because Parliament is also the seat of hereditary power. It is a product of historical 'lines' drawn over centuries demarcating not just political, but national, inclusion. The Palace of Westminster is cared for by UNESCO's World Heritage Forum. It was designed as an ode to patriotic tradition, evoking the national imagination through representing 'the grandeur of constitutional monarchy', British democracy, and 'English architectural references (UNESCO, n.d.). In Britain, these material and imaginative evocations of nationhood are indelibly linked to its history as the seat of imperial power. It is within these boundaries of the national imagination that the unease generated by the arrival of black men and women such as Dianne Abbott into privileged public space must be contextualised.

As an 'imperial city', London is an 'aesthetic manifestation' of the iniquitous power relationships of imperialism (Jazeel 2019: 65), and infrastructure such as Parliament often display the most tangible signs of colonialism. The present-day Palace was built in 1834, following a fire, and was partially rebuilt following its bombing during World War Two. These restorations coincide with two periods in British imperial history: the immediate aftermath of the abolition of slavery in 1833 at the height of empire, and the empire's ebb during postwar anticolonialism. Both restorations were likely financed by profits accrued from colonial trade. Walking through the Palace is a reminder of this predemocratic history: from the 232 works of art with links to the transatlantic slave trade (Syal 2020), whose trade was legalised by Parliament, to the Lord Speaker's woolsack seat, made from Commonwealth wool, and to the viewing galleries above both chambers where disenfranchised wives and sisters sat excluded from formal politics. These items belong to a heritage industry that welcomes millions of visitors a year, from whom it collects money and hopes to attract repeat visits. In this context, as Corrine Fowler (2021) points out, history easily becomes confused with public relations. Amidst ongoing debates over the proposed renovation of Westminster and in light of Butler's remarks, there is a need to revisit this predemocratic past in urgent service of Britain's contemporary and future multiculture (Gilroy 2004: 121).

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Parliament's heritage status denotes the need to conserve, and care for, its material integrity. I draw attention to this because dedicated in-house Heritage Cleaners are responsible for 'high profile' areas such as the statues, brassware, and libraries. This subset of cleaners are described as 'predominantly female, foreign-born, and fiercely proud of their work' (Fenwick 2021).. 'It's the history of our country' is how one heritage cleaner explained her pride in working at Westminster (*Ibid.*). This complicity in the heritage project is not shared by Cleaner X who epistemically distances himself from Westminster; 'they just want to conserve the building' is what he believes explains the differential status of heritage and contract cleaning. Any differential sense of institutional inclusion mattered less to him. It is difficult to see Parliament's preferential treatment of heritage cleaning as anything except a hierarchisation of their perceived contribution to the Estate, however. Cleaner Y, however, felt differently, saying that being employed in-house is 'like being part of the family'.[15]

15 Interview with Cleaner Y, 16 August 2023.

16 *Ibid.*

Parliament:
A Status Quo No Longer Tenable?

Even within my small sample, then, arise complex relationalities to Parliament, unsettling the foreclosure of a Fanonian 'white world'. If the normative lines making Parliament 'white' space are 'shaped by the repetition of bodily and social actions over time (Ahmed 2006: 66), then the repetition of bodies 'out of line' creates new 'lines of rebellion… that gather over time to create new impressions on the skin of the social' (18). This is an important insight because Parliament, as democratic space, is also uniquely vulnerable to contestations of state violence and exclusion. Recall the women who stormed the Chamber demanding enfranchisement, routinely breaching the viewing gallery's confines to protest their political exclusion. Recently, Parliament's heteropatriarchal orientation has been challenged by female MPs breastfeeding their babies in the Commons (Mason 2015). I would add to this the anecdotes I gathered from night cleaners; of 'sitting where the MPs sit' when staff have left,[16] and of covert tactics used to organise their union campaign.

There is perhaps an as yet unrealised opening for these alternative reconfigurations of parliamentary space amidst the public debate over its refurbishment. The heritage effort to clean and conserve Westminster's predemocratic remnants are rendered deeply ironic by the building's state of decay and disrepair. Parliament's outer walls are corroding, it caught fire forty times between 2008 and 2012, has sewage leaking throughout, and requires repairs at a minimum of £3.5 billion (Higgins 2017). It is a symbolic decline of a building that is, as this chapter explored, a stage for Britain's masculinised and hierarchical democratic rituals. They are traditions that construct desires for pomp and ceremony that its members do not need, while obstructing access to what workers do need – fire safety, sanitation, changing rooms, fair wages, and rest, to name a few. In debates over rennovation, some voices cling to Parliament's theatre and connection to British identity, those who fear a new space where they, too, feel like a 'space invader':

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'I think there is an agenda with restoration and renewal', says Conservative Sir Edward Leigh, for 'in kicking us out, the whole thing will change… If you are out for years, institutional memory will die very quickly' (*Ibid.*).

