

1 **Book Review**

2 **A call for justice following a call for papers: A book**
3 **review of Kehinde Andrews' *The Psychosis of***
4 ***Whiteness: Surviving the Insanity of a Racist World***

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11 About the authors

12 Peter and Natasha have previously collaborated through their shared agenda in
13 Medical Education in a London (England) National Health Service (NHS) Trust.
14 Natasha is Head of Knowledge & Library Services and holds a voluntary role as
15 Strategic Ambassador for the Global Majority Staff Network (GMN). Peter has been
16 a Consultant psychiatrist with a specialism in young people experiencing psychosis
17 since 2010. His academic role at University leads him to championing rights and
18 justice in an undergraduate ethics curriculum.

19 This is our first co-authored book review; we were enthused by the opportunity.
20 Schedules and logistics necessitated an iterative approach – it has been something of
21 an asynchronous adventure. We have applied a critical analytical lens to our discussion
22 of the book, aiming to highlight links to some of the ideas referenced in the call for
23 papers as well as applying clinical expertise to interrogating the adoption/co-option
24 of the concept of “psychosis”.

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26 Professor Kehinde Andrews is based at Birmingham City University, UK where he
27 led the development of the Black Studies degree and is director of the Centre for Criti-
28 cal Social Research (Birmingham City University, 2024). Activist as well as academic,
29 Andrews' credentials extend to founding the Harambee Organisation of Black Unity
30 which is centred on ideas of understanding, solidarity and community.

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31 Andrews' previous books include *New Age of Empire* (2022) and *Back to Black:*
32 *Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (2019). *The Psychosis of Whiteness*
33 is an in-depth exploration of a peculiar thesis of race and racism.

34 Andrews is well known in Britain – for an academic. He regularly writes for
35 (erstwhile) left-wing UK newspaper *The Guardian* and is often rolled out to spar with
36 right wing commentators and populists on topics relating to race and racism. In *The*
37 *Psychosis of Whiteness* he recounts and reflects on a number of “tours of duty of
38 the culture wars” including discussions of the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan
39 Markle, Winston Churchill and the murder of George Floyd.

40 His style of writing positions him as both journalist and novelist, but never far from
41 the central theme of disenfranchisement, prejudice and of course the psychosis of
42 whiteness which on occasion feels like a chorus, or a call to power. The words and
43 themes used are often uncomfortable but as the book grips, it becomes easier to sit
44 with the discomfort. Satire and humour are often used, to good effect, as an expression
45 of disbelief. We particularly enjoyed the references to contemporary culture (“The
46 first rule of Whiteness is you don’t talk about Whiteness” p. 33), the frequent word
47 play, and creative punctuation and formatting.

48 The book’s main thesis is that the construction of race and therefore Whiteness (not
49 white *people* as individuals!) amounts to a collective delusion. The UK’s National
50 Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) notes that “psychosis’ encompasses a
51 number of symptoms associated with significant alternations to a person’s perception,
52 thoughts, mood, and behaviour” (NICE, 2021). The prominent aspect of psychosis is
53 a fixed false belief which is not amenable to reason. Andrews makes this apparent at
54 many points, however it is in the inclusion of psychodynamic considerations that the
55 strengths of the concept really come to light. Psychodynamic theory is a step away
56 from the biological models of psychosis on which Andrews’s criticism rests, although
57 certainly has its own colonial history. It relies more on unconscious approaches and
58 how these inform the observed behaviours.

59 A psychodynamic approach would consider white psychosis as a pathological
60 defence which reshapes an external reality (racism exists) to meet internal needs
61 (anxiety at the existence of racism), or even eliminating the need to cope with that
62 reality altogether. The denial of external reality (racism) exists as it is too threatening
63 (he describes this in terms of black academics engaging with white academics).

64 Contemporary use of the word psychosis is often thought of as a less stigmatising
65 term in the context of mental ill health. However, Andrews considers it another term
66 to widen the reach of considerations of mental illness and bringing more people
67 susceptible to this diagnosis. This in itself challenges the contemporary practice in
68 mental health services.

