

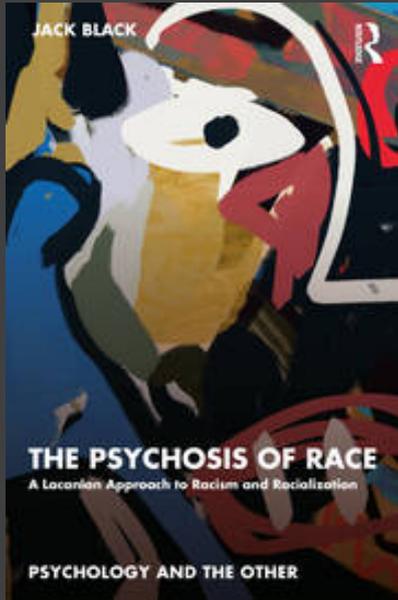
**JACK BLACK**

ROUTLEDGE

# **THE PSYCHOSIS OF RACE**

**A Lacanian Approach to Racism and Racialization**

**PSYCHOLOGY AND THE OTHER**



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## The Psychosis of Race

A Lacanian Approach to Racism and Racialization

*By* Jack Black

The Psychosis of Race offers a unique and detailed account of the psychoanalytic significance of race, and the ongoing impact of racism in contemporary society. The Psychosis of Race speaks to an emerging area in the study of psychoanalysis and race, and will appeal to scholars and academics across the fields of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, media studies, and the arts and humanities.

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*'The Psychosis of Race* usefully intervenes upon contemporary theories of race and racism. By drawing attention to a psychotic structure that underlies the anxieties, delusions, and fantasies that spur racial violence in our present historical moment, this study takes Lacanian psychoanalysis in directions it has not fully explored.'

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# The Psychosis of Race

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*The Psychosis of Race* offers a unique and detailed account of the psychoanalytic significance of race, and the ongoing impact of racism in contemporary society.

Moving beyond the well-trodden assertion that race is a social construction, and working against demands that simply call for more representational equality, *The Psychosis of Race* explores how the delusions, anxieties, and paranoia that frame our race relations can afford new insights into how we see, think, and understand race's pervasive appeal. With examples drawn from politics and popular culture—such as *Candyman*, *Get Out*, and the music of Kendrick Lamar—critical attention is given to introducing, as well as explicating on, several key concepts from Lacanian psychoanalysis and the study of psychosis, including foreclosure, the phallus, Name-of-the-Father, sinthome, and the *objet petit a*. By elaborating a cultural mode to psychosis and its understanding, an original and critical exposition of the effects of racialization, as well as our ability to discern the very limits of our capacity to think through, or even beyond, the idea of race, is provided.

*The Psychosis of Race* speaks to an emerging area in the study of psychoanalysis and race, and will appeal to scholars and academics across the fields of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, media studies, and the arts and humanities.

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# The Psychosis of Race

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A Lacanian Approach to Racism and  
Racialization

Jack Black

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# Introduction

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There is no doubt that race exists. From defining and explaining one's athletic capability, to the medical statistics that populate news reports on cancer and COVID-19, references to race maintain a ubiquitous presence. We are, in this regard, routinely classified and delineated according to a racial arrangement that seeks to determine and characterise explicit racial differences. By categorizing the human population according to prescribed racial designations, race remains a distinctly synonymous classification, both appropriated and applied to a variety of situations, scenarios, and 'problems'. Indeed, while there are many who acknowledge the fact that race is nothing more than a social construction, its common usage suggests that it is unlikely to disappear. Today, race continues to be *constructed* by racists and anti-racists alike, maintaining a ubiquity that undermines any assertion that race no longer matters.

If anything, assumptions regarding race have proven adept at finding new ground for their expression. For both racists and anti-racists, one's race can prove fundamental to one's very being. While this is frequently asserted in examples of racism, for the anti-racist one's values, culture, and belief remain integral to one's prescribed racial identity—that is, one's inherent sense of self. As a consequence, it is one's *racial identity* that is both recognised and protected. Certainly, whereas examples of racism are, in most situations, socially policed through the adoption of 'correct' forms of address, ultimately, race maintains a cultural presence that explicitly sustains such racial distinctions. Though ascribed cultural affiliations and ethnic differences can prove just as essentialising as any ascription that seeks to identify biological differences between proposed racial groups, the effect of such cultural determination is that it readily assumes a 'dominant culture' as the norm: it is in relation to *this* culture that cultural differences are abjectly defined. What creeps into these discourses are more subtle, less obvious forms of racism that are often presented with the intention of expressing no racial hostility.

Take, for example, the widely-reported incident of Amy Cooper, who, while walking her unleashed dog in New York (U.S.), came into confrontation with a birdwatcher, Christian Cooper (no relation). After asking Amy to put her

dog on its lead, in an area where leads were required, a confrontation ensued between both Amy and Christian. Christian recorded the incident, which later went viral. In the video, Amy responds, 'I'm calling the cops ... I'm gonna tell them there's an African American man threatening my life' (Aguilera 2020). On the phone to the police, Amy can be heard saying to the responder, 'There is an African American man—I am in Central Park—he is recording me and threatening myself and my dog. Please send the cops immediately!' (Aguilera 2020).<sup>1</sup> As Russell Sbriglia explains, what proves so 'jarring' about the incident:

is that she [Amy] specifically says—both to the black man himself before she calls 911 and to the police dispatcher once she's on the phone with them—that 'an *African American* man' is threatening her life. It's almost as if, having mastered the proper, politically correct jargon ('African American,' not 'black'), what she's doing couldn't possibly be racist.  
(cited in Žižek 2020b, 39–40, italics in original)

In the days after, Amy would openly profess her non-racism, with the usual apologies ensuing (Black 2020). What is clear from the Cooper example, however, is that it is through a veneer of political correctness that we see a channel of racism maintained (Black 2021).

