

## BOOK REVIEW

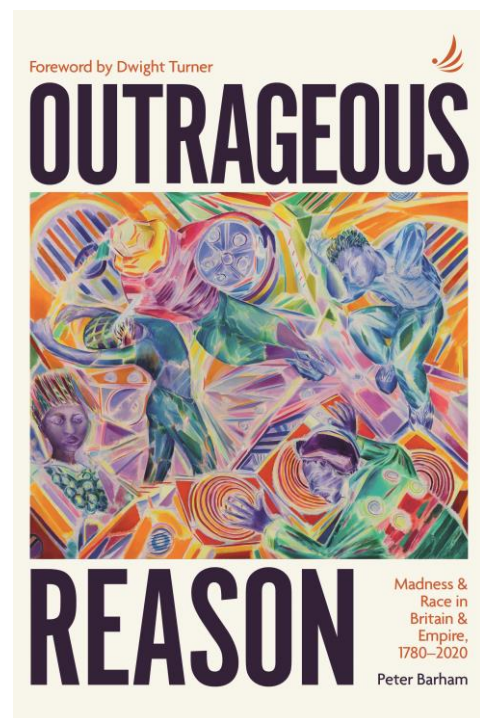
### *Outrageous Reason: Madness & Race in Britain & Empire, 1780–2020* by Peter Barham (PCCS Books, 2023)

Reviewed by **Sham Selvaratnam**\*

I'm writing this within the context of my intersectionality, at a moment when collective trauma, collective healing, and liberation from suffering are at the forefront of many minds and bodies, including mine. Home is London, United Kingdom, and Jaffna, Sri Lanka—geographical and ideological locations which influence the ways I've been socialised and the way I experience power, resistance, and liberation.

For me, *Outrageous Reason* illuminates and complicates the conventional historical and present day discourses in and around mental health, race, madness, reason, and empire. The text draws upon a wide range of archival sources and scholarship to reveal the structural and material violence created through the construction of race and madness. It might also help us to interrogate with fresh eyes, across disciplines, the coloniality which maintains those systems of oppression in our current ideologies and practices, within the UK's statutory sector services—and within us, even as we work on decolonising our minds.

Having worked in a male forensic secure setting, the gap between the present day and past appears slim in ways that are painful to dwell in. One of the most insidious ways of normalising power arrangements I observed in that setting was the 'credibility deficit' that Barham writes



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of—a construct deeply entrenched in our everyday discourse, along with many other ways deficit models are applied to ‘othered bodies’ in contrast to those bodies conferred with ‘full personhood status’—so much so that to notice and voice the ‘credibility deficit’ can feel revolutionary—and also puts the namer of such discourses at risk of attracting the same label. ‘Credibility and power are co-constitutive’ and this is apparent historically and in today’s mental health paradigm as Barham names in different ways throughout his text.

The expansive nature of Barham’s analysis feels profound. Identifying the normative and unexamined forces of power underlying Western modernity—in particular Whiteness—and its positioning of the racialised ‘other’ as inferior, justifying all subsequent violence. Barham diligently names and links back to race scholars the ways in which policing (in the everyday sense, as well as the institution of policing), governing, medicalising, detaining, and social order are operationalised through Whiteness, in policies, cultural discourse, and in specific injustices and rights violations carried out behind the ‘closed doors’ of mental health institutes.

These details provide a bridge between scholarly and lived experience perspectives—and may bring moments of recognition to those less familiar with these ideas.

As a therapist, and activist, I wonder how expressions of individual, collective, and generational resistance, resilience, determination, and courage can make a difference in dismantling the ‘ways things are’ and moving toward liberation, with allies from across the board, as Dwight Turner outlined in the powerful foreword to this foundational text.

This book will be an essential text for anyone wanting to understand present day mental inequities—policy makers, activists, educators, students, NHS (National Health Service) staff, and anyone working in the field of mental health. It will also be an important reference for those involved in decolonising curriculums and minds—and developing alternative paradigms which confer dignity and humanity onto all bodies.