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Geographies of race in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT


This article is a discipline-defining agenda. It addresses the oversight of Geographies of race in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and explores geography's potential contributions to the unfolding debates around race, decolonisation, and whiteness. Geographies of race remain unmarked and therefore unchallenged within the field of geography in CEE. Consequently, geographers typically consider CEE as peripheral to the global racial discourses and possibly post-racial. By drawing on sociological, migration, historical, and anthropological approaches, particularly in Poland, the article emphasises the importance of geography in discussions around race, decolonisation, and whiteness. It considers the appeal of geographies of race to this "peripheral location" to demonstrate a shift in racial and colonial discourses. By bridging interdisciplinary approaches and challenging prevailing discourses, the article aims to broaden the scope of the geographies of race and foster a more inclusive and global understanding of race and colonisation.

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Introduction

Scholarly investigations into the concept of race have illuminated its origins and the pivotal role of the colonial backdrop in its emergence. When tracing the development of this concept, historians of race have noted that the term race, in the context of human beings, entered Western language relatively late, gaining prominence due to European colonial endeavours beyond Europe (Hanaford 1996; Smedley and Smedley 2012). The concept of race gradually permeated various European languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French,

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German, Dutch, and English, through the establishment of colonies in different geographical locations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Whilst some forms of prejudice existed before the sixteenth century, it is suggested that these early prejudices did not lead to the widespread adoption of race-based ideologies until after the sixteenth century. As a historical construct, the concept of race became a social phenomenon during the height of the European colonial endeavours in the nineteenth century (Desmond and Mustafa 2009). This fundamental insight underscores the idea that any comprehensive study of race theory must begin with or at the very least incorporate the context of European colonialism, which continues to shape and influence social life at local and global levels (Golash-Boza 2016, 131).

Given the above trajectory of race, the concept of geographies of race – the exploration of the close connection between race and geography – has gained popularity, particularly in Western Europe and North America. It has contributed significantly to the understanding of cultural politics, social practices, and everyday geographies of identity (Dwyer and Bressey 2008). Various works on post-colonial studies have further advanced the understanding of geographies of race by highlighting the impacts of colonial expansion, nation formation, white supremacy, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism (Bonnett 1997; Jackson 1998; Pulido 2018). Together, these studies have emphasised the importance of examining the relationships between race and space (Hawthorne 2019). Beyond this, they reveal how national and cultural identities have been used to assign individuals to distinct geographies, which over time, have become racialised even though they are not explicitly based on race (Ahluwalia 2006; Gilroy 1998).

The mapping of individuals to specific geographies quickly led to theories about racial origins, as language and race became intertwined (Ahluwalia 2006; Goldberg 2006). For the most part, the mapping focussed on ethnography, philology, anatomy and comparisons between languages and customs, dealing with “the entire range of questions provoked by the existence of different peoples in far-off places, such as Africa, Asia and the New World” (Stepan 1982, 31). Geographies of race provide a platform for such theories through the socio-cultural-geographical influence that adopted global racist imaginaries. The historical connection between race and geography has its root in European imperialism, shaped by the legacies of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. Indeed, geography played a crucial role in facilitating such domination, where groups deemed “racially inferior” were subjected to practices of domination, regulation, and eradication (Nelson 2008). Notably, European thinkers such as Immanuel Kant played a significant role in constructing and circulating geographies of race. For example, Kant classified populations based on unequal mental and moral characteristics, asserting the natural superiority of white populations over the inferior “others”. In doing so, Kant accentuated the differences between white and

Black “races”, attributing various characteristics to each (Bernasconi 2001; Boxill 2017, 45; Eze 1997, 61–63). These racial and national classifications perpetuated the perception, preservation, and differentiation of space (Tymoczko 1999).