A similar occurrence would take place in the wake of a leaked draft judgement, which disclosed that the U.S. Supreme Court intended to reverse the *Roe v. Wade* ruling, thus ending women's right to abortion in the U.S. (the Supreme Court did in fact overturn the right on 24th June 2022). In response to the leak, U.S. actor, Amanda Duarte, tweeted: 'I do wonder how these white supremacist lawmakers would feel if their little white daughters were raped and impregnated by black men'. The tweet was later deleted, but what seemed to fly over the head of Duarte was the ease in which 'black men' became the crux of her 'anti-sexist' example, and the subsequent channel for her frustrations. It would seem that, for Duarte at least, the path to women's equality required a level of empathy that remained ignorant of the racism that she served to sustain.

What underscores the Cooper and Duarte examples is the evocation of race in scenarios that, on the face of it, bear no justification for its appearance. In fact, what each example reveals—and here we can assume that Duarte is fully aware of the moral impropriety surrounding racism if only on the basis that she later deleted her tweet—is that both Cooper and Duarte remained fully aware of the effects of racial discrimination, and the ongoing impact of racial inequality in the U.S. Presumably, if questioned, we can suppose that each would be cognizant of the impact of racial prejudice both within and outside the U.S., and, further still, would no doubt conceive of themselves as being non-racist. Instead, we can consider how it is the knowledge and the conviction that underscores their anti-racism which serves to maintain one's assumed 'racial empathy'.

This can be found in the bizarre case of Grace Halsell, a White journalist, who, in 1968, chose to undergo certain treatments that allowed her to ‘physically’ pass as a Black woman. Conducted in order to evidence the effect of racial injustice in the U.S., Halsell later documented her experiences in the book, *Soul Sister* ([1969] 1999). Halsell’s attempts to build racial empathy remains unique, if only for the fact that changing her skin colour afforded her a level of racial appropriation that would, in some form or another, provide her a journalistic insight into the lives of Black women. Ultimately, the fact that Halsell’s physical appropriations could help her understand the plight of Black communities, steers more towards a pathological obsession with the notion of Blackness as ‘something’ that can be obtained and displayed. Aside from the far more concerning assumption that a White woman could so easily appropriate the outward complexion of a Black woman, a form of racial dominance in and of itself, there nonetheless remains the contention within Halsell’s actions that through the knowledge obtained in her experiences wider changes in racial inequality could be assured or, at least, highlighted.<sup>2</sup> If anything, it confirmed that one’s racial identity could be *politicised*. Ultimately, in Halsell’s fraught attempt to achieve racial empathy, it is the racial characteristics that Halsell sought to mimic which underlie the very distinctions and differentiations that prescribe the assumed racial differences that function to determine and fix one’s racialization.

### **Approaching race**

What is clear from these opening examples is the fact that they stand opposed to a political and cultural context that unrelentingly celebrates its racial diversity. In 2022, the short-lived U.K. prime ministership of Lizz Truss and her appointed cabinet, which included Kwasi Kwarteng as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Suella Braverman as Home Secretary, and James Cleverly as Foreign Secretary, was, aside from its brevity in office, remarkable for its racial diversity.<sup>3</sup> For the first time in U.K. history, the Great Offices of State were not held by a White man.<sup>4</sup> What is more, following Truss’s brief prime ministership, on 24th October 2022, Rishi Sunak became the U.K.’s first prime minister of South Asian descent.<sup>5</sup>

Such ‘celebration’, however, would continue to be bound to the identity politics that it sought to proclaim. That is, by presenting a path of ‘equality’, based largely on symbolic representation and the politicization of one’s racial identity and ethnic heritage, both the trickle-down diversity professed by Truss’s cabinet, and the appointment of Sunak by Conservative MPs, remain miles apart from the structural inequalities that prevent such ‘diversity’ being achieved across the very society that both Truss and Sunak are responsible for.<sup>6</sup> Instead, these examples would, in the end, shed light on the racial anxieties that continue to underscore such diversity. In the weeks after Truss’s cabinet appointments, Labour MP Rupa Huq was reported to have referred

to Kwarteng as ‘superficially’ Black, highlighting instead his attendance at the elite Eton School (BBC 2022).<sup>7</sup> Though Huq’s remarks rely upon the racist assertion that there must be a certain authenticity to being Black, a racial particularity that, presumably, Kwarteng was not capable of, her comments were followed by *The Mirror* newspaper, which mistakenly used a picture of Bernard Mensah, President of International for Bank of America, in a story pertaining to Kwarteng’s mini-budget (Bryant 2022).

Evidently, it would seem that despite a proliferation of Black bodies within our visual, commercial, and political cultures (Gilroy 2000), the anxieties that abound one’s confidence in openly decrying the legitimacy of one’s race, or in mistakenly associating (again) one Black man for another, serve only to confirm and maintain the ubiquity of race as an unrelenting force that frames, but also constitutes, our reliance on racial forms of categorization and differentiation.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the same can also be said for those examples where an enforced ‘colour-blindness’ works to enliven the very racial differences that are meant to be ignored. Like the anxieties that framed Kwarteng, such enforcement functions to mediate the visibility of racial difference. Whether or not these racial differences can be, on the one hand, disparaged for their non-significance, or, on the other, used to endorse the racial distinctions that they seek to dispel, we remain ill-equipped, or, perhaps, incapable, of upending the injustice, discrimination, and inequality that goes so far in preserving the hegemony of race as a principle of one’s psychic and social organization. In effect, race does not simply reveal the inequalities embedded in society, but openly flaunts and propagates the very obscenities that maintain our social and political systems.

Of concern here is how easily the work of anti-racism can proceed to enact new forms of racial consequence that only exacerbate the division between the subject and the racial other. This occurs through the self-placation of obsessively identifying and finding new forms of racial prejudice. In such cases, the problem of racism resides in an anti-racism that succumbs to a level of virtue-signalling, whereby the valency of hate is merely redirected towards the racist other. Though guilt and confession become aligned in forms of self-humiliation and self-development, psychoanalytically, such diversions, and the sense of righteousness they convey, work to obscure the subject’s lack just as much as they fixatedly maintain one’s reliance on a set of racial distinctions that never go so far as dismantling the very discriminations that they rely upon (Black 2020).

