

Redeeming the “Ordinary Working Class”

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Introduction

In describing for the Sunday Telegraph what she envisaged to be Britain’s post-EU “shared society”, Prime Minister Theresa May (2017) explicitly placed the “ordinary working class” as its prime deserving constituency. May’s address, while not providing a sociological definition, nonetheless gave a clear sense of what, to her, counted as “ordinary”. The Prime Minister first detailed a set of social injustices linked to impoverishment, racism, and mental health. However, May argued in the following paragraph that the mission to build a “stronger, fairer Britain” had to go further. She then set aside those “obvious injustices” that she had just listed for a focus on the “everyday injustices that ordinary working class families feel are too often overlooked”. These injustices did not pertain to social exclusions and inequalities born from poverty, racism or disability but were rather related to income security and inter-generational social mobility. Effectively, May normalized the working class beneficiary of Brexit as a capable white family that sought to preserve its orderly independence.

Critical responses to the rise of right-wing populism in the Western World have done much to draw attention to the racialization of moral economies. It has become clear that the white working class is the fundamental constituency of contemporary populist imaginaries – a constituency unfairly left behind and now deserving of redemption from the vicissitudes of globalization including competition from non-white and/or migrant labour (for example Tilley 2017; Roediger 2017; Bhabra 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2017; Emejulu 2016; Sayer 2017). However, there is more to this story of redemption than the racialization of class per se. After all, when it comes to governing elites, current populist dispositions towards the white working class stand in stark contrast to previously prevailing social conservative dispositions towards the white underclass - a constituency primarily imagined as the poor, congenitally unemployed inhabitants of suburban council estates (see for example Hancock and Mooney 2013; Garner 2012).

It is not only remarkable that class has returned to the grammar of politics as an intractably racialized category – the white-working-class (Griffith and Glennie 2014); it is just as remarkable that the racialized moral opprobrium of the underclass has given way rhetorically and ideologically to a

racialized moral commitment to social justice for the ordinary working class. Of course, policies targeting the imagined underclass – for example Universal Credit – have in no way disappeared. Nonetheless, this recent shift in moral focus from a white *under*-class to a white *ordinary* working class remains under-examined and to some extent obfuscated by the recent turn towards (rightfully) highlighting the racialized nature of the category of “working class”. More critical reflection is needed to understand the way in which the imagined constituency of populist lore is worthy of redemption not just by virtue of their whiteness but of their white-ordinary-working-classness. This article seeks to provide one such historically-informed understanding.

In what follows I seek to build some of this reflective capacity by addressing the patriarchal and eugenicist evaluations of the worth of labour that underpin so much of Britain’s modern political-economic history. In a recent book, I have laid out an expansive genealogy of the racialization of the undeserving poor in Britain from abolition through to Brexit. Here, my intention is more humble: to present a series of key comparative moments in debates over social security and welfare provision - past and present - that demonstrate the centrality of labour’s “cooperative spirit” for political-philosophical debates over social security and welfare. To this end, I methodologically sketch out a set of political “grammars” that frame ethical quandaries and policy prescriptions through debates (for an overview see Hampsher-Monk 1984). I argue that these political grammars have variously apprehended the orderly or disorderly nature of labour’s cooperative spirit by reference to patriarchal and eugenic filiations. While the debates that I interrogate have no doubt utilized different terms and categories, their grammatical syntaxes resonate strongly. This gives cause to consider that the redemption of the “ordinary” working class requires the segregation of that class along imperial - and postimperial - lines of heredity.

In the first part of the article I engage with what might be termed the original redemption of the working class in British parliamentary politics via the 1867 Reform Act. I document how labour’s “cooperative spirit” – once feared as disorderly – was re-evaluated as a force for orderly independence owing primarily to the localized and patriarchal character of “friendly societies” and other such self-help organizations. I then turn to fin de siècle debates over the expansion of social security and welfare as a response to mass urbanization. Discussants of the 1911 National Insurance Act worried that such demographic shifts would undermine the localized and patriarchal nature of labour cooperation which gave the ordinary working class its redeemable qualities. I subsequently argue that the two mainstream political philosophies which sought to renew first Conservative then Labour politics in the 2000s - “Red Tory” and “Blue Labour” - owe much to fin de siècle debates,

especially the way in which they rhetorically redeem the ordinary working class as a constituency deserving of social justice.

In the second part of the article I reveal how, historically, such arguments about labour's cooperative spirit drew not only upon patriarchal but also eugenicist concerns born out of fin de siècle imperial politics. This was especially the case in the aftermath of the Boer war and the way in which the 1911 Act addressed the putative weakness of Britain's working stock. I then engage with William Beveridge's landmark 1942 report on social insurance and allied services. I demonstrate that his commitment to an even more expansive provision than the 1911 Act was a eugenicist one. Via Beveridge the attempt to preserve the localism and patriarchy of labour's cooperative spirit was folded into a eugenicist concern to preserve the most strategically valuable "stock" of imperial Britain. I then return to the political philosophies of Red Tory and Blue Labour and suggest that they provide contemporary articulations of this prior eugenicist concern. That is, the ordinary working class must be redeemed not just from welfare dependency but also from the degenerative presence of globalization's principle avatars: non-white commonwealth immigrants.