If that institutional memory is democratic, then incorporating those outsourced or marginalised by Parliament through acknowledging the everyday occupation of political space by a heterogeneity of people is one route to renewal.

Indeed, there is something redeemable in the way night cleaners are exhausting the democratic avenues possible *within* Parliament for their campaign, by approaching HR, strategizing how to lobby MPs, and writing a letter to the Speaker about the campaign:[17] a vernacular expression of the co-production of political space by multiple people. It speaks to how addressing complex inequalities requires a culture of care; caring for each other by more actively recognising latent inequalities and addressing them through careful reform. At the same time, the contradictory intertwining of democracy and capitalist political economy is embodied by night cleanings' outsourcing. Institutional apathy has acted as a fulcrum, permitting cleaners to look beyond the workplace and to broader-based alliances that democratic space seems to restrict.

Section 3:
Forging Protection and
Alternative Political Solidarities

Parliament's failure to represent its cleaners brings us to the present importance of 'indie' unions and worker-led movements for strengthening and protecting collective existence from racial capitalist rationalities. Indeed, the question of how democratic forces such as organised labour can gain a degree of control over public-private power in neoliberalism is perhaps central to political economy today. Parliament's cleaners and CAIWU are one of many recent worker-led campaigns against neoliberal restructuring and helps explain the forms of labour mobilisation that have emerged to challenge the status quo. These movements move beyond a narrow focus on workplace- or trade union-led forms of organising. Industrial disputes in precarious service sectors have been dominated by 'indie' unions, such as CAIWU, Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), and United Voices of the World (UVW). They are outside larger established unions and run against the grain of neoliberal atomisation (outlined in Chapter 1) that limit possibilities for labour organisation. This workforce's heterogeneity, in economic organisation, migratory and linguistic background, has challenged traditional forms of labour organising. Indeed, the history of 'indie' unions, oriented towards migrant, outsourced workers, is fissiparous in relation to established trade unions. Yet its success brings new hope for working-class collectivism. This final chapter explores unionisation among cleaners at Parliament, and CAIWU's activities generally, as something emergent and unifying amidst capitalism's rapacity for differentiation.

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Organising the 'unorganizable'

Labour organisation is difficult in any industry, but obstacles in heterogenous service sectors are particularly challenging. As outlined in Chapter 1, outsourcing and night work's asociality can atomise cleaners, through sub-contracting, short-term tendering processes, smaller workforces, and the related spatiotemporal dimensions of working away from one another. These factors make it harder for cleaners to organise than in the past. Historically, perhaps the most durable base for trade unionism was the coalfield. As Timothy Mitchell (2013) writes of coal's unique vulnerability to sabotage by miners:

> 'The power [of workers] derived not just from the organisations they formed, the ideas they began to share or the political alliances they built, but from the extraordinary concentrations of carbon energy whose flow they could now slow, disrupt or cut off.' (403).

Mitchell proceeds to argue that coal's replacement, oil production, is much harder for workers to disrupt because workforces are smaller, closely supervised above ground, and operated through tankers and pipelines, rather than railways. If space and infrastructure are pivotal to labour organisation, the heterogeneity and dispersal of night cleaning – its asociality and the complex inter-organisational relations characterising outsourced arrangements – might then preclude organisation. Cleaner X spoke of both spatial and legal barriers to union membership. Spread across shifts on the Parliamentary estate, there is no obvious place to meet and organise. Fear of disciplinary action prevents cleaners from openly discussing the campaign at work anyway. One cleaner described how his supervisor reported him to management when he overheard him discussing CAIWU with another employee.[18]

The history of Britain's trade unions is also one of gendered and racialised exclusion. Mitchell interlinks coal mining, unions, and modern democracy, yet ignores how the labour movement, since the nineteenth century, struggled to incorporate racialised and/or migrant segments of the working class (Virdee 2014). Paul Gilroy has discussed how British trade unionism is indelibly coloured by its history of colonialism, from which the 'white' working class has long derived economic benefits (Gilroy 1982: 305). The enhanced socioeconomic status of 'white' workers compared with racialised workers through the operation of racism has been abetted by the exclusionary practises of trade unions: they have 'failed to represent the interests of black workers, both abroad and at home, where black rank-and-file organisation has challenged local union and national union bureaucracy since the day the 'Empire Windrush docked' (*Ibid.*). The inability of the working class to overcome racist ideology, an institutional chasm between 'white' and non-white workers, leads Gilroy to dismiss Marx and Engel's (1977) belief in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. Rather, 'we must learn to live without a theological faith in the working class as either a revolutionary or an antiracist agent' (Gilroy 1990: 81). The same tendency towards differentiation can be observed in the identity-driven politics that came to dominate the

social movements of the late-twentieth century (Shukra 1997: 241).