### **The psychosis of race**

Facing the fact that ‘the term “race” conjures up a peculiarly resistant variety of natural difference’ it is in ‘the possibility of leaving “race” behind’ (Gilroy 2000, 29) that the task of approaching the inequalities that sustain the racial worldview maintain a critical significance. To this end, the opening sections to

this Introduction have taken a familiar path. Elucidating on the significance of race while also highlighting its ongoing role in shaping and framing our discussions on race, racism, and racial difference, it is now customary to assert the well-trodden explanation that race is a phenomenon both historically and socially constructed. Part I will seek to upend this common trajectory. By taking to task the assertion that race remains a social construction, it will consider how such debates can just as easily reify racial distinctions as much as they seek their critique. In the end, deferring to race as a mere social construction serves only to infix its social embeddedness, so that the very nonsense of race continues to prescribe the external differences that constitute one's sense of racial being.

It is on this basis, however, that the significance of race, as a form of thinking, works to presuppose examples of racial division. Indeed, elsewhere, Asare has referred to the need to 'exorcise' our reliance on race, revealing how 'the language of exorcism speaks to the harm associated with the race framework, and also of the need to battle this affliction in multiple realms' (2018, 23). These realms comprise Gilroy's (2000) account of raciology and the racial hierarchies it helps to erect and maintain. Referring specifically to the work of Frantz Fanon, Gilroy points to the very ways in which 'race-thinking' works to both subordinate certain racial groups, while also prescribing Whites with 'the alchemical magic of racial mastery' (2000, 15). Echoing the work of Sheldon George (2014; 2016; 2022), it is this apparent mastery which masks and obscures the very lack that constitutes the racialized subject, whether they be Black, White, Brown, Red, or Yellow. While Gilroy does not follow the psychoanalytic path that underscores George's work, Gilroy undoubtedly aligns with George when asserting that 'Black and [W]hite are bonded together by the mechanisms of "race" that estrange them from each other and amputate their common humanity' (Gilroy 2000, 15). While the latter 'may not have been animalized, reified, or exterminated, ... they too have suffered something by being deprived of their individuality, their humanity, and thus *alienated* from species life' (Gilroy 2000, 15, italics added).

It is in accordance with such deprivation that a psychoanalytic approach can prove helpful. Whether it be in delineating the very *jouissance* that racism expounds (Hook 2018; McGowan 2022; Miller 2017; Zalloua 2020), or through a fantasy of race that both constrains and delimits the subject's sense of being as well as that of the other (George 2016), in each case, it is the effects of one's racial 'enjoyment', or one's fantasy relation to the object *a* of race, that disavows or outright prevents a level of universality grounded in the inconsistencies of the human subject (Flisfeder 2022; Gilroy 2000; Zalloua 2020).

Accordingly, amid the pernicious work of race—which continues to systematically expel forms of racial inequality, discrimination, and injustice—this book argues that it is in our reliance on race to demarcate, divide, and differentiate the human population that our understanding of race is both secured and

perpetuated through acts of racism (Fields and Fields 2012). In fact, when race is conveyed and maintained just as much through one's assumed racial identification, as it is in the capacity to remain cognisant of a range of racial improprieties, then our reliance on race can best be expressed through what this book will refer to as the 'psychosis of race'. Specifically, this will consider how our seeing and thinking about race elicits and relies upon a psychotic structure that frames and shapes our social relations and institutions.<sup>9</sup> This includes examples of racism and racial hatred as well as the anti-racist agendas that seek to critique the prejudices, inequalities, and discriminatory practices that racism relies upon. Bringing together key concepts and texts in the study of race, racism, and psychosis—such as extimacy; fantasy; lack; master-signifier; *jouissance*; *objet a*; the phallus; and foreclosure—it will be argued that Lacan's (1997) theory of psychosis provides a critical insight into the ongoing effects of racialization. In so doing, this book details how racial anxiety, paranoia, delusion, and fantasy maintain a constitutive significance in examples of racialization that serve to mark and prescribe the human subject *their* race.

Importantly, the following discussion and analysis will seek to focus on the ongoing significance of 'race' in contemporary society. More importantly, by directing attention towards the effects of race, we do not ignore racism. Referring explicitly to the work of Karen and Barbara Fields, and their key text, *Racecraft* (2012), McGowan argues that to '[t]alk about race instead of racism is always ideological and has the effect of ensconcing us in the trap of attempting to tolerate difference instead of focusing on eradicating racism' (2022, 24–25).<sup>10</sup> Whereas the ideological effects of racism underscore the need for its eradication, it is important not to ignore the very 'craft' that racism achieves, especially in propagating a reliance on race, both as a point of reference, and as an assumed cause of racial difference. Accordingly, while the following discussion stands opposed to liberal requirements that posit the need for greater forms of tolerance in our relations with the other (requirements that simply rely upon increasing representational forms of racial equality [Black 2021]), it is in elaborating upon the trap of race—the 'craft' that racism so persuasively achieves—that the eradication of racism can be asserted (McGowan 2022).<sup>11</sup>

As will be explored in Part I, and while drawing specifically from Lacan's Symbolic order and the Real, race and racism are, in the analysis that follows, entwined. That is, insofar as our understanding of the Symbolic and the Real cannot be separated, equally, the same can also be said for race and racism. To discuss, think, see, or conceive of race is to be on the path of racism, and, thus, in sight of the Real. Inevitably, this book follows such a path, arguing that our capacity to tackle racism rests upon our ability to understand, and, therefore critique, our reliance on race—here, psychosis can help us navigate such a predicament.