Labour's cooperative spirit

Key to the political grammar that allowed for a redemption of the working class in late 19th century British politics is the notion of labour's "cooperative spirit". But in order to explicate this notion, it is first necessary to engage with two central elements of 19th century conservative thought: the paternalism of Edmund Burke and the nationalism of Benjamin Disraeli. Of special importance is Burke's notion of the "little platoons", local, intermediary units in a paternalistic hierarchy that connected the lowest servant to the highest master (Burke 1910, 44). For Burke, this hierarchy preserved the patriarchal principle of property inheritance at the same time as it mitigated against the fracturing effects of private property ownership and the marketization of agriculture via the enclosure of common lands.

In his own era, Burke looked on with horror at the white revolutionary agents in France and the Black abolitionists in its Caribbean colony of St Domingue (see Wood 1999). These forces, for Burke, directly threatened the paternalistic principle of patriarchal hierarchy with an absolute and thus anarchical idea of individual freedom. Burke distinguished the revolutionary disorder of Black and French Jacobins from the orderly independence assured by the "little platoons", and which he considered exceptional to what we might term the "English genus" (see for example Burke 1796, 90). Genus, here, refers to a heritable root. I use this meaning purposefully as it links the patriarchal

legacies inherited and transmitted through birth to the later-day racialization of this root through eugenics, to which we shall presently turn.

Disraeli's importance arises from the passing, under his premiership, of the Second Reform Act of 1867. The Act effectively doubled the English and Welsh electorate by giving the vote to male urban householders and lodgers who paid more than £10 rent per annum, as well as to agricultural landowners and tenants with small land plots. The Act enfranchised what, in parliamentary members estimations, was a working population that demonstrated characteristics resonant with the principle of orderly independence – skilled, industrious, property owning or settled patriarchs.

The Act was a notable shift from the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, which had prohibited trade unionism for fear of the anarchical influence of revolutionary Jacobinism. And while sixty years later many still worried about the anarchy that might be unleashed with the entry of workers into parliamentary politics, Disraeli counted upon the paternalistic deference championed by Burke that supposedly made England “safe in the race of men who inhabit her ... [and] safe in her national character ... [and] in the traditions of a thousand years” (“Disraeli's Speech on the Reform Bill: 15 July 1867,” n.d.) Hence, after the decline of organized labour as an oppositional force (especially the Chartist movement), Disraeli proclaimed a new principle to conservatism: there was no longer “class struggle”, there was only “one nation”.

In the year that Disraeli drove through the Second Reform Act, John Ludlow, head of the Christian socialists, published a tract on the *Progress of the Working Class*. Ludlow imputed a special significance to the growth of “Benefit Societies, Building Societies, Industrial and Provident Societies, Working Men's Colleges, Working Men's Clubs and Institutes, etc.”, all of which generated “an ever-increasing number of meeting-points, material as well as moral, between class and class, which are gradually binding each to each by closer links of fellowship” (Ludlow and Jones 1867, 282). Co-operative values, for Ludlow (1867, 283), were responsible for the “growth of loyal national feeling among the working class”. The skilled, settled, patriarchal and orderly working class were now rhetorically filiated with the English genus.

I use the notion of “cooperative spirit” to represent this shift in political grammar away from the conception of working-class organization as a danger to England's hierarchical order towards an embrace of its orderly potential. And the logic of attributing a redemptive quality to labour cooperation can be demonstrated in two ways. The first is reflected in the influential work of Charles

Fay, a well-regarded public intellectual and economic historian in the first half of the 20th century. In his popular economic history of Britain, Fay repeated Ludlow's argument by identifying in friendly societies and cooperatives "the most conspicuous examples of English self-help" (Fay 1950, 406). Importantly, Fay located the wellspring of such organizations in provincial towns and villages, which were led by a "local spirit". In fact, Fay argued that in the "very large towns", where workers did not know each other "so intimately", the development of such self-help organizations was "relatively backward" (Fay 1950, 425, 427). This was especially the case in London, the centre of which was "barely touched" by this spirit even as late as 1914. Hence, for Fay, the embrace of labour's cooperative spirit was at the same time an embrace of the localized and personal relations that provided for mutual self-help.