Whilst the above understanding of race and its relations to space has been theorised almost exclusively in the West, the ontologies that underpin geographies of race have received limited attention within the canon of geography in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). As Lafferton (2016, 4) encourages us, “We also need to look at Central and Eastern European national and imperial settings whose history of science still needs to be scrutinized, especially from a spatial perspective concerning the production of knowledge”. Acknowledging the unique aspects of race and space in CEE is particularly pertinent to understanding the global dissemination of race, as several studies are now beginning to examine CEE nations’ attempts at colonial arrangements beyond the region (Balogun 2018; Ginelli 2024; Herza 2020; Lemmen 2013). Indeed, there is a need to address the implications of geography as a human discipline in CEE and its relevance to the question of race and colonialism.

In what follows, this article seeks to examine the relevance of geographies of race to Poland and CEE, whilst demonstrating the shift in racial discourses beyond Western contexts. We start by mapping the geographies of race and their global implications. Given their negligence in CEE, the article then presents what geographies of race, colonialism, and whiteness might look like in the region, whilst drawing explicitly on the *Geographies of Sociology*, *Geographies of Migration*, *Geographies of Anthropology*, and *Geographies of History* which provide diverse yet overlapping theoretical and methodological approaches at least in Poland. We argue that interdisciplinary interventions from these disciplines have the potential to propel racial enquiries in geography into the mainstream in CEE. The article ends with some suggestions for geographies of race outside its usual Western context and the need for more globalised and less attachment to national or regional boundaries. In doing so, we attempt to integrate critical geography into the ongoing debates on race, colonialism, and whiteness in Poland and CEE broadly. Our aim is to bring attention to this oversight and encourage a more decolonial approach to geography that aligns with the global trend.

Mapping the geographies of race, colonialism, and whiteness

In recent decades, spurred in part by ongoing discussions about the significance of geography within colonial discourses, Anglo-American geographers have increasingly turned to questions of race and colonisation to gain a better understanding of spatial contestation. This shift has led to a greater emphasis on re-evaluating the racialisation of spaces and the ways in which spaces are racialised or constructed in racialised terms (Bonnett

1997). Indeed, geography as a discipline is well situated to engage with the questions of race and space, but not without its weaknesses that often reduce the conceptualisation of race to Anglo-American contexts and lack of enough people of colour in the field of geography (Delaney 2002; Hawthorne 2019). This underlines the importance of recognising that knowledge is inherently locative and that paradigms developed in one context may not be applicable in another. As Mignolo (1999) emphasises, it is crucial to consider the local specificities and situated perspectives that shape knowledge production. This is a major gap long identified by Kobayashi and Peake when they observe that:

Geography's agenda is directly or complicitly racist in a number of ways, beginning with a thoroughly racialized disciplinary past. From its origins in exploration and scientific classifications, the discipline played a founding role in establishing the systems of imperialist expansion and colonial power through which the Western world became a dominant center and its white inhabitants became normative, authoritative, and privileged. (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 399)

The above framing of race recognises the ways race is mapped and reproduced geographically through histories of inclusion and exclusion. This gives prominence to the deployment of the terms such as "global south" and "global north" as well as "western" and "eastern" as critical socio-political and historical constructs that have the potential to emphasise a particular approach to knowledge production within the field of geography. For the most part, these terminologies rest largely on geographical knowledge of coloniality, and locate a specific understanding of Blackness within white-dominated global knowledge (Hawthorne 2019; Noxolo 2022). Such knowledge is better understood when viewed through colonial logics that "violated black body and the stubborn denial of a black sense of place" (McKittrick 2011, 948).

Other scholarships have increasingly drawn upon the discourse of decoloniality as a strategic framework for examining the intersections of race within the field of geography. This approach makes Quijano's (2000) "coloniality matrix of power" pertinent to decolonising geographical knowledge production and discourses. For the decoloniality framework to achieve its objectives, it necessitates the cultivation of "alliance, connectivity, articulation, and interrelation", whilst striving for innovation, creation, and critical intervention (Walsh 2014). Such a shift would require pushing the boundaries of various disciplines capable of challenging the racial discrimination that rationalises economic and political exploitations (Mignolo 2007). Indeed, as Wynter (2003) has long recognised, geographies of race, colonialism, and whiteness are inseparable from colonial legacies and systems of thought that produced them. This has been particularly evident in the European colonisation of the

Americas since 1492 and the occupations of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific from the 1730s up to after the Second World War (Pagden 1995). These privileges, at the “core” and the “peripheral” of Europe, remain at the heart of the rise of Europe based on the exploitation of the non-European world underwritten by race and the assignment of geographical knowledge. Beyond this, geographies of race remain essential to the domination that created the classification of the world based on the concept of race. Much of this classification, built on geographical location, is arranged around “a biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others” (Quijano 2000, 533). As Wynter (2003, 266) further argues, “it was to be the peoples of Black African descent” and “the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples” who would be constructed as “racially inferior” groups based on their geographical origins.