## Why psychosis?

By introducing the psychosis of race, this book will not defer to some form of psychological reductionism, which ultimately locates the analysis of race and racism in the subject's individuality and their own internal pathologies. Instead, the benefits of undertaking a psychoanalytic interpretation is made clear when we consider how our unconscious investments in race indelibly require a psycho-sociological approach. In fact, if there remains a political project to psychoanalysis, then it stems from a level 'of analysis which has always had an intrinsically social character' (Zupančič 2008, 38). Identifying this 'intrinsically social character' can allow us to examine the social pathologies that provide a path towards increasing forms of particularization and individuality. What it also points towards is the benefits afforded to Lacan's account of the (big) Other. As Lacan posits, '[f]rom the moment the subject speaks, the Other, with a big O, is there' (1997, 41). Consequently, it is only by 'grasping the unconscious as the subjective locus of the Other ... that we avoid falling into the routine dualism of private versus public domains—a dualism that typically risks de-politicizing racism' (Hook 2008, 69). Though our unconscious relies upon the Other as the structure which helps organize and maintain the Symbolic order, equally, it is in accordance with the Other's signifiers that the unconscious connects the subject to the process of signification and to the Symbolic order itself.

Indeed, while this emphasizes how our unconscious investments remain at the behest of the Other, and, specifically, 'the Other's discourse' (Lacan 2006a, 10), what is of greater concern is that one's social and psychical development emerges from the questions that arise when we consider the very gaps, inconsistencies, and antagonisms that mark our social existence. While it is in view of these questions that the existence of the unconscious can be averred, it is with regard to the Other that our social relations, as well as our relation to reality, can be interrogated.

It is on the back of such interrogation that we can trace the importance of the Other in studying the effects of racism. Hook summarises:

What the Lacanian concept of the Other makes possible is that we may retain a form of explanatory reference to the unconscious—so crucial in fathoming racism—without reducing it either to the inner depth of repressed emotions or to an ostensibly a-social sphere of primal instincts *within* the singular subject.

(2008, 68, italics in original)

Today, the effects of retaining this 'explanatory reference' are compounded by the contention that our public discourses and relations to 'truth', as well as what is conceived as either 'right' or 'wrong', are increasingly framed by an absence of authority, or, at least, by a decline in respect and trust towards

those institutions that once served as sources of authority (i.e., political parties, public services, the church). One noticeable example of this is how our reliance on race, and the ongoing perpetuation of racism, convey a lack of moral anchorage. The violent shooting of unarmed Black civilians in the U.S.; the enduring systemic reproduction of racial violence and abuse; and the flagrant propagation of hate speech by politicians, journalists, and social commentators, each seeking to exacerbate domestic tensions in the guise of public interest, are all repeated, reproduced, and accepted as part of our day-to-day reality, laying seed to the hatred, violence, and ‘us’ and ‘them’ hostility that underscores our social and political relations. In this context, the promulgation of racial paranoia and anxiety echoes Frederic Jameson’s (1995) contention that, amidst a demise in Symbolic efficiency, the turn to conspiracy theories and other forms of ‘cognitive mapping’ compels a psychotic aesthetic that is increasingly brought forth under the totalizing logic of postmodern late capitalism (see also Jameson 1992).<sup>12</sup> Identifying the *they* and *them* ‘responsible’ for this decline becomes dependent upon a process of racialization that seeks to frame and position the racist and anti-racist subject as well as the racial other.

Though it may seem that our capacity to determine the truth and to trust the information that we are provided with serves only to cement the declining efficiencies of a Symbolic order slowly eroding under a lack of public trust, it is here that our reliance on racial forms of differentiation, and the ongoing perpetuation of racism in both its psychical and structural forms, functions to reveal the contradictions, antagonisms, and ambivalences that underscore the psychosis of race. In fact, while the decline in Symbolic authority does not confirm the complete and utter collapse of the big Other—indeed, to postulate such a collapse would itself require an Other with which this collapse could be perceived against—what it does suggest is that our relations to race continue to bear a psychotic character.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, by permitting ‘to break with a deficit model of psychosis’ (Vanheule 2011, 147), Lacan was able to situate an understanding of psychosis that was focused upon the subject’s relation to the Other, which, in the context of the present study, can allow us to explore the ongoing effects of race, racism, and racialization today.

As will be argued, it is through employing Lacan’s (1997; 2006f) theory of psychosis that we can identify and approach the anxieties, paranoias, fantasies, and delusions that frame our reliance on race. To appreciate this importance, it is appropriate to remember that, for Lacan:

the idea of psychotic structure is not a presumed mode of psychological organization that is hidden in the mind or the brain. It concerns the *logic of subjective functioning as expressed in relation to the Other, which entails a specific position of the subject.*

(Vanheule 2019, 78, italics in original).

This book will consider how it is with regard to this ‘relation to the Other’ that a specific racial position is prescribed to the subject, and that it is from a psychotic structure that our orientations to race and racism, as well as an array of racial practices (stereotyping, racist fantasies, racial paranoia, racial anxiety, racial segregation, etc.), can be explored.

Furthermore, whereas for Lacan the very nature of reality is phantasmatic, by extension psychosis cannot be reduced to a simple loss of reality on behalf of the psychotic. Rather, it is in accordance with a perceived lack of authority in the Other that our social relations, popular cultural formations, and public discourses exhibit a psychotic structure. Insofar as ‘the psychotic is without the primary, or fundamental, (symbolic) link to anchor the structure of psychological reality’ (Fimiani 2021, 104), it is without the Other’s perceived authority that we are left in a position of ‘non-sense’ that race helps to shape and define. Where psychosis expresses ‘a fundamental difficulty in articulating one’s position as a subject’ (Vanheule 2011, 94), the appeal of *race* stems not only from the assurances that it affords but from the very difficulties that these assurances create and maintain. As will be explored in Part I, race makes ‘meaning’, but it remains a meaning that is tied to a level of non-sense that is both fixed and intrusive.