CAIWU is an interesting case amidst this pessimism towards modern labour movements.

Its history highlights the fissures that have emerged in attempts to organise precarious service workers. Yet it also represents innovative forms of mobilisation that have re-energised organised labour. CAIWU's origins lie in a series of breakaways from larger unions. Firstly, the founders of the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS) left UNITE citing a 'lack of democracy' and joined the Cleaners' Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Political differences and 'limited control over their own resources' then led to a breakaway from IWW, to found IWGB in August 2012. Simultaneously, a group of outsourced workers of the '3 Cosas Campaign' working at the University of London broke away from UNISON in 2013 after feeling ignored and formed the University of London branch at IWGB. After more internal differences, members of the Cleaners and Facilities branch at IWGB left to set up CAIWU. These break aways, largely of independent unions from established unions appear, principally, to be over politics rather than policy. There has been resistance to larger unions' bureaucratic style of organisation, in which members have limited control over industrial disputes (Aslam and Woodcock 2020: 418). Larger unions, meanwhile, have been more reluctant to organise the (dis)organised, precarious workers, making 'indie' organisations particularly attractive to the migrant workers on outsourced contracts. Whilst UK trade union membership levels have not recovered from record lows in 2016, all 'indie' unions have seen growth (Smith 2022): CAIWU increased their membership from 684 in 2016 to 1,537 in 2021 (Gov.uk 2021a), and IWGB from 915 to 6,658 (Gov.uk 2022b). Thus, despite precarious working arrangements and an increasingly heterogenous workforce, cleaners at Parliament and elsewhere *are* organising across major cities.

A New Urban Vanguard?: CAIWU and Cleaners

Like CAIWU's recent member-led campaigns at the Royal Opera House and Nike Town, Parliament's cleaners approached the union themselves for assistance. Cleaner X, taking the lead in recruiting members, heard about CAIWU through another cleaner. He has never been part of a union but is a veteran of workplace disputes, having lobbied to receive the London Minimum Wage from Parliament's former contractor, Mitie, in the mid-2000s. Other cleaners, he says, were already union members before this campaign.[19] Indeed, Parliament's cleaners had already forged a small collective against the contractor before involving CAIWU, challenging pay roll mistakes and contract breaches, but approached the union for assistance as their employer was increasingly apathetic. A similarly worker-led campaign occurred not long ago at Amazon's offices near CAIWU's headquarters. Amazon's cleaners organised their own strike against the unfair dismissal of their supervisor; CAIWU were only

approached once cleaners had launched their own campaign – in lieu of unionisation, as one staff member emphasises during my second visit.[20] The generative power of these workers, therefore, is not solely trade union-led. What unions provide, however, are legal, administrative, and, importantly, wider social alliances to build bargaining power and prepare to fight disciplinary action. Having joined CAIWU, cleaners identify an improvement in Atalian's response to complaints, due to the union's legal scrutiny. They are now trying to recruit more cleaners into the union to strengthen numbers. Fears about disciplinary action are the most common reason why cleaners are reluctant to join.[21] However, I learnt also of cleaners wanting to join CAIWU, but being tied to memberships at other unions in the meantime.[22] Nevertheless, and in spite of their spatiotemporal dispersal, Parliament's cleaners have managed to forge networks during brief conversations before or after shifts and recruited colleagues outside of the workplace over WhatsApp.

Similarly, in overcoming the (dis)organisation of its members, CAIWU and other 'indie' unions have articulated their demands through innovative strategies which draw on tactics from a mix of social movement, official and unofficial industrial action, and employment tribunal claims. A key dimension of CAIWU's politics is forging collective, combative identities out of heterogeneity. Most of its members are migrants, some are relatively recent arrivals from countries in Latin America and Africa, outside of the Commonwealth and without the direct colonial link to Britain to which Gilroy earlier referred. These newer arrivals have often entered on more fluid and precarious migration statuses than previously, such as asylum seekers, temporary workers, and students, aggravating their job insecurity. Added to this, is outsourcing's co-production which distorts the more clear-cut hierarchies characterising the single employer model (Mori 2017). In 2017, when a night cleaner was injured whilst cleaning the kitchen, a court case had to decide whether Parliament or the contractor were liable for poor health and safety (Kirk 2017). The current campaign, therefore, is designed to address a multiplication of actors: the Parliamentary estate, Atalian Servest, and the moral conscience of Westminster's staff. At CAIWU, this heterogeneity is not deemed an impediment to solidarity, but provides ground for action. Whilst their principal aim is ending outsourcing, economistic class issues are not prioritised over the more totalising experience of being a worker who is also, say, a migrant or a woman. Their campaigns are not led by any material identity or animated by an essential Latin American of African identity. Instead, CAIWU operates through broader based alliances.