Beyond the above decolonial intervention, Critical Whiteness Studies offer a valuable framework for exploring various dimensions of geographies of race. This interdisciplinary approach is evident in a long-standing historical sociology. To gain a deeper understanding of the significance of whiteness in this context, it is crucial to view whiteness as an embodiment of hegemonic beliefs and practices that establish white people as the norm and, consequently, racially unmarked (Dyer 1997; Hartigan 2005; Ignatiev 1995; Leonardo 2004; Roediger 1991). In this sense, whiteness, as an unmarked social identity, functions as a form of property and encompasses a collection of privileges that, in turn, manifest as a source of oppression (Frankenberg 1993; Harris 1993; Mark et al. 2024; McIntosh 1992). As echoed by Dyer (1997, 9), “white people shape the predominant perceptions of the world, often without realizing that they are projecting their own worldview onto it”, in doing so, “they establish criteria for humanity in which they are destined to succeed while others are destined to fall short”. In this cartography of whiteness, white privilege and white supremacy feature prominently. Collectively, they ensure the privilege assigned to being white, whilst a vast majority of people of colour have to settle for the minimalist option, as an unspoken way of asserting white supremacy (Pulido 2015). These privileges, though unwritten and largely unspoken, are advantages accumulated “by a social structural system normed on White people’s experiences, values, culture and perceptions” (Walter and Butler 2013, 401). It is in this context that Böröcz (2021) identifies the inner working of whiteness as a subject that

(1) creates a hierarchy of all people, (2) places itself on the top of that hierarchy, and (3) propagates the model as objective truth in which (4) all that, including, most important, its self-placement at the top of the global human hierarchy, is fully transparent. Consequently, (5) that ‘Whiteness’ can be read, at will, as a synecdochic reference to ‘humanness’ *genus* serving as a master plan for all Others. (Böröcz 2021, 1123)

Although the strategic frameworks mentioned above offer valuable insights into the intersecting nature of geographies of race, which have been extensively explored in Western contexts, our understanding of this topic in CEE remains understudied. Despite a growing body of research on race within sociology and migration studies, critical questions regarding the role of geography as a discipline in the region are yet to be addressed. The denial of significance of race within the field of CEE geography has obscured the inherently racist socio-spatial relationships at play. Whilst this article takes Poland as a case study to examine the significance of geography in understanding race, it also challenges the oversight of racial discourses from the discipline of geography across CEE.

Poland in the orbit of geographies of race, colonialism, and whiteness

Geographies of race circulate globally. However, as already indicated above, most works in this area typically come from Western perspectives, most notably in the United Kingdom (Bonnett 1997; Byron 2020; Desai 2017; Esson 2020; Jackson 1998; Noxolo 2022; Valentine 2001) and the North American contexts (Bonds 2020; Gilmore 2002; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Price 2015; Pulido 2018). Building on and going beyond this, we forefront sociology, migration, anthropology, and history to enrich geographical studies in CEE. Whilst there is substantial scholarly work on race and the spatial separation and marginalisation of Romani populations in the region (e.g. Garapich, Fiałkowska, and Mirga-Wójtowicz 2020; Picker 2017), there seems to be a glaring absence of focus on the geographies of race. To fill this gap, we pay critical attention to the “empty spaces” brought about by silence, exclusion, and denial, which perpetuate normative whiteness (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 400). Such spaces are not limited to areas largely dominated by white scholars, but locations where geographies of race are assumed to be absent. This geographical viewpoint is pivotal and holds the potential to drive societal change (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 400). Therefore, discussions of race and racialisation in CEE must consider the discipline of geography – a field that emerged within the Eurocentric methodologies rooted in the colonial exploration of the world. In particular, European exploration and conquests in Africa, India, and the Americas from 1492 onwards propelled these methodologies, ultimately giving rise to Europe’s world domination (Blaut 1992; 1993). This period of exploration and expansion, especially between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, resulted in the Columbian Exchange, a significant geographical interchange involving enslaved populations and cultures between the “Old” and “New” Worlds (Mann 2011). The primary aim of this age of discovery was to “accurately” document