## The subject of race

In the proceeding chapters, Lacan’s theory of psychosis will ‘provid[e] a framework to reflect on the ways in which subjectivity takes shape’ (Vanheule 2011, 80); a framework in which the effects of the subject—primarily, its inherent lack (the gap which constitutes being)—undergo a process of racialization. Echoing Seshadri-Crooks, it is argued ‘that to be a subject of race is a pathological state’ (2000, 60), in which the psychosis of race can help to take seriously ‘Lacan’s view [that] pathological formations like neuroses, psychoses and perversions have the dignity of fundamental philosophical attitudes towards reality’ (Žižek 2006, 3–4).

Certainly, by exploring race as a pathology, we do not lose the importance of the Symbolic order or Lacan’s focus on language, the Other, and the Real. In fact, as Seshadri-Crooks explains, ‘where race is concerned, it is the signifier itself that is the symptom’ (Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 60). Yet, as Part I will consider, rather than conceiving of race as discursively constructed and reconstructed—an approach that ignores the limits of the Symbolic and, thus, the Real—the following analysis will consider how the psychosis of race both shapes and frames our subjectivity through ‘the individual’s ability to articulate a subjective position via the signifier’ (Vanheule 2011, 77). Thus, it is in accordance with the signifier and, hence, the Symbolic order, that our investments in race—specifically, how we make use of race and relate to race—remain both socially and psychically significant. This posits that the psychosis of race is not beholden to the racist subject, but instead frames, positions, and structures the

processes of racialization that interdependently involve both the racist subject and racial other. It is in this way that the exclusions promulgated by Whiteness are neither ignored nor disavowed. Rather, what the psychosis of race affords is a consideration of race's inherent non-sense, as well as the irrationality that underscores the subject's racialization.

This bears some resemblance to Andrews (2016) account of the psychosis of Whiteness, which he relates to the discursive significance of Whiteness as grounded in systemic forms of racial inequality. Set against critiques of White privilege and unending calls for further education and more dialogue, the psychosis of Whiteness examines how such efforts propose a decentring of Whiteness that, in Andrews's account, are resigned to failure. Instead, for Andrews, 'if we see Whiteness as a psychosis, then we understand that it is hallmarked by irrationality and a distinct inability to see reality in any other way than the distorted view it creates' (Andrews 2016, 439). As a result, any attempt to decentre Whiteness is ultimately undermined by the hallucinatory effects that the psychosis of Whiteness induces.

Certainly, the assertion that Whiteness 'can be addressed, dismantled, or overcome ... through rationale dialogue' (Andrews 2016, 436) is a falsity that will ring true in the argument that follows. Where this argument will diverge, however, is in drawing attention to the underlying contentions that Andrews exposes. Ultimately, if examples of Whiteness remain 'rooted' in social structures that bear no opportunity for correction or critical engagement, then efforts to dispel, undermine, or even destroy the social conditions underpinning hegemonic Whiteness remain, in Andrews's case, beyond the act of reason. While this sense of fated failure posits 'a discursive psychosis that cannot be tamed through reason' (Andrews 2016, 442), it is not '[u]ntil the conditions that create Whiteness are destroyed' that the psychosis of Whiteness can be challenged and effaced (Andrews 2016, 451).

In this respect, it is difficult to determine how such destruction can ever be enacted when one's ties to the social conditions remain under the 'spell' of psychosis, and where the very act of 'reason' is itself nullified. Indeed, to seek a path of identifying or revealing some 'truer' reality or form of reason, outside of that which the subject envisions, is to ignore the structural significances that position, orientate, and locate the subject's psychosis. Instead, in the case of reason, we can ask how it is that the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent to reason serve to compound an irrational, yet no less determining, reliance on race.

Therefore, as the focus of this book will confer, to move beyond the very idea of *race* is to think through the 'ontological structure' that race prescribes (Lacan 2006b, 76).<sup>14</sup> Though Andrews's account does not explicitly refer to psychoanalytic theory, the analysis that follows will explore how the psychosis of race maintains its resilience through an obfuscation of the subject's constitutive lack (George 2016). Whatever one's racial determination, the psychosis of race delimits a form of racial being that irrationally positions and ultimately fixes one's relation to lack, the signifier, and the racial Symbolic order.

## Is that a Jew or a crocodile hiding under the bed?

By drawing from Lacan's work on psychosis, this book will not seek to prescribe race an *a priori* existence. Nor will it suppose that acts of racism cannot be challenged or resisted. Instead, as Seshadri explains, it is in accordance with the psychoanalytic approach that 'the production of racial group attachment as a historical and psychological construct' can allow us to consider how race has come to 'generat[e] powerful effects of biological embodiment' (2022, 302). Importantly, these effects have a significant psychic component, grounded in a level of extimacy that socially positions the subject's perception of race as well as their own racial embodiment (see Chapter 3 for an extended discussion on race and extimacy).

To help explain this perception, we can turn to the following tale involving an analyst and their analysand:

A patient comes to see him complaining that a crocodile is hiding under his bed. During several sessions the analyst tries to persuade the patient that this is all in his imagination. In other words, he tries to persuade him that it is all about a purely 'subjective' feeling. The patient stops seeing the analyst, who believes that he cured him. A month later the analyst meets a friend, who is also a friend of his ex-patient, and asks him how the latter feels. The friend answers: 'You mean the one who was eaten by a crocodile?'

(Zupančič 1998, 67).

For Zupančič, the underlying question that abounds this tale is that which asks: what is it 'that killed [...] and] "ate" the subject?' (1998, 67). Her answer: 'Nothing other than: "I have the *objet petit a* under my bed, I came too close to it"' (Zupančič 1998, 67).