Fay was an advocate of women's rights. And we should not forget that the cooperative movement had initially opened a radical space for non-patriarchal sexual and economic relations. But - and this is the second way in which the logic of labour's redemption was expressed - that space was quickly shut down. As they came together, artisans tended to defend their crafts by alluding to patriarchal respectability and arguing that work demeaned women's morality and reduced the ability of men to provide for their family (Rose 1993, 155). Take, for instance, one contributor to the *Trade's Newspaper* in 1825 who agitated for the withdrawal of women and children from the labour market so as to "establish the authority of fathers" and make "each man responsible for the comfort, respectability, and the education of his family" (Clark 1997, 203).

It was, then, the injection of localism and patriarchy into labour's cooperative spirit that was logically deemed to provide a quality of *orderly* independence, thus making this spirit cognitively reconcilable with Burke's "little platoons". By such logic the skilled and settled working class family enfranchised in 1867 was rendered "ordinary" in political grammar through its orderly filiation with the English genus. Meanwhile, to the extent that their circumstances promoted disorderly behaviour, such as idleness, licentiousness and vagrancy, the unskilled, casual, or unemployed worker enjoyed no such filiation to the ordinary – orderly independent – working class. Increasingly occupying urban slums, this grouping was given the label of a "residuum": a left behind.

But by the second half of the 19th century, Britain's working population was experiencing a general demographic shift into urban conurbations. To commentators of the time it was not at all clear whether labour's cooperative spirit could be preserved in an unforgiving urban milieu without some form of social assistance to support its orderly independence. With this challenge in mind, I want to

turn to the political philosophies of Helen Bosanquet of the Charity Organization Society and Beatrice Webb of the Fabians. Both intellectuals (and their husbands) were key protagonists in fin de siècle debates over the urban poor and welfare reform, and both predicated their arguments on the orderly independence promoted by labour's cooperative spirit.

In 1904 Bosanquet wrote *The Strength of the People*, a text that underlined the importance of charitable interventions in the alleviation of urban poverty. Bosanquet (1902, 168–70) attributed much of the strength of labour in the nineteenth century to the growth of friendly societies, co-operatives and trade unions. But Bosanquet also spoke to the problematic contrast between “town and country”. Why is it, she (1902, 103) asked, that “we accept it as a sort of law of nature that in the country a man can bring up a family successfully upon half what is considered the Poverty Line in London?” Bosanquet's (1902, 104–7) answer was that the urban working class husband had “missed the interests and companionship and assistance which should have come to him from his friendly society or trade union or co-operative store”. Having only ever been a dependent – rather than co-instigator - of aid, the husband had degraded his character – and the moral standing of his family - to the point where he could not function as a patriarch.

In her influential tract on the cooperative movement, Beatrice Webb (née Potter) argued that the cooperative spirit had “one aim and one motive: ... the desire on the part of a majority to regulate and to limit the exploitation of their labour by a powerful and skilled minority” (Potter 1904, 39). Yet Webb attached this movement for social justice to a distinct line of heredity. Specifically, she compared the history of revolution in France - the “complete separation of the higher and lower orders, leading inevitably to anarchy and despotism” - with the emergence in England of the “new spirit” of association (Potter 1904, 38). Webb followed this “inborn capacity of Englishmen for self-government” through the religious dissent of the eighteenth century into the mutual improvement clubs, benefit societies and union shops of the nineteenth century (Potter 1904, 36–38). Despite being a Fabian, Webb concurred with one-nation conservatism by filiating labour's cooperative spirit to the English genus.

Nonetheless, Beatrice and Sydney Webb (1891) differed to the charity approach by agitating for a stronger role for public administration regarding the preservation of labour's cooperative spirit in the urban milieu. Their solution was to engender a “municipal patriotism”. The Webbs' shift in focus speaks to the fact that industrialization had mooted new scales and modes of social interventions away from the localised and patriarchal styles heretofore implicated parish relief. For example,

James O' Grady's presidential address to the Trades Union Congress in 1898 argued that "if... the national prosperity depends on the well-being of the worker, the necessarily corollary is that the state should care for him in sickness" (Mallalieu 1950, 56). Additionally, during this era the idea that unemployment had to be addressed as an impersonal, national problem, grew in favour across the political spectrum and complicated the traditional focus upon moral character, a focus that was central to the late 19th century redemption of the ordinary working class (see Taylor 2015).

Both the Bosanquets and the Webbs struggled to answer the same fundamental question: would the national dispensation of social insurance and poor relief along impersonal, administrative lines undermine efforts to embed the localized and patriarchal cooperative spirit within urban labourers? Debate over this question was met through the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, which gathered evidence between 1905 and 1909. The commission split into a majority report, effectively taking the Charity Organisation Society's position (see for example B. Bosanquet 1910), and a minor report espousing the Fabian view, one that they had previously published (Fabian Society 1891). The Bosanquets believed that their paternalistic model of regular home visits would substitute for direct involvement by family members in cooperative enterprises. Alternatively, the Webbs' "municipal patriotism" advocated a far more impersonalised administration of reform efforts (Vincent 1984, 347).

