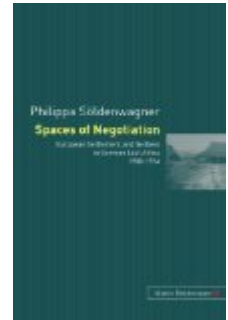


**Philippa Söldenwagner.** *Spaces of Negotiation: European Settlement and Settlers in German East Africa 1900-1914.* München: Martin Meidenbauer Verlag, 2006. 286 S. EUR 49.90, cloth, ISBN 978-3-89975-072-0.



**Reviewed by** Christopher Molnar

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German East Africa was a hybrid colony. It was neither completely a settlement nor a trade colony, and its hybrid character opened up "spaces of negotiation" between German settlers and the colony's other inhabitants. In *Spaces of Negotiations*, Söldenwagner uses an anthropological approach to explore the interactions between German settlers, other Europeans, and Africans in German East Africa in the decade and a half before the outbreak of World War I. Using records from the colonial administration, memoirs, travel reports, and newspapers, Söldenwagner describes the negotiated character of colonial policy as well as the rich interpersonal interactions and negotiations of identity that took place in the everyday life of the colony.

Germany established its control over East Africa in 1884, and early on a debate developed as to whether East Africa should be a settler or a trade colony. On the one hand, "emigrationists" who pushed for the creation of a settler colony sought to expand the German nation and to redirect German emigration towards new German territories. Emigrationists, who were usually na-

tionalists, called for the state to actively encourage and support settlement. On the other hand, supporters of the "economic standpoint" argued that settlement in East Africa was too difficult to be economically profitable. They saw East Africa as a supplier of raw materials and as a new market. After 1900 they also believed that independent Africans were the best producers of raw materials, a conviction that clashed with emigrationists' plans to use Africans as forced laborers. Representatives of both viewpoints were present in the colonial administration, and so "East Africa ended up being a colony that incorporated elements of both settler and trade colonialism" (p. 51).

Emigrationists initially hoped to fill East Africa with small-scale German peasant farmers, but that idea, which never came to fruition, gradually gave way to the desire to attract "gentleman farmers" who could purchase more land and grow cash crops. In reality, however, settlement was never very extensive: there were never more than about five hundred settlers. Moreover, German settlers and officials deemed a great number

of settlers to be "racially dubious" (p. 53). Greeks were among the earliest and most successful settlers, but Germans disliked the economic competition and considered them "second-rate whites" (p. 59). The German colonial administration recruited Boers and German-speaking Russians to begin settling the land, but both plans failed. The Boers preferred to make a living through hunting and trading rather than farming, which led Germans to compare them to "gypsies" and led one official to call them "white Maasai" (p. 63). German settlement finally picked up in 1907 because of the extension of railway lines and the emergence of profitable cash crops, especially rubber. Most new settlers were upper-class males.

Land acquisition in East Africa was controlled by the colonial administration, and, in contrast to practices in other European settler colonies, the property rights of sedentary Africans were generally respected. German officials viewed small-scale African production as important for the colony, and so German settlers were not allowed to force them from their land. German officials considered the nomadic Maasai, however, to be of little economic value to the colony, and so they were pushed into reservations without compensation. Settlers violated the colony's restrictive land acquisition policies in two important ways. First, they claimed free land on their own and only retroactively had it legalized, and second, they often negotiated directly with Africans. Although she recognizes that Africans were often cheated in these negotiations, Söldenwagner also contends that these negotiations show African agency, since they sometimes managed to receive quite good compensation for the sale of their land.

After acquiring land, settlers had to try to make a living under very difficult conditions. This task proved so difficult that many European settlers rapidly became destitute. Among the many challenges that farmers and plantation owners faced were the difficulty of transportation, the scarcity of willing laborers, shifting local and

world market demands, economic competition from Africans, and a general lack of agricultural knowledge and experience, especially in such a foreign environment. Many German settlers failed to eke out an existence as farmers or plantation owners and instead turned to hunting, craftwork, employment on plantations, cattle trading, and labor recruiting. Life was so difficult that some impoverished settlers asked the colonial administration to send them back to Germany, which it did, "since 'poor whites' posed an unacceptable threat to the colonial racial order" (p. 168). White prestige was so important to the colonial order that the colonial administration even deported some poor settlers who had not asked to be sent back.

Because the colonial administration never established a separate settlement area for Europeans, Africans and Europeans lived in closer proximity to each other than was usually the case in settler colonies. Söldenwagner explores four spaces of negotiation--exchanges of goods and services, the workplace, the neighborhood, and sexual relations--in which interactions between Africans and Europeans took place. Germans established a "culture of violence," in which Europeans were given the legal right to use corporal punishment on their African employees. This culture of violence invaded all of the spaces of negotiation, particularly the workplace and in sexual relations, where reports of sexual violence against African women, including children, were common. Germans were troubled by sexual relations between Europeans and Africans, but while marriage between Europeans and Africans was made illegal, casual sexual relations, as long as they did not involve European women, were generally accepted. Despite the culture of violence, African workers were still able to negotiate higher wages and better treatment by threatening not to work for Europeans, a threat they could carry out since they were not dependent on Europeans for their livelihood.

The construction of a firm racial hierarchy did not lead to the forging of a true settler community. European settlers were so few in number until about 1907 that the construction of community life was impossible, and when their numbers increased it became clear that they were divided by nationality, social class, politics, economic interests, and more. After 1907 the social and political life of the colonies began to develop: newspapers, schools, and clubs and political associations were founded. The clubs and associations were generally only open to European men, and politics was dominated by German men. The rise in the number of women settlers also increased social stratification. The settlers were so riven by divisions that "one cannot speak of a settler community throughout the German colonial period in Tanzania" (p. 207).

*Spaces of Negotiation* is a well-researched book that is full of rich material. One of the book's chief values lies in its detailed description of German failure in East Africa. Indeed, Söldenwagner concludes that, lacking the full support of the colonial administration, German settlers' experiences in East Africa were "more often than not characterized by insecurity, failure and ineptitude, thereby constantly negating the image of the successful colonizer that was so essential for the justification and maintenance of European settlement" (p. 10). Söldenwagner's discussion of the negotiation of racial identities, although brief, is also particularly good. For obvious reasons scholarly treatments of German racial thought often focus on its antisemitic and anti-Slavic character, but by examining German attitudes towards Greeks, Boers, Russian Germans, and others, Söldenwagner is able to show just how fluid racial identity was and how contested and constructed the category of "whiteness" was. Söldenwagner might have done better to spend more time exploring these racial constructions. She also could have done more to draw out the ways that race was defined in terms of gender and class, especially since so much evidence in the book calls out

for this sort of analysis. Finally, the book's prose is quite choppy. Nonetheless, *Spaces of Negotiation* is an excellent study of German East Africa which will be welcomed by historians of German and European imperialism.

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