Accordingly, there remains a psychotic dimension to this tale, one revealed by the fact that the analysand comes 'too close' to their *objet petit a*. In psychosis, whatever may underscore one's delusion, be it a crocodile, or some other malignant force, 'there is a solidity to the meaning ascribed to their situation' (Leader 2012, 77). Leader elaborates upon this meaning by highlighting how in examples of psychosis '[l]ibido is localized outside: in the persecutor or in a fault in society or the order of the world. ... There is a "badness" out there that has been situated and named' (2012, 77). What is unique, however, is that '[t]he content of the paranoid delusion here may be absolutely true' (Leader 2012, 77). Therefore, what remains *essential* to examples of psychosis and paranoia is the conviction that sustains the 'delusion' occupying the subject's life—that is, the *certainty* of the crocodile hiding under the bed.

Here, our reliance on race follows a similar form to that of the poor analysand and their crocodile. For instance, consider the following example from Žižek, who notes that:

[i]t's not enough to say anti-Semitism is factually wrong, it's morally wrong; the true enigma is: why did the Nazis *need* the figure of the Jew for their ideology to function? Why is it that if you take away their figure of the Jew their whole edifice disintegrates?

(1999, italics added)

It is here that we can draw a connection between the convictions (the *need*) upholding the figure of the Jew and the certainty that supports the crocodile under the bed. For the analysand, it was not enough to declare to them that the crocodile was nothing more than a figment of their imagination, a feeling which they themselves were creating. Rather, the underlying enigma, which compounded the analysand's predicament, was why was there a *crocodile* to begin with? What was it about this *objet a* that proved too much for the analysand? Along the same lines we can echo Žižek's inquiries, and ask: why does the fascist need *the Jew* in order to function? What is it about the Jew's *objet a* that proves 'too much' for the Nazi? What both examples reveal is the importance of the fantasy *objet a*, which, in examples of racism, cannot simply be expunged or ignored. What constitutes the other in the racist fantasy, and what underlies our perceptions of race, is the other's *objet a*—that very object which prescribes and denotes one *their* race. It is what fuels and exacerbates the paranoid, anxieties, and delusions that underpin how we see and think about race.

In either case, for the poor analysand, consumed by their crocodile, or the unfaltering Nazi, consumed by the Jewish intruder, their convictions cannot be approached by simply considering their personal failings. On the contrary, what is required is a consideration of the position that such convictions sustain in their relation to the other. Yet, this begs the question: to what extent do we take the analysand's fears and the Nazi's racism 'seriously'? To discount the analysand's concerns or to ignore the Nazi's racism is to fall foul of the reasoning, the certainty, and the expelling of doubt that underlies both positions.

Ultimately, it remains too easy to discredit examples of racism as merely the thoughts and beliefs of an uneducated, uncultured 'working class'. In fact, in the case of antisemitism, 'we cannot simply distinguish between "real" Jews and the way they are perceived by others' (Žižek 2022, 198). To do so would suggest that the racist does not understand, or rather, does not accept, the Jew's 'real' identity; a problem that can be easily fixed with better understanding, more 'dialogue', and further education. Instead, as Žižek notes: 'thousands of years of the exclusion and persecution of the Jews, and all the fantasies projected onto Jews, have inevitably also affected their identity which is formed in reaction to the fantasies grounding their persecution' (2022, 198). In the case of racism, one must always take the racist fantasy seriously, especially when, in the psychosis of race, such fantasy underpins the subject's 'reality'.

Therefore, in order to challenge and resist our convictions in race we must take seriously the very certainties that frame one's knowledge *of* race. To do so is to engage with an account of psychosis that approaches the reality of race in all its psychotic complexity. Better knowledge and more education cannot dispel race's most disparaging effects if only because it is in accordance with our racial fantasies, paranoias, anxieties, and delusions that our reliance on race is lived.

### **The veracity of race**

Evidently, this Introduction proposes a path that sits outside any clinical examination of psychosis towards exploring how forms of racism, racial prejudice, and racial discrimination can be read through 'a cultural mode of psychosis' (Samuels 2001, 141, fn.14). This requires perceiving psychosis as a form of social orientation that dictates our very reliance on race. Only by locating Lacan's approach to psychosis in a critical and interpretative account of culture, can we begin to conceive how the psychosis of race works to frame and shape the subject's relation to and perceptions of the racialised other.

What psychosis provides therefore is a 'logic' through which our understandings of race and racism can be conceived (Fernandez 2014). It can, for example, allow us to unpick 'the scientific point of view', which confidently proclaims 'race ... as a false epistemology of human difference', while all the while ignoring or disavowing the very fact that race continues to provide 'powerful social and ontological effects' (Seshadri 2022, 300). Though race 'markedly invests identity and shapes the psyche's fundamental fantasy' it remains 'deeply buried and intricately imbricated ... in the constitution of the western subject' (Seshadri 2022, 300).<sup>15</sup> To this end, any form of anti-racism must itself be aware of the 'subjective complicity' that draws together the social and the psychic (Cheng 2001, 298). It is for this reason that 'to properly have and be a race, it is necessary that the discourse be inscribed at a fundamental level of subject constitution' (Seshadri 2022, 302).

Consequently, at the heart of this study will be the consideration that the presence of race—indeed, the fact that it remains, despite its criticisms, a constant feature of our contemporary societies—is due to the very way in which the psychosis of race seeks to fix and determine one's sense of being. It is to fully appreciate what the Fields refer to as the 'marrow-deep certainty that racial differences are real and consequential, whether scientifically demonstrable or not' (Fields and Fields 2012, 198). In effect race's 'intransigence' can be conceived as 'an outcome of the fact that the visible reference of race makes a claim to nature—it is about "telling," like "sex," who is this or that' (Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 19). Accordingly:

[u]nlike other forms of socially constructed difference, such as class or ethnicity, ‘race,’ like sex, appears as a fundamental and normative factor of human embodiment, something that one inherently is from birth. Thus, despite historicist arguments about its social construction, which may or may not be valid, there is a powerful *semblance* of necessity built into race that makes it ultimately intractable to constructionist claims.

(Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 19–20, italics in original).