These lines of tension – between the local and paternalistic, and the national and impersonal - ultimately influenced the administrative structures of the National Insurance Act of 1911. Evident in the new structures was an attempt to balance, on the one hand, the introduction of a rationalised national governance structure and, on the other, the preservation of the localised and patriarchal bases of self-help (see for example Jose Harris 1992, 78). In a compromise, the Act placed the public administration of the insurance scheme with existing friendly societies.

Those who debated and implemented the first National Insurance Act hoped that the dependencies introduced by the national provision of security and welfare might be mitigated by the retention of labour's cooperative spirit as a force for orderly independence. Thus, integral to the debate over a more expansive pursuit of social justice was the preservation of a line of heredity to the English genus. Socialists and conservatives at least agreed on this. Similar agreements appear in a quite different context to which I now turn - the years leading up to the Brexit vote.

The political philosophies of Red Tory and Blue Labour developed as responses to the electoral success and subsequent failure of New Labour. In the aftermath of Margaret Thatcher's removal from power, David Willetts, former director of her Centre for Policy Studies, sought to refashion the Tory image by restating a conservative vision of "community" (Hickson 2013, 411). Rather than a singular obsession with marketization, Willetts (1998) argued that the conservative tradition was based on a "creative tension" between the belief in individual freedom and property ownership, and the commitment to "maintain the institutions which hold our nation together".

In the mid-2000s, Jesse Norman, with help from journalist Janan Ganesh, built upon Willett's suggesting by sketching out the contours of a "compassionate conservatism". Taking his cue explicitly from Burke and his defence of the "little platoons", Norman feted the intermediary institutions that lay between the individual and state – the family, church and guild. These intermediaries generated "a tribal feeling of belonging", and an associative spirit based on affection and friendship (Norman and Ganesh 2006, 42, 46). They also embodied "the collective experience of previous generations" which, suggested Norman (2006, 47), often outstripped "the wisdom of those who would reform them". Crucially, in exemplifying this wisdom, Norman turned to nineteenth century labour cooperatives, specifically, friendly societies that in his estimation provided for a "spirit of self-reliance and mutual support ... [and] discouraged reliance on charity and on state provision."

This conservative embrace of labour's co-operative spirit was especially evident in Philip Blond's contemporaneous promotion of the "Red Tory". After Thatcher's market megalomania and New Labour's bureaucratic engineering, Blond believed that a re-enchantment of social bonds was necessary. Taking a cue from theological debates, Blond turned to the English tradition of Christian socialism (see Coombs 2011). Focusing on moral critique and personal character improvement, instead of Marx's "scientific socialism" with its secular prophesy of unavoidable class conflict, Blond (2010, 9–11) was at pains to present the working class as a moral force and an integral element of Britain's "organic culture". Similar to Norman, Blond (2010, 13–14) narrated a grand tradition of working class organization, springing from localized associations, running through the London Corresponding Society, to the Chartists, and to the Friendly Societies and Cooperatives.

Despite different contexts and terminologies, the political grammar utilized by the Bosanquets and Webbs resonate with the grammars deployed by Norman and Blond. All pivot around redemptive notions of labour's cooperative spirit, its patriarchal heredity and thus orderly independence. All find the best examples of this spirit in friendly societies and other such organizations; all speak of

localized networks of self-help that are organic to the English genus. Crucially, as was the case with the Charity Organization Society, so did Blond and Norman identify the nationalization of security and welfare as a force destructive of labour's cooperative spirit, producing instead a "suppliant citizenry dependent on the state". Indeed, both deemed the post-war welfare state to have destroyed the "indigenous traditions of working-class self-help, mutuality and social insurance" (Blond 2010, 15; Norman and Ganesh 2006, 47–48).

As the new party leader, David Cameron rhetorically claimed labour's cooperative spirit for the Conservative tradition. In 2007, he launched Norman's Conservative Co-operative Movement in Manchester, proclaiming the cooperative principle of "strong independent institutions, run by and for local people" to be a historical inspiration for the reforms to public services that he planned (ultimately to manifest in the 2011 Localism Act) (Cameron 2007). Two years later, in his 2009 Hugo Young lecture, Cameron explicitly endorsed Blond's Red Tory philosophy. There, he advocated for a "big society" that would, in part, incorporate the tradition of "self-improvement, of mutuality, of responsibility" promoted by "the co-operatives, the friendly societies, the building societies, the guilds".

With the end of the Blair/Brown era, it was the turn of Labour to undertake a soul searching of its roots. Maurice Glasman, political theorist and long-time Labour member, attended to this task. Glasman believed that "distinctive labour values" were "rooted in relationships" and in practices that strengthened "an ethical life" (Glasman 2011, 14). The historical exemplars he provided were, as was the case with Norman and Blond, the 19th century co-operatives and unions (2011, 14–15). In this way, Glasman argued that the party's tradition featured a strong conservative concern with the "preservation of status" and "an attachment to place". Given these historical and political coordinates, I would claim that Glasman's appreciation of labour's cooperative spirit is explicable through the political grammar that provided for the fin de siècle debates discussed above. And while Glasman (2011, 27) only glosses Burke, nonetheless, his sensibility towards labour's cooperative spirit was clearly Burkean - a force of orderly independence that fortified the English genus.