geographical details, which has profoundly shaped contemporary understanding of peoples and cultures.

Since the circulation of geographies of race is global, we ask: how do we begin to excavate their constitutive nature in CEE, if at all possible? With the aim of igniting debates surrounding the roles of geography in “racial” enquiries, we suggest a significant body of research that is already opening up the enclave of geographies of race and capable of setting a proceeding to identify research agenda for critical human geography in CEE. In the following discussions, we highlight experiential aspects of geographies of race, focusing on Poland as a major example whilst also incorporating insights from other nations within CEE. We anticipate that *Geographies of Sociology*, *Geographies of Migration*, *Geographies of Anthropology*, and *Geographies of History* can facilitate geographically rich scholarship in the country and across the region.

Geographies of sociology

In contrast to some other disciplines within the humanities, the field of Sociology in Poland is not new to questions of race as an important line of enquiry. As such, the field is integral to the revision and discourses on race and space in the country. For example, through the social and economic context of belonging, Jaskułowski and Pawlak (2020, 464) have shown the pivotal roles of race within social hierarchies and power relations in Poland, where “a global neoliberal imaginary shapes ways of dealing with racism”. In a different sociological study, Balogun and Pędziwiatr (2023) examine how the global influence of Black Lives Matter mobilisations has been adopted in Poland, playing a part in the continuing effort to address crucial racial matters in under-researched areas in CEE. Furthermore, Balogun (2018; 2020; 2022a; 2022b), among many others, has sought to bring a specific understanding of anti-Black racism into conversations with sociological studies in Poland. In all this, he observes that the conditions created by the circulation of race and racism in North America and Western Europe provide the platform for the manoeuvring of race in CEE.

Beyond the broader sociological context, language of race has played a crucial role in CEE. Ohia (2013; 2015; 2016a; 2016b), for example, has explored the linguistic expressions of racism in contemporary Poland, examining both the language system (overt and covert) and public discourses related to Black people in the country. Through the analysis of everyday language usage and media narratives, Ohia shows the discursive strategies, mechanisms, and linguistic elements through which some aspects of the Polish media portray people of African descent as threats to the “Polish values”, disruptors of Polish homogenous identity, and threats to Polish existence (Ohia 2015; 2016a). Added to this, Nowicka (2018) provides a deeper understanding of verbal gestures and their racist nature that are often underplayed in

Poland. This is evident in the Polish term “Murzyn” [Black/Negro], as a contentious topic of recent debates in Poland (Balogun and Pędziwiatr 2023; Łaziński 2007; Michalak and Linde-Usiekniewicz 2022; Ohia-Nowak 2020; Paluszak-Bronka 2022) often embodies racial prejudices, but also embraced as neutral term believed to have no link to the global understanding of race.

These insightful sociological works highlight the pervasive influence of race on everyday life, playing a pivotal role in geographies of race. But very much more than that, they show that “race – in all of its complexity and ambiguity, as ideology and identity – is what it is and does what it does precisely because of how it is given spatial expression” (Delaney 2002, 7).