69 Andrews dedicates a significant portion of the introductory chapters to explaining
70 and framing his conceptualisation of the psychosis of whiteness, including the links
71 to present day Black mental health inequalities. He provides a brief history of racist
72 psychiatric ideas and diagnoses that were used to justify enslavement and even
73 promote it as beneficial for Black people. One example being *Drapetomania* a disease

74 of the mind that caused enslaved people to run away . . . and that could be cured by
75 whipping (p. 6) Today we have a “self-fulfilling prophecy” that Black People are
76 more likely to suffer with serious mental illness because living with racism is a source
77 of trauma: “psychosis is a label that has been put on us for wanting to be free; trying
78 to resist; and existing in ways that go against an established White norm” (p. 12).

79 As reviewers working in England’s National Health Service (NHS) mental health
80 services we are witness to the human faces behind the figures on a daily basis.
81 Andrews references that young Black men in the UK are ten times more likely to
82 be diagnosed with psychotic illness and four times more likely to be hospitalised
83 (Cabinet Office, 2018). The Race and Health Observatory (RHO) rapid evidence
84 review of Ethnic Inequalities in Healthcare (Kapadia, 2022) identified inequalities in
85 the receipt of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) with ethnic minority people with
86 psychosis less likely to be referred for CBT as well as “strong evidence of clear, very
87 large and persisting ethnic inequalities in compulsory admission to psychiatric wards,
88 particularly affecting Black groups . . . also evidence of harsher treatment for Black
89 groups in inpatients wards, e.g., more likely to be restrained in the prone position or
90 put into seclusion”.

91 Although the book’s subtitle is “surviving the insanity of a racist world”, it doesn’t
92 provide sufficient guidance on how Black Communities might do this in practice;
93 there is no blue sky vision of progression from surviving to thriving. It is only in
94 passing at the end of the final chapter that Andrews references *interest convergence*
95 – one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory that he has earlier decried – as one
96 solution or course of action (Bell, 1980). The book thus – perhaps intentionally –
97 misses an opportunity to advocate for better mental health services and the potential
98 contribution from community organisations for better Black mental health. Examples
99 include *Coffee Afrik CIC* and *Black Thrive*. Perhaps these are better covered by
100 dedicated works such as Guilaine Kinouani’s *Living while Black: the Essential Guide*
101 *to Overcoming Racial Trauma*, Derek Owosu’s *Safe: 20 Ways to be a Black Man in*
102 *Britain Today* or Chloe Pierre’s *Take Care: the black women’s guide to wellness*.

103 It is hard to imagine this book being published before the racial justice summer of
104 2020, when George Floyd’s name became synonymous with (or shorthand for) the
105 reminder of the permanence of racism and White supremacy in western society (Bell,
106 1992). The Black Lives Matter protests and subsequent public discussions of summer
107 2020 briefly allowed the more naive to imagine that change was possible, that the
108 revolution was being live Tweeted.

109 In this aspect *The Psychosis of Whiteness* feels very much time bound. The story-
110 telling style can only report the past and recent events; it can’t look to the future with
111 any certainty. The book may not stand the test of time as some of the more recent
112 references will become dated. We must acknowledge Andrews provides much historical
113 context such as the contribution of Black psychiatrist Dr. Aggrey Burke which
114 deserves much wider recognition. Further, at the time of writing one of Andrew’s main
115 targets still appears to be suffering from the symptoms of White psychosis he has defined
116 and diagnosed. On 18 April 2024 the UK’s Business and Trade Minister, a Black

117 woman, told a conference in the City of London that “It worries me when I hear people
118 talk about wealth and success in the UK as being down to colonialism or imperial-
119 ism or white privilege or whatever.” and said that The Glorious Revolution of 1688
120 should be credited for providing the kind of economic certainty that paved the way
121 for the Industrial Revolution (Makortoff, 2024). Again, we see the reshaping of an
122 external reality to meet internal needs.