Recall that Burke and later-day celebrants of friendly societies identified in the English genus a fundamentally localized *and* patriarchal composition. It is interesting to note, in this respect, that Glasman used the metaphor of the family to demonstrate Labour's tradition of radicalism-tempered-by-conservatism. Glasman suggested that the Labour Party was the child of a "cross-class marriage between a decent working-class Dad and an educated middle-class Mum". The Dad represented

“the trade unions, the co-operative movement, and the building societies and mutuals”; the Mum represented the Fabian Society (the Webbs etc.) and all the “ruling-class” public servants connected to the labour movement with “ambitious plans for government”. In short, Dad was a traditional preserver of the “common good”; Mum, a progressive idealist (Glasman 2011, 21–22). The ordinary working class family thus channelled social justice through a commitment to orderly independence.

Norman and Blond saw in the provision of universal welfare the corruption of working class worthiness. So too did Glasman. After 1948, in his estimation, “universal benefit replaced mutual responsibility” and the national compact between government, business and labour placed “managerial prerogative as the fundamental principle of organization” (Glasman 2011, 29). Specifically, Glasman argued that the post-war settlement consolidated Dad’s loss of power at work, while power in the home was ceded to Mum as the Labour Party became dominated by “middle-class policy technocrats”. With this history presented, Glasman argued that if Labour wished to develop a “good society” rather than merely a “big society”, the party would have to give power back to Dad. Only in this re-balancing could relationships of “reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity [be built] all the way up and all the way down, in politics and within the economy” (Glasman 2011, 27).

So, while Norman and Blond were keen to give room for labour self-organization (Red) within the Conservative’s focus on character, Glasman was keen to give room to the conservative character within labour co-operation (Blue). In both ways, and despite their critiques of the “welfare state”, Red Tory and Blue Labour redeemed the ordinary working class as moral subjects who deserved social justice. Their deserving nature was evaluated through the same political grammar that framed the fin de siècle debates: the localism and patriarchy of labour cooperation guaranteed an orderly independence that enabled its affiliation to the English genus. In short, redemption for the ordinary working class required social justice to be directed through a line of heredity. In the following section I will return to both sets of debates in order to tease out their eugenic and imperial dimensions.

Labour’s eugenics

By the second half of the 19th century, the English genus began to take on a pronounced biological definition. In 1863, Francis Galton famously announced his science of biological heredity to the world: eugenics. Galton himself was an early proponent of the idea that urban living quickened the degeneration of a populations stock (MacKenzie 1976, 513, 515). Indeed, eugenics spoke early-on – and intimately so – to the problem of preserving labour’s cooperative spirit in the industrial urban

milieu. For, as Dorothy Porter (1991) argues, eugenics did not necessarily promote a Nazi-like aim of eradicating gene pools. Eugenacists also aimed to prevent the degeneration of good stock through “social hygiene” interventions into education, health, sanitation, habitation and food (see Jones 1986).

Debates that I recounted in the first part of this article also assayed the expansion of social security and welfare through a eugenicist sensibility. Moreover, concerns over the degeneration of national stock necessarily intersected with concerns over Empire’s integrity. The Boer War proved a pivotal moment in this regard. Between 1899 and 1902 hundreds of thousands of troops from across the empire were required to save Britain’s dominion in South Africa from rebellion. And it was widely believed that up to 60% of English volunteers were rejected due to physical fitness (MacKenzie 1976, 515; see in general Semmel 1968). The realization, in the context of increased inter-imperial competition, that British rule was dependent on the vitality of its overseas imperial stock shocked most parties of the political establishment.

In 1904 the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration reported on their inquiry into the “deterioration of certain classes of the population as shown by the sizable percentage of rejections for physical causes of recruits for the Army”. The report principally addressed itself to the problem of a “deterioration of the race” and explicitly refuted the Social Darwinian position of letting the unfit die for an embrace of eugenicist interventions (Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration 1904, 81). Additionally, the report argued that urbanization had produced “consequences prejudicial to the health of the people”, and advocated social hygiene policy in terms of housing, environment and employment.

Central to such interventions was the integrity of the family unit. Karl Pearson, protégé of Galton, lectured in 1900 on the connection between domestic eugenics and imperial integrity. “Selection of parentage”, he argued, “is the sole effective process known to science by which a race can continually progress” (Stone 2001, 409). In 1907, John Frederick Sykes, Medical Officer of Health for St Pancras, London, claimed that “if we intend to remain an imperial race, we must restore to its imperial place the dignity of motherhood” (Porter 1991, 170). Miscegenation was an unavoidable concern when it came to motherhood and racial integrity, as argued by Robert Rentoul, another eugenicist and member of the Royal College of Surgeons (Stone 2001, 399). So too was the mental competency of mothers to bring up children in an orderly fashion (Jones 1986, 29).