CAIWU has a larger agenda, casting workers' issues through lenses of community, immigration, housing, and education, over workplace-centred class interests. Membership entails concrete opportunities to learn about employment rights, immigration, tenants' rights and welfare entitlements alongside English language classes. This reflects a concern for members' lives beyond the workplace, addressing matters such as the position of migrants in the labour market and discrimination in wider society. The union's office in Fleet Street's MayDay rooms provide an opportunity for members' personal empowerment through affective relationships and community. Social events including film viewings, barbecues, and dancing, encourage members to make friends with fellow workers.

20 Visit to CAIWU office 27 July 2023.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Interview with Cleaner X, 11 August 2023.

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CAIWU's protest tactics are similarly broad. They combine traditional industrial action of strikes and picket lines outside the workplace, with social movement tactics such as systematic social media use on Twitter and Facebook, featuring interviews with members and videos of their marches. They find allies online from the media, gaining much of their traction from retweets that raise awareness of cleaners' conditions. Thematically, campaigns revolve around the word 'justice' as opposed to economic slogans, which broadens the remit of workers' struggle. They also incorporate street protests and marches, with the aim of obtaining support from members of the public, spectacles which are designed to 'make as much noise as possible' – featuring dancing, singing, and Latin American and African drums.[23] Solidarity is such that an industrial dispute with a particular workplace is engaged with by a broader alliance of members and other 'indie' unions, who attend each other's protests. This participatory culture is embedded in the structure of the union itself. It is a grass roots, strongly democratic, and multi-cultural organisation. Its member-led ethos entails a commitment to acting according to the decisions of its members, such that Parliament's cleaners have agency over their campaign and its direction. Established unions, whose members must show solidarity in the workplace and, if necessary, risk disciplinary action if a strike is voted, often develop bureaucratic structures. There is no hierarchy in decision-making here, but horizontal webs and circuits of power that connect members.

Mitchell felt that miners had a unique capacity to obstruct production. Industrial strikes by cleaners can cause similar levels of disruption (Willsher 2023), of literal blockages in sanitation which is, after all, a networked system. In cleaning movements driven to strike, the materiality of cleaning has become an important part in the making of its politicisation, and in this study it emerges from conflict over the institutional and valuative judgements of its labour, which in turn imbricate questions of race, gender, and anti-capitalist oriented 'justice'. Critical work on British trade unionism has been impoverished by an over-identification of the labour movement with white working-class mining and factory cultures, using the same narrow definitions of racialised identity that they struggle to overturn. Meanwhile, emphasis on the increasing dominance of differentiating economic rationalities over democracy and liberal concepts of 'justice' might find something redeemable in the 'indie' union movement, which recognises the messiness of affiliations that class or race alone cannot encompass.

Conclusion

'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.' (Vergès 2019).

Neoliberalism's rapacity for round-the-clock work and its pressures on work-life balance brings night work into representation because increasingly flexibilised work structures have elongated day into night. Vergès refers to this sense of accelerated time and its temporal inequalities, which resonate with this study's exploration of the accelerations/decelerations characterising night

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cleaners' lived time and mobility through space. Lived experience can remind us that such capitalist rationalities are not foreclosed possibilities; the case of Parliament's night cleaners have generative potential in bringing together everyday strategies of coping and unionised protection as ways of living through the contradictions of being outsourced inside representative space. The campaign speaks to the collective possibilities of racialised and/or migrant workers' struggle – to scrutinise webs of public-private power up and to contest these inequalities on multiple fronts that articulate intersecting issues, such as exhaustion, (im)mobility, race, gender, and institutional inequality.

The first chapter explored the ways racial capitalist modes of differentiation are lived in the everyday by Parliament's night cleaners. It introduced masculinity and nocturnality as conceptual elisions that can deepen understandings of labour stratification. But beyond this, are mundane strategies of coping and hopes for the future that reveal subjectivities within capitalist rubrics. Chapter 2 explored Parliament's place in the campaign, suggesting that cleaners' lived experience are imbricated in wider processes of differentiation that have materialised in space to codify exclusion/inclusion in formal politics. It revealed a particular generative irony in how democracy, shaped by colonial-era racial capitalist rationalities, takes on the terms of collectivity whilst futilely trying to foreclose the exclusion of 'others'. Finally, Chapter 3 reflected on the hopes of collective protection against racial capitalist modes of separateness and associated precarity. 'Indie' unions may not be a panacea for anti-racist and anti-capitalist activism. However, perhaps those who lament the lost momentum of BLM, the decline of the left, or the dominance of identity-driven politics, need not be so politically defeatist.

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