123 This special issue focuses on decoloniality. Oral history traditions predate the print
124 book and so it is appropriate to give some special consideration to the audiobook
125 version of this book. Andrew’s journalistic style of writing translates well to the
126 audio format. For Black people listening to this audio book may feel like an act of
127 communion. Listening to this audio book while out and about in White areas allows
128 sense of not being alone and reminder to laugh at the absurdity of some situations
129 (where possible and not dangerous). For Black Britons (or those who are Black and
130 live in Britain, if they do not identify as British), Andrews’ regional accent, lilting
131 diction and comedic timing, makes the text even more accessible and relatable –
132 shrinking the distance from what one might have learned to imagine a professor
133 would sound like. While we know that representation can present real dangers for
134 Black people, there is still truth in the saying that “if you can see it, you can believe
135 it”. It also speaks to the idea of contemporary Britain as a “melting pot”.

136 That said, as two UK based reviewers, we are mindful of the global audience of
137 this special issue. Although this book attempts to draw examples from the US and
138 South Africa, it is very focused on life in Britain. We could suggest, a touch unfairly,
139 that perhaps something of the “small island” mentality persists. Andrew’s coverage
140 of the “cancellation” of the early 2000s TV Series *Little Britain* – which included
141 characters in Blackface – will be meaningless to overseas audiences. While the
142 psychosis of Whiteness is probably a global phenomenon, there is little consideration
143 of peculiarities of how it manifests in settler colonies such as Australia or even in
144 Hong Kong. Had the book been written a year or two later there may also have been
145 useful discussion and consideration of the concept of Whiteness in the Israel Palestine
146 situation with its links with Black liberation struggles. Is the whole world racist as
147 certainly racism is a global phenomenon, or should we only consider the English
148 perspective, repeating the fading colonial outlook?

149 Another omission is the lack of inclusion of women scholars. While Andrews
150 makes several references to the Black woman government minister mentioned above
151 there are few references to women scholars. Kimberle Crenshaw gets a mention but,
152 Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Olivette Otele (Britain’s first ever Black female history
153 professor), are absent.

154 Andrews does not set out to give a balanced opinion, but his viewpoint is clear,
155 nuanced and evidenced, using recent and historical factors to justify his arguments.
156 He uses historical understandings of race and racism and how these are displayed
157 in contemporary thinking. Largely, he views the current ‘psychotic’ state as an
158 impediment to any rational conversation.

159 His candid admission is that one consequence of the book may be for readers to
 160 realise that things are even worse than imagined. On the flip side, some (Black) readers
 161 will take comfort in his analysis. That a senior academic has confirmed Shaggy et
 162 al's assertion that we're living in a "Mad mad world" will provide reassurance that
 163 it really is them and not you. Eliminating the need to waste more mental energy
 164 on trying to rationalise the situation. If you accept this awful state, you could be
 165 defeated or energised – what determines which outcome? And to what extent is that
 166 the author's responsibility? Andrews' own activism may be addressing this but how
 167 does the reader? We found the idea that education was unlikely to be of any value
 168 in changing the status quo one of the more challenging concepts. Particularly that
 169 unconscious bias cannot be trained seems defeatist and ignores the theory and practice
 170 of 'consciousness raising' (Wikipedia, n.d.). It is more relatable when he highlights
 171 the wasted energy in educating white people and that would be better directed to
 172 empower and organise the oppressed.

173 The Psychosis of Whiteness is accessible, funny, tragicomic and could support you
 174 on your own antiracist journey. However, on its own it lacks the tools which might be
 175 empowering. We look forward to a second, more practical volume. Gil Scott Heron
 176 said "the revolution will not be televised" – perhaps Andrews will bring the revolution
 177 with his next audiobook.

178 To experience Andrews' regional accent and an overview of the book without
 179 paying for the audiobook you can watch [The psychosis of whiteness | LSE Event](#)
 180 [\(youtube.com\)](#) – (London School of Economics, 2023).

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