Though Seshadri-Crooks cautions against ‘analogizing race with sex’, race nonetheless succeeds in inserting itself into the constitution of the subject (2000, 20). That is, while ‘there is no denying the fact that race is, after all, a historical invention, and that like most inventions it veils the artifice of its origins’, this is, for Seshadri-Crooks, ‘not interesting’ (2000, 20). Instead, ‘[w]hat is confounding about race is its successful grafting to nature’ (Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 20), or, what comes to be perceived, through a psychotic form, as fixed, determined, and prescribed by the inconsistencies, disruptions, and failings that constitute one’s very nature.<sup>16</sup> Following this, Part II will explore how the role of the *objet a* in psychosis—the object *a* of race—becomes attributed to the subject’s sense of being in such a way that it’s assumed ‘essence’ serves to fix the subject to their prescribed racial identity. Here, ethnic determinants, cultural heritage and genetic determination become co-aligned in one’s racial identity. Indeed:

[w]hen identity refers to an indelible mark or code somehow written into the bodies of its carriers, otherness can only be a threat. Identity is latent destiny. Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation.

(Gilroy 2000, 103–104)

It is in accordance with the fact that racial identity is conceived as destiny—that race is perceived to elicit a truth about the subject conveyed by either the body or its cells—that race comes to determine, and, thus separates, one subject from another. In so doing, race’s very significance remains determined by acts of racialization that work to both define one’s racial prescription as well as marking and defining one’s racial identity. In the case of the latter, race can often appear in subtle forms, such as the apparently neutral definition of a crime statistic, educational attainment, or national demographic.

However, what we see in these examples is the extent to which ‘[r]acialization establishes an illusory essence of identity according to which unique individuals are relegated to one or another fictive race, membership in which is determined by ludicrous and arbitrary criteria (e.g., the rule of hypodescent for blacks)’

(Hoyt 2016, 134). Though the veracity of one's racial identity confines one to the very definitions that prescribe this racial identification, through the process of psychosis, one's very racialization is predetermined by one's sense of racial being—a fact determined just as much by one's social affiliations as it is in the significance that is given to one's racial visibility. It is in this way that the psychosis of race can speak to how an apparent racial essence underlies the various forms of seeing and thinking about race that both create and sustain its ongoing significance. Indeed, while '[r]ace structures human subjectivity in ways largely ignored by Jacques Lacan in his psychoanalytic reading of the subject' (George 2022, 241), and while '[t]he work of theorizing the role of race in the constitution of the subject has only just begun' (Seshadri 2022, 303), it is through exploring and applying the psychosis of race that this book will proceed.

Accordingly, whereas Part I, 'Race is (Not) a Social Construction', will lay the groundwork for conceiving how it is in accordance with the signifier, and, thus, the Symbolic order, that our investments in race—specifically, how we make use of race as well as relate to race—bestow a social and psychic significance, Part II, 'Race and the Structure of Psychosis', will bring together key concepts in Lacan's approach to psychosis (such as extimacy; fantasy; lack; master-signifier; *jouissance*; *objet a*; the phallus; and foreclosure). This will explore how examples of racial anxiety, paranoia, delusion, and fantasy come to constitute the racialization that marks and prescribes the human subject *their* race.

In Part III, 'Ethics, Lack, and Doubt', the social importance embedded in our capacity to doubt, and, hence, to know, will be examined. Drawing from Lacan's (2018) account of the *sinthome*, Part III will develop an ethical praxis that traces the possibility of confronting the psychosis of race, a central aspect of which will be the reinterpretation of 'post-race' debates. By focusing specifically on the 'post-' prefix, it is argued that the relevance of any 'post-race' assertion speaks not to our present moment (and to a misguided assumption that we have overcome racism) but to a future 'yet-to-come' (Gilroy 2000). Indeed, from this future position, an introduction of doubt, which questions and undermines our present certainties in race, racism, and racialization, will be asserted.

To help elucidate on this approach, the concluding chapter pays critical attention to the songs, 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst' and 'Mortal Man', both performed by the Compton-born, hip-hop musician, Kendrick Lamar. By highlighting how Lamar presents a critical perspective on the act of representation, as performed through his adoption of a unique temporal structure and lyrical form, it is argued that Lamar's work offers a space in which both his lyrics and music can confront the psychosis of race. It is here that a re-structuring of our relation to language and new forms of mediation will be used to critique the psychosis of race.