These eugenic concerns over social and racial hygiene were influential to the crafting of the 1911 National Insurance Act. Take, for instance, the unemployment provision of the Act, which focused on specific industries – building, construction, shipbuilding, mechanical engineering, iron founding and construction of vehicles and saw milling (Porritt 1912, 279). These trades were not only cyclical in nature (hence lending themselves to the necessity of insurance) but just as importantly were capital-intensive and required high-skill levels from their labourers. By focusing on these trades the Act sought to ensure that the skilled worker – the best of the breed - would not become destitute and degenerate into the residuum that occupied the slums of cities. Consider, also, the fact that married female labourers were excluded from nearly all provisions on the assumption that their earnings were supplementary to their husband's wage (Thane 1978, 33). This act of omission ensured that labouring women would not be able to recuse themselves of their imperial patriarchal duty to raise good English stock.

I am arguing that national welfare manifested not just as a patriarchal but eugenicist enterprise. Even the young William Beveridge subscribed to eugenics. It was the “dysgenic effects” of the less-civilized urban industries that, in Beveridge's opinion, produced a “degenerate posterity” (José Harris 2003, 104). Good stock could be identified as those who practiced labour's cooperative spirit and transmitted this spirit to their children; bad stock pertained to those who had not been so sanctified – the urban population's dependents, vagrants, unskilled casual workers, and bad parents. Beveridge developed his philosophy of universal social security and welfare as a means by which to preserve good working stock and ameliorate bad stock.

Within this eugenicist framework, Beveridge continued the debate begun by the Bosanquets and Webbs and sought to tread the fine line between consolidating the national administration of insurance, avoiding the degeneracy of dependency, and preserving labour's cooperative spirit via the principle of voluntarism - a force for orderly independence. As a partial solution to the tensions evident in the 1911 Act, Beveridge cleaved strongly to the principle of a national minimum of living standards. This principle allowed for a cooperative enterprise to be struck between state responsibility and self-help (Beveridge 1948, 8–9). It was the stipulation of a minimum rather than maximum that incentivised each man to make extra provisions for his family by voluntary insurance or saving (Beveridge 1944, 12).

Throughout all his moral and social calculations, Beveridge (1943, 36) clearly accepted the heredity principle of family and its production of inequality of opportunity along distinctly “race or class”

terms, in so far as “more capable parents will have more capable children”. By supporting the family unit, Beveridge (1943, 36) refused to accept that he was articulating a “doctrine of aristocratic exclusiveness”. Rather, he argued, the state had to be conceived of as the “general parent of all children”, one that would intervene only when the natural family failed. Notable in Beveridge’s argument was a desire to address equality of opportunity in eugenicist terms: good stock would be encouraged to breed, while bad stock would be ameliorated through state intervention.

This was precisely his argument for universal children’s allowance (Beveridge 1943, 150). Preparing for his Galton lecture to the Eugenics Society in 1943, Beveridge noted that such allowance would support “the skilled wage earners”, who represented “probably the largest store of heritable ability in the country and a store which it is vital to keep as large as possible” (Beveridge 1943, 159–60). Addressing the tendency for the more-skilled and more-affluent to have less children, Beveridge (1943, 152) argued that it was not important that universal provision might give support to the “thrifless and careless”. Instead, what mattered most was that the “economic system shall no longer be such as to favour breeding from those who are less successful than from those who are more successful in rendering services to the community” (Beveridge 1943, 161).

I noted above that the eugenic turn was very much driven by a concern for empire’s integrity. In this sense, those worried about the strengthening of Britain’s working stock not only looked inwards to the society’s demographic shifts, but also outwards to the position of Britain at the apex of an imperial hierarchy. Social justice, in the form of expanded insurance and welfare provisions, was tasked to strengthen a line of heredity – the English genus – that was considered exceptional not only amongst other European civilizations but also amongst the populations of its own Empire. Beveridge’s understanding of the eugenicist project likewise approached the strengthening of the English genus as a conjoint domestic and imperial endeavour.

So on the one hand, Beveridge’s apprehension of social justice mapped onto the moral economy associated with “one nation” conservatism wherein class struggle was said to have been subsumed by affiliation to the English genus. In an address at Oxford in 1942, Beveridge spoke of post-war planning in terms of prioritising Britain’s own challenges, and by addressing specifically the needs of the British worker. “It’s often been said”, he noted in an aside to Marx, “that the worker has no country. That has never been true of British workers” (1943, 94). On the other hand, Beveridge (1943, 150) explicitly framed the beneficiaries of universal insurance and welfare in eugenicist terms as the “British race”. Indeed, he affirmed “pride of race” to be “a reality for the British as for other

people”, who had a duty to “maintain their breed at its best” (Beveridge 1943, 161). Beveridge’s overriding concern was that at its “present rate of reproduction” the race could not continue (Beveridge 1943, 150). Hence, mothers had “vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and British ideals in the world” (José Harris 2003, 402). In both these ways, then, Beveridge segregated the beneficiaries of social justice along eugenic lines of heredity.