Geographies of migration

Scholarship on migration puts the geographies of race differently, yet central to the discourse on the contestation of spaces through racialised terms. In more circulated migration and refugee studies, drawing out the implications of geographies of race in Poland and elsewhere in CEE, Nowicki (2017); Bobako (2017); Krzyżanowski (2018); Krotofil and Motak (2018); Puskás (1983); Krivonos (2019); Rudwick and Nwagbo (2024) and others have all illustrated how anti-refugee and anti-immigration narratives have become tremendously political in the contestation of spaces and who is and who is not welcome within a specific location. Related to this point is the Romani Studies, where scholars have examined the (mis)representations of Romani communities in Poland (Garapich, Fiałkowska, and Mirga-Wójtowicz 2020; Kaprański 2016), and elsewhere in CEE (Andjelic 2018; Kende 2000; Merhaut 2019). Many of these anti-immigration discourses are at the intersections of nationalism and racism (Polynczuk-Alenius 2021). As Grzymała-Kazłowska (2009, 58) aptly notes, anti-immigration narratives are linked to widespread ideological and political standpoints that are often shaped by the state and ethno-nationalistic narratives in the contestation of CEE as a territorial space.

Also, worth situating within this body of work is the racialisation of white Eastern Europeans as an implication of geographies of race that located many residents from CEE in an inferior, yet ambiguous position in Western Europe (Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine 2022; Kalmar 2022; Lewicki 2023; 2024; Mogilnicka 2022; Rzepnikowska 2019). On the one hand, they are perceived as “negative significant other”, and for the most part, “backward, poor, dirty, nationalistic or post-communist, aggressive, often dangerous and unpredictable” (Zarycki 2018, 80). On the other hand, Narkowicz (2023) notes that this particular group is also “able to benefit from their position as ‘paler migrants’ to distance themselves from other migrants as well as ‘darker citizens’”. Thinking through this process of biological determinism as an unmarked, but important aspect of geographies of race and space, Zarycki (2022, 328) makes an essential intervention here through the

framing of “lord” (the noble person) and “boor” (the peasant or enslaved person) as individuals located within a different spatial yet related environment. The most telling of Zarycki’s argument is not only the linking of “boor” to biological inferiority, but the particular ways in which many Polish noble families are “closely related to some European royal families or other well-known Western noble families” that allowed many Polish aristocrats to “pass themselves off as Western gentlemen improved the image of Poles as a whole as more European society”. The boundaries created by these narratives, Delaney (2002, 9) reminds us, “are not solely metaphorical; they have material referents in the lived-in world” with geographical “racial” enquiries at their hearts.

Geographies of anthropology

Anthropology has had a unique development and impact on the non-Western world. It was and still, to an extent, a “methodological assumption that the study of the ‘primitive’ or non-Western world could take place only from the vantage point of the Westerner or outsider” (Lewis 1973, 582). In addition to the areas where geographies of race have had a major impact in CEE were the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries anthropological shows that emerged from Western Europe and North America. They were public displays of largely non-European bodies perceived as primitive and uncivilised, which quickly grew into circuses and in some cases “human zoos”. Importantly, the shows were often prepared for and presented before white audiences across various cities in Western Europe and in North America (Parezo and Fowler 2007, 204). Symbolic in this respect was the inferiority of the bodies on display, whilst highlighting the superiority of Whiteness and Europeaness. Discussions around these anthropological shows have tended to focus on North America and Western Europe, as part of the global racial order. However, Novikova (2013); Herza (2016); Leskinen (2018); Savitsky (2018) Boldāne-Zeļenkova (2020); Czarnecka (2018; 2020); Czarnecka and Demski (2020); Demski (2020); Kontler (2020); and Křížová (2022) have all demonstrated neatly the practices of ethnic and exotic shows in CEE, including Poland, Czechia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Romania. These nations, often assumed to be, in “the peripheral” played a key role in the global and racial ordering of peoples from differently perceived geographies, most notably non-white populations outside Europe. This less known, but emerging scholarship on exotic shows in CEE is better understood as an integral component of geographies of race that highlights the contrast between Europeaness and non-Europeaness and their colonial origins. As Czarnecka and Demski (2021, 12) point out, these shows, similar to race, were part of the “instrument of imperial-colonial power” used loosely for the purpose of hierarchy with white European at the top of such hierarchy

and yet never been a major line of enquiry within the canon of geography in CEE. In this way, geographical ethnic shows in the region came to be seen not only as part of a wider European cultural movement, but as synonymous with it.