**Notes**

- 1 The incident involving Amy and Christian took place on the same day that Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer, used his knee to slowly suffocate and kill George Perry Floyd Jr. during a routine arrest.
- 2 What this ignores is the ‘fictional nature of social reality [which] undermines most attempts to counter forms of prejudice by simply pointing to the distortions on which they are based’ (Samuels 2001, 11, see also Žižek 2008).
- 3 Appointed on 6th September 2022, within 45 days Kwarteng had been fired and both Braverman and Truss had resigned.
- 4 In the U.K. government, the Great Offices of State refer to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, and Home Secretary.
- 5 Under Sunak, Braverman was reinstated as Home Secretary (she had previously resigned from the position after sharing official documentation using her personal email account and, thus, was in breach of the ministerial code) and Cleverly was re-appointed as Foreign Secretary.
- 6 Reports by the Runnymede Trust (Edmiston et al. 2021) and The Centre for Social Justice (2020) continue to identify declines in racial equality across the U.K., especially in education, health, criminal justice, and work. This decline is compounded by research that reveals how, amidst the cost-of-living crisis, Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in poverty due to a highly regressive and racialised tax and social security system (Edmiston et al., 2021).
- 7 In keeping with the arguments of this book, Huq’s remarks can be read as displaying the paranoid conviction that there are ‘authentic’ ways of being Black.
- 8 As will be discussed in Chapter 6, my decision to stick with the term ‘racialization’ stands opposed to McGowan (2022), where, in referring to the racialized other, McGowan argues that the term fails to account for those instances where the racial other is perceived as not having a race (such as, the Jew in Nazi anti-Semitism). What Chapter 6 will highlight, however, is that even in cases where a particular group is defined by their racial non-particularity, it is, nonetheless, their very *non-particularity* that becomes the abiding feature of *their* racialization.
- 9 References to structure, and, specifically, ‘psychotic structure’, will be used throughout this book. In accordance with Lacan, such use does not assume ‘a negation of the subject’ (Marini 1992, 43). On the contrary, as Marini explains, Lacan’s reference to structure reflected ‘his dependency on an order that went beyond him and that was at his origin—the Symbolic’ (Marini 1992, 43). All subjects are dependent upon this order, as it is this same Symbolic order that structures the subject’s relation to race, and which, over the course of this book, will allow us to investigate the effects of a psychotic structure in examples of racialization.
- 10 A discussion on ‘racecraft’ will be returned to in Chapter 3.
- 11 I would argue that what the Fields so brilliantly demonstrate in their account of racecraft is the ability to perceive and critique this ‘trap’ in discussions on race and racial difference (Fields and Fields 2012). What an understanding of racecraft exposes, therefore, is *the racism* that our references to ‘race’ inevitably rely upon.
- 12 Here, Kornbluh summarises how ‘[a]ttenuated efficacy of the symbolic entails the relativization and fragmentation of meaning; the proliferation of “alternative facts,” of that which is “posttruth,” and the like; and the lack of common social institutions and practices for coordinating stable signification’ (2022, 409). In light of this, the relation we hold to these examples helps to emphasise the critical and cultural importance of psychosis.
- 13 It is also in this context that we can refer to Lacan’s Name-of-the-Father and to the importance of foreclosure in examples of psychosis (these are both discussed in Chapter 7). Elsewhere, Svolos considers the decline of the Name-of-the-Father and

the personal and social/political ramifications this establishes (Svolos and Rouselle 2022). Indeed, amidst ‘the decline of the symbolic as the dominant domain and the decentering or overthrow of the name-of-the-father as universal, the corollary for that in the social world is certainly the decline in dominance of universalism and, in the West, the church, in particular, and authorities and traditions, in general’ (Svolos and Rouselle 2022). Importantly, this bears a psychotic significance, wherein the prevalence of a ‘generalized foreclosure’ means that ‘[t]he symbolic is no longer dominant’ (Svolos and Rouselle 2022). Chapter 7 will serve to explore this contention by conceiving how such a decline in dominance denotes a disruption in Symbolic mediation.

- 14 Appearing in Lacan’s, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’, the full quote reads, ‘[i]n my view, this activity has a specific meaning up to the age of eighteen months, and reveals both a libidinal dynamism that has hitherto remained problematic and an ontological structure of the human world that fits in with my reflections on paranoid knowledge’ (2006b, 76). The ‘activity’ in question refers explicitly to the child’s identification with the specular image, the founding of its identification in an assumed image. McGowan’s (2020) criticisms of Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ will be considered in Chapter 4; for now, it is helpful to conceive how this ‘ontological structure’ can be conceived in accordance with the topological structure of the Möbius strip. With regard to Lacan’s (2004) later work on the Real (and the gaze), ‘the two sides [of the Möbius strip] representat [sic] the imaginary and the symbolic, with the real functioning as the cut. As an effect of the torsion of the strip, the real becomes structurally inherent to the figure, rather than “having a place.” The cut designates the impossibility that the imaginary and the symbolic will meet the real, while at the same time the real is inherent in representation as negativity’ (Herzogenrath 2010, 21). It is through this ‘ontological structure’ that the dialectic between subject and reality is conceived for Lacan (Žižek 2020a).
- 15 Notably, Seshadri (2022) attributes race’s imbrication within the western subject as attributable to the ignorance of psychoanalytic accounts of race. This is exacerbated when we consider Hsiao’s contention that ‘[Frantz] Fanon’s mention and application of the mirror stage in the colonial situation ... exemplif[ies] an early encounter, or missed encounter, between Lacanian psychoanalysis and decolonization or post-colonial theory’ (2010, 162). Despite this ‘missed encounter’, since Seshadri-Crooks’s, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (2000), there has been Robert Samuels’s, *Writing Prejudices: The Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy of Discrimination from Shakespeare to Toni Morrison* (2001); Shannon Winnubst’s, “Is the mirror racist? Interrogating the space of whiteness” (2004); Stephen Frosh’s, *Hate and the ‘Jewish Science’: Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis* (2005); W.J.T. Mitchell’s, *Seeing Through Race* (2012); Azeen Khan’s “Lacan and Race” (2018); and, Sheldon George’s, *Trauma and Race: A Lacanian Study of African American Racial Identity* (2016). Pre-dating Seshadri-Crooks, there is Christopher J. Lane’s edited collection, *The Psychoanalysis of Race* (1998), and, more recently, George and Derek Hook’s *Lacan and Race: Racism, Identity and Psychoanalytic Theory* (2021). Further still, in studies of colonialism and post-colonialism, Hook’s, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (2012); Jamil Khader’s *Cartographies of Transnationalism in Postcolonial Feminisms: Geography, Culture, Identity, Politics* (2014); Robert Beshara’s, *Decolonial Psychoanalysis: Towards Critical Islamophobia Studies* (2019); Gautam Basu Thakur’s, *Postcolonial Lack: Identity, Culture, Surplus* (2020); and Zahi Zalloua’s, *Žižek on Race: Toward an Anti-Racist Future* (2020), all provide a Lacanian approach to race and racism.
- 16 Seshadri-Crooks clarifies this approach in relation to the following questions, each of which will help guide the proceeding analysis: ‘[t]hus we must ask how race

appears as the logic of human difference itself. Why do we allocate difference along certain conventional lines of looking? How do we come to be racially embodied? What is the structure of racial difference, and what insights can psychoanalysis offer in the study of the raced subject?' (2000, 20).

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