In this respect, I do not consider the neo-conservative turn in the late 1970s towards a “new racism” to be a replacement of eugenics by culturism. Eugenics – as heredity – always comprised a cultural dimension given the importance of nurturing and mothering to its political application. For instance, the 1943 report by the Hygiene Committee of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare, entitled *Our Towns*, introduced into the eugenicist lexicon the term “problem families” (see Macnicol 1987); and by the early 1970s, Margaret Thatcher’s senior colleague, Keith Joseph, talked in the same language of “cycles of deprivation” – a purported inter- generational transmission of poverty through problem families. Indeed, Joseph’s (1974) directly eugenicist allusion to the degeneration of “our human stock” is what made his bid for Conservative Party leadership untenable, thus in part opening the door for Thatcher.

A cognate moral segregation of the beneficiaries of social justice is evident within the political philosophies of Red Tory and Blue Labour, albeit expressed at a very different moment in British history. If Beveridge and others worried about the possible degenerate effects of expanded social security and welfare entitlements upon the ordinary working class, Red Tory and Blue Labour concerned themselves with how to redeem this class in the aftermath of such a degeneration. And if Beveridge commented upon an imperial context, Red Tory and Blue Labour spoke to a postimperial postmulticultural context, wherein the racialization of the English genus was articulated principally by a moral panic over non-white immigration from Britain’s Commonwealth.

This racialization is relatively clear amongst Red Tories. Norman’s (2006, 53–54) compassionate conservatism, for example, essentialised the “British experience” into an “island story” with all its racializing connotations including, even, the erasure of Ireland. Blond’s racialization is slightly more convoluted. Firstly, he argued that the welfare state “shattered the vivid communal life of the urbanised white working class” (Blond 2010, 16). Secondly, he claimed that New Labour’s management of social cohesion, especially via anti-discrimination legislation, replaced an “old paternalism” with “identity politics”, thus disengaging the new left from “the needs of working-class people”. By this sequence of argumentation, Blond effectively conjoined the destruction of labour’s

cooperative spirit via welfare dependency with the governing elite's failure to protect the English genus from dilution by non-white immigrants.

In both cases, the ethical task of the Red Tory was to redeem the distinctly "indigenous" working class tradition of collective self-help to mitigate against this class's long-term economic neglect and political disengagement. Such a task necessitated a political grammar that constricted social justice to a singular line of heredity.

What of Blue Labour? Immigration – and anti-immigration sentiment - is more subtly mobilized in Glasman's redemption of the ordinary working class. To be fair, Glasman (2011, 18) positively embraced immigration from Europe to Britain, albeit in so far as it constituted the "grandparents" of the labour movement with the arrival of non-established churches. In recounting his work on the Living Wage campaign with London Citizens, Glasman even acknowledged the impact of Muslim alongside non-conformist faith groups in the scoping out of the project.

Nevertheless, immigration was negatively implicated in Glasman's criticism when he took New Labour to task for its inability to communicate to the traditional working class. While deriding New Labour's attenuation of the redistributive ethic to mere "equality of opportunity", Glasman (2011, 14) bemoaned the abstract and implicitly out-of-touch nature of values linked to this ethic, such as "freedom" and "equality". Reflecting on this shifts in register, Glasman (2011, 24) claimed that New Labour replaced the "specific language from within the political traditions of our own country" with generic notions of "justice" and "fairness" that would resonate in any country.

The substance of "tradition", for Glasman, would be best supported by the integrity of family life and the upholding of the common good. Yet tradition was precisely what is undermined when abstract, rootless principles of plurality and diversity were promoted in the service of economic globalization (Glasman 2011, 26–27). By these logics, Glasman's argument implied that New Labour's refusal to provide a meaningful politics of redistribution also denied the Party an ability to communicate with its core constituency, the "traditional" working class. And in this way, Glasman shared the Red Tory criticism that the language of social justice spoken in parliamentary politics was no longer understandable to the indigenous population.

But what, we might ask, of the bearers of these so-called abstract values – immigrant workers, the majority of whom at the time Glasman was writing in 2011 were non-European and politically

marked by their non-whiteness? The grammar of Glasman's argument, unless specifically corrected otherwise, infers that non-white immigrants undermine English tradition, or at least, a deeper commitment from the governing class to social justice. For instance, Glasman (2011, 23) made a strong plea for the labour movement to return from managerialism and neoliberalism back to the value system of the grandparents – that is, to a non-conformist faith base. Only with this return might love and reciprocity be rekindled between Mum and Dad. But despite Glasman's practical knowledge to the contrary, the faiths of non-white immigrants – especially Islam - remained logically excessive to this English/European faith-based lineage of the labour tradition.