Geographies of history

When taking stock of the historical accounts of geographies of race, colonialism, and whiteness in CEE, one needs to be attentive to CEE's position of in-betweenness in the colonial and anti-colonial spheres. It was a dynamic of continuity, separation and, at the same time, largely overlapping in terms of spaces, practices, and representations. This position provides space for "elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1994, 2). Within these innovative sites of collaboration, nations in CEE sought "approval/envy and love/hatred from the west, never questioning the main frame of western modernity, only changing the superfluous details" (Tlostanova 2012, 136). Here, Mark and Betts (2022), Alamgir (2023) and Nguyễn Vũ (2024) present a nuanced historical account with geographical spatial analysis of the relationship between race and space. This was particularly evident in the early twentieth century when emerging nations in CEE started to insert themselves within the global geographies of race, as a way of proving their worth as fit European nations. In doing so, they fantasised about having colonies and sought to contest, and emulate its values and achievements, whilst also resisting the imperial subjugation in Latin Americas and Africa. Navigating this "complex geographies" is not that straightforward, especially for nascent nations, nonetheless, its potential was embraced through the notion of whiteness, as Mark and Betts (2022) argue:

The smaller Eastern European states had to survive in an international environment in which their own sovereignty was still vulnerable. Some elites sought to work through a broader white imperial world to fortify their fragile new polities and, in a few cases such as Czechoslovakia and Poland, fantasized about gaining overseas possessions themselves and becoming 'superior colonizers', enlightened by their own experience of suppression under imperial rule in Europe. (Mark and Betts 2022, 12)

With this, nations in CEE were able to imagine themselves as white and tapped into the wider European colonial projects and its geographies of race. Other studies within history illustrate this commendably. Puchalski (2021), for example, demonstrates the intersection between Poland's national policies and the fascination with the processes of colonialism outside Europe, most especially in Africa during the interwar period. As Puchalski (2021, 5) plainly points out – the "Polish physical and intellectual interactions with

the colonies are still too rarely studied, despite a strong (historical and current) presence of people from Poland living beyond the state's borders". Similar oversight has been identified by Grzechnik (2020) when considering the activities of Poland's colonial organisation – *Liga Morska i Kolonialna* (Maritime and Colonial League) in West Africa. Whilst such an expedition is cautiously presented as a modernising project, Poland's position was "underscored by [the] anxiety to be recognised as equal to Western Europeans, as sufficiently white" (Grzechnik 2020, 840). It is within this position of wanting to be part of the European "core" that Lingelbach (2020) locates Poland's colonial ambiguity where whiteness has been employed to situate white Polish people within global racial hierarchy whilst still experiencing exclusion within the Western imperialism. In a similar historical context, focusing on the GDR, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, Burton et al. (2023) have examined how these countries in CEE adopted a genre typically associated with colonialism and repurposed it for anti-colonial geo-politics. In all these contexts, "the territorial division of continuous social space into dichotomous 'insides' and 'outsides' facilitates the polarisation of a continuous range of colors ... into 'white' and 'black' and hence the freezing of identities into 'we' and 'they'" (Delaney 2002, 7). Indeed, the thread that ties together these nations and geographies of race is whiteness, as they saw themselves as white, therefore, able to escape a specific racial subordination based on biological determinism.

Taken together, the above body of work seems to raise important questions on how the field of geography, at least in Poland, could now insert itself into the ongoing debates on race and colonialism in a region where geographers are well-placed to address these concerns. Such decolonial geography, Noxolo (2017, 318) suggests "would be much more focused on how that colonial past is still active in the inequalities of the present", most especially in relation to people of colour. This decolonial turn, especially about geographical knowledge production, can hardly take its course without addressing the colonial structures inherited from the discipline's colonial and imperial histories that either manifested locally or inherited from the West (Turda and Balogun 2023).

