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In On Burnley Road: Class, Race and Politics in a Northern English Town, Mike Maikin-Waite, an officer for Burnley Council between 1995 and 2018, develops a personally inflected local history exploring the 2001 Burnley riots, the rise of the BNP and the disintegration of the “Red Wall” in 2019. Weaving together a narrative of imperial decline, de-industrialisation and managed state neglect, Maikin-Waite explores the construction of local white nationalisms and develops recommendations for political strategies against the far right. Centred around a useful elucidation of local state activity, a granular account of New Labour cohesion policy and the rise of UKIP, Maikin-Waite’s own on-the-ground experiences are adeptly woven into a thoroughly researched historical account which grounds its analysis of conceptions of whiteness and rising fascism within a long view of British colonialism. But a reluctance to consider how the ‘repatriation of colonial habits to the no-longer-imperial core’ (Gilroy 2021:9) applies specifically to the racism of the British state and police, risks blurring key arguments about the Burnley riots and the ways in which the state promotes destructive articulations between constructed categories of race and criminality.

On Burnley Road’s analysis is strongest when interrogating the machinations of party-political wrangling and the grinding contexts of de-industrialisation and local funding cuts. Reading the histories of local council bureaucracy and national policy initiatives in tandem, the book connects Thatcherite and New Labour de-industrialisation and draws out a narrative of managed decline in which state funding initiatives were decimated, then replaced by PFIs, before the osteoporotic skeleton of the local state was further weakened by Coalition austerity. For Makin-Waite, this material diminution is central to creating the ‘political space’ for the rise of the far right, describing how racist politicians worked to associate residents of Asian heritage with decline, bolstering segregationist housing policy, dividing schools and further racialising divisions of labour and unemployment. The book is clear that all parties were complicit, that the consistent failure of Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors to fight the racist principles and malpractice of right-wing independents, BNP and UKIP, reproduced racial differentiation and stratification at all levels of the local state. Makin-Waite’s approach is self-reflexive: the detailed accounts of race relations mediation programmes are counterpoised with authorial reflections on (helpfully footnoted) strands of political economy that inform his judgements on these programmes’ political and ethical value. This methodological approach cracks open the workings of local political formations to explain how national schemes, council initiatives and personal interventions entwine or conflict to shape policy.

Importantly, the book cements these insights within historic accounts of how the British imperial state violently constructed ideas of white identity through the colonially fuelled built environments of northern industrial towns, and how these discourses were reanimated into affectual and symbolic systems of post-colonial melancholia, to be recoded and re-entrenched by successive Labour and Conservative governments. These narratives are illuminated by connection to Robbie Shilliam’s discussion of the ongoing construction of the constituency of the “white working class” and the political ‘bid to retain a singular, racialised filiation to the English genus’ (Shilliam 2018:123), a group ‘produced and reproduced through struggles to consolidate and defend British imperial order’ (Shilliam 2018:6). Shilliam’s focus on racial ‘order’ is important, and when brought into
conjunction with *Burnley Road’s* description of the disorder of the 2001 riots, highlights a conceptual omission in the Makin-Waite’s analysis: of how the ever-growing carceralisation of the local state apparatus forcibly constructs oppressive racial categorisations. The Introduction frames the 2001 riots as central to the book’s analysis but describes police activities in passive terms (10). Drawing heavily from the *Task Force Report* (advised by the Pennine Division Chief Superintendent, John Knowles) and using policing testimony, the book denies evidence of rebellion against racist policing practices in favour of arguments that centre criminality: it was ‘partly because of a lack of political motivation and discipline, [that] Asian youth’s initial defensive stance was overtaken by negative and counter-productive acts of criminal aggression’ (92). As the IRR argues, racist policing in Burnley and Oldham “provoked the youths into uprising” (Kundnani 2001:109), analysis which must be carried forward across the current conjuncture. Political solutions which bring police onto community cohesion training schemes (133) or commit to ‘social order in ways that the police admired’ (179) can only reproduce structures of racial violence (manifest through borders, Prevent, policing in schools, health and housing, for example).

Interlinking the book’s economic and political histories with analyses of the carceral state could also reframe solutions to the problems Makin-Waite analyses. Surveying Burnley’s political horizons, the author is pessimistic about the possibility of ‘convivial cosmopolitanism’ in northern towns, suggesting that the ability to ‘negotiate racial, ethnic and cultural difference through the micropolitics of everyday social contact’ is still a ‘long way off’, and only possible in more urbanised areas (192). Instead, the book supports a politics of progressive patriotism, recommending a ‘national-popular outlook in England’ (167), a solution that risks delimiting cultures or suggesting they can be contained by borders. Instead, as Luke de Noronha argues, tracking resistance to police and state power (to which the managed decline Makin-Waite investigates is inextricably related) may help reclaim ‘alternative resources of hope in the struggle against the most dangerous forms of “camp-making”… constitutive of contemporary statecraft’ (de Noronha 2021:16), centring spaces where ‘prefigurative commonalities forged across disparate racial and ethnic backgrounds obtain an acute sociopolitical intensity and urgency’ (de Noronha 2021:12). In studies of towns, where ideas of place and space are central to sociological analysis, a foregrounding of anti-racist resistance that connects across the entire social formation might also undermine constructions of British rural locations as essentialised sites of whiteness. Makin-Waite knows this, celebrating, for instance, the fundamental interconnectedness of spaces through movement and migration (215): an argument that only needs sensitising to accounts of racialising and criminalising state power.

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