I do not charge Norman, Blond, or Glasman with visceral racism or with an aversion to immigrants' rights; and I regret the lack amongst many contemporary pundits of a basic fluency in historical and philosophical understandings of race. Nonetheless, I am arguing that the "red" in Tory and the "blue" in Labour reference a small-c conservative working class tradition of orderly independence, a co-operative spirit of labour that intrinsically affiliates to the English genus, thereby racializing the ordinary working class as white heredity. In past debates, this heredity had an avowedly eugenicist meaning linked to the function of universal welfare to preserve Empire's most strategically valuable working stock. The language of Red Tory and Blue Labour are, of course, not directly eugenicist. Yet their fantasies about the redemption of the working class from the ravages of the global market, including its avatars in the form of immigrants, share the same grammar.

Moreover, precisely this redemption was rhetorically offered by Theresa May's recent version of "one nation" conservatism, predicated upon the centrality of the "ordinary working class family" in Britain's post-Brexit society. The political grammar of Red Tory (via Blond) and Blue Labour (via David Goodhart channelling Glasman) were used to frame May's platform principally by Nick Timothy, her previously close advisor (Asthana 2017). It is also the grammar that framed May's (2017) vision of a post-Brexit shared society, which subtly separated the injustices suffered by the abject poor, the non-white immigrant and resident, and the mentally ill from the deeper commitment to salvage the "ordinary working class". That eugenicist language is not deployed by the Prime Minister does not infer the absence of its deeper determining logic.

Conclusion

As political philosophies, Red Tory and Blue Labour have failed to gain any direct traction in policy making. Their immediate importance lies more as cardinal reference points for the way in which the

horizon of social justice must be gleaned post-Brexit. In this postimperial and postmulticultural era of resurgent right-wing nativist populism it is notable that prominent left and right political philosophies have attenuated the ordinary working class to an orderly line of heredity. While it is another task to undertake sociological inquiries into the causes and consequences of this delineation, a first-order task is to orient towards these reference points. This has been the purpose of this article: to sketch a political grammar of the “ordinary”. For it is the “ordinary” as much as the “white” that has welded labour’s cooperative spirit to the integrity of imperial and post-colonial orders. Furthermore, it is notable that the tumultuous debates over Brexit did not feature any significant innovation in the ideological or rhetorical articulation of the “ordinary”. Indeed, the post-EU subject of social justice presented by Theresa May is articulated along lines of heredity that recognisably speak to past imperial grammars. Writing in April 2019, at a time when May’s parliamentary authority seems in tatters, I would nevertheless conjecture that her use of the “ordinary working class” to underwrite her tenure will remain fundamental to the political grammar of post-Brexit Britain.

It might be tempting to imagine that the recent return of social justice to the diet of political debate presents an opportunity for the left to leverage the right by appealing to the lowest common denominator – the ordinary working class. This is understandable. There is a blunt demographic fact that constitutes many western societies: the numerate majority of the working class belong to white families. Being that the left traditionally espouses a universal commitment to overcome inequality, exploitation and oppression, it could seem strategically logical to fete the majority. Yet demographic “facts” do not emerge outside of a moral economy wedded to the defence of political order. Before it becomes a demographic fact, the ordinary working class has already been filiated to lines of heredity. Thus, justice for the ordinary working class cannot open the way to justice for all; their justice demands partiality towards other working classes. It is notable that Jeremy Corbyn’s tenure has in no way displaced Labour’s reliance upon the “ordinary working class” as the subject of social justice. For example, just as I finish writing this article, Emily Thornberry, shadow foreign secretary, has expressed a commitment to the ending of freedom of movement – the red line that has acted as May’s lodestar for the parliamentary and EU debates of the last two years.

In this article I have critically interrogated the grammars that have justified the redemption of the ordinary working class, past and present. Within these syntaxes, it is not possible to distinguish a radical ideology of labour cooperation from the platitudes of one-nation conservatism. Nor is it possible to identify a principle of universality in social security and welfare provision that is not

already embedded in a eugenicist project. Hence social justice for the ordinary working class can neither be radical nor universal. Might we then need to turn to the “extraordinary” working classes – those unaffiliated, expunged or degenerated - the “motley crew” (see Linebaugh and Rediker 2001) that appears with such dignity in the aftermath of the fire at Grenfell Tower? What would it take to consider the population of that post-code the “ordinary working class”? To my mind, only by meeting this hermeneutical challenge might the movement for social justice glean a horizon that is as expansive as the powers that seek to decimate public goods and dissolve the public ethos. And only then would the ordinary working class be deserving of redemption.

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