Geographies of race are currently understudied in Poland and certainly in CEE. Yet, their circulation, especially within the discipline of Geography in CEE, has barely been questioned or acknowledged, therefore assumed to be absent. In the region, geographies of race require a critical level of awareness that is currently clouded by the denial of the significance of race and its social ostracism. In light of Poland's historical entanglement with colonial pursuits, the field of geography, much like in other Western European nations, has been criticised for its failure to fully embrace diversity and openness in knowledge production processes (see Balogun and Ohia-Nowak 2024). This lack of openness reflects unresolved issues related to colonialism. However, if we

are to overcome the wider implications of geographies of race, it is necessary to focus specifically on Central and Eastern European Geography that engages directly with the legacies of race and colonialism in the region.

Geographical contributions and future directions of CEE geography

Sociology, migration studies, anthropology, and history provide valuable insights into the geographies of race in Poland and offer interdisciplinary approaches to understanding racial dynamics. As demonstrated in this article, sociological research highlights the roles of race within social hierarchies and power relations, whilst emphasising the influence of global neoliberal imaginaries in shaping responses to racism. Similarly, migration studies shed light on the contestation of spaces through anti-refugee and anti-immigration narratives, revealing the intersection between racism and nationalism. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the racialisation of everyday life and the impact of race in shaping social and spatial contexts.

Anthropological investigations in CEE unveil the historical practices of ethnic and exotic shows, which were part of a wider European cultural movement. These exotic shows reinforced racial hierarchies and the contrast between Europeaness and non-Europeaness. Also, historical accounts have revealed some CEE nations' ambiguous relationship with colonialism, seeking recognition as equal to Western Europeans through engagements with colonial imaginaries. The exploration of colonial expeditions and the desire for whiteness, for example, reflect Poland's positioning within the global geographies of race.

However, geographies of race in CEE have been largely overlooked within the discipline of geography, limiting our understanding of race, colonialism, and whiteness in the region. By integrating insights from sociology, migration studies, anthropology, and history, this article has demonstrated that geography can contribute to ongoing debates on race and colonialism in CEE. A decolonial geographic approach is necessary to uncover the colonial structures inherited from the discipline's past perpetuated through colonial legacies. By centring the experiences of marginalised communities and foregrounding questions of Blackness and racism, geographies of race have the potential to transform geographical enquiries and promote social justice and antiracism.

From a theoretical standpoint, we consider geographical perspectives as a potential discipline in CEE that is capable of shedding a light on the global understanding of race and migration in the region. Empirically, we draw on insights from sociological, migration, anthropological, and historical studies within the region in order to bring geography into the unfolding debates around race and migration in the region. The trajectories of *Geographies of Sociology*, *Geographies of Migration*, *Geographies of Anthropology*, and *Geographies of History* charted throughout this article have the potential to

transform the field of geography in Poland and CEE. However, it is worth asking – how do these disciplines contribute to geography? With questions being raised as to the significance of geography to the contemporary social issues in CEE, we contend that the problem with geographies of race in CEE is not a lack of information or theorisation of their crucial elements at least in Poland. As stressed above, geographies of race are already embedded within the geographies of sociology, migration, anthropology, and history. They only need to be integrated into the field of geography where discourses on race and colonialism are currently rendered invisible, but have the potential to make even more substantial contributions that speak to the consciousness, imaginations and complexities of race-space nexus in the region. To be clear, geographies of race are not exclusively the study of people of colour. Rather, as Hawthorne (2019, 8) suggests, it “is a call to center those subjects, voices, and experiences that have been systematically excluded from the mainstream spaces of geographical enquiry”.

All this suggests that it is no longer enough to only pursue social-historical enquires as the only normative commitment to antiracism. Such enquires need to incorporate the relationship between race and geography. Here, geography is capable of revealing the ways in which race, and its elements have structured spaces, as the consequences of living in a racialised world. Geographies of race in CEE represent a vital area of study that requires increased attention. By integrating insights from various disciplines, we can broaden our understanding of race, colonialism, and whiteness in the region. Geographical perspectives have the potential to contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of race beyond the dominant Western contexts. By accentuating the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, this article calls for further studies that engage with the complexities of race, colonialism, and whiteness in CEE and foster social change and decolonial practices within the discipline of geography.

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