The topic of ideological and intellectual foundations of empire and colonization in Africa has a relatively large body of literature behind it. However, these studies tend to focus on either the British Empire in Africa with its conceptions of Frederick Lugard’s “Dual Mandate” or the French colonial holdings, which saw the path of colonial control being one of assimilating the local population into France as a cultural construct. While short-lived, the German Empire in Africa initially charted its own path informed by its own conceptions of populations and their inherent cultures. The most well-known studies tend to focus on the military devastation leveled by imperial forces in Africa or the early political debates within the German Reich over colonial efforts. Matthew Unangst’s *Colonial Geography: Race and Space in German East Africa, 1884-1905*, which explores imperial Germany’s intellectual and ideological approach to its East African colony, is an exceptionally welcome addition to the larger study of European empires in Africa. As befitting his background, Unangst uses the lens of cultural geography to grapple with the German colonial authorities’ changing conception of space and culture within German East Africa. In doing so, he enriches our understanding of how late nineteenth-century German intellectual conceptions of race, space, and cultural formation ultimately shaped East Africa during and beyond the colonial era.

Unangst follows the larger ideological and intellectual evolutions within the local and German conceptions of space and culture in East Africa. He draws on existing documentary and cartographical evidence to explore the discourse that formed the evolving conception of space, using the methodology of cultural geography to analyze how the ideas and ideology of the figures mapping the area ultimately created a series of representations of the region and its people that defined them for larger audiences. Unangst is quick to note that much classical work of cultural geography often lends it-
self to mechanistic ideas of development and space making. As a result, much of the book serves as a critique of these earlier ideas, adapting Edward Said’s Orientalism to effectively introduce the idea of a “spatial imaginary,” where the discourses of German explorers, officials, and authors produced a representational space that both defined and distorted the peoples and places of East Africa in the larger imagination of the German Empire. These distortions in turn collided with German ideas of people and development to create a continual process of transformation as Germany attempted to define and develop its prized colonial territory.

To trace these lengthier transformations, Unangst takes readers through a chronological evolution of the local understanding of the space of East Africa and various populations’ conceptions of their relations to it. The earliest discussion offered is that of the Omani overlords of the region and their view of the space from their enclaves on the coast and Zanzibar archipelago. The maps and stories of the patrician classes offer a rich discussion of the space as various nodes within a larger interconnected trade network that drew inland commodities to the Indian Ocean coast. While there was cultural separation between coastal and inland populations, it was one defined as much by their role in these networks as location. The populations that had settled on the coast, known as the Swahili, defined themselves by their role as civilized and cosmopolitan brokers to the wider Indian Ocean trade. This led them to label themselves through the concepts of ustaarabu and uungnawana, which denoted urbanity and cosmopolitanism. Meanwhile, they defined the inland populations, which they traded with, as ushenzi, babaric, savage, and uncultured. These locations were ultimately defined by the potentially mutable culture that existed within them and their role in the larger trade networks as opposed to the more static conceptions of space and race that would shortly be imposed.

With the arrival of German colonial representatives, the racial ideology of these new European colonizers began to define the people of the mainland as lazy and indolent tropical populations, as documented thoroughly in personal and official documents of both the German East African Company and the later imperial bureaucracy. Unangst identifies the centrality of the German conception of Kultur as an animating intellectual construct, with Kultur representing the relationship of land and space to the people living on it. Starting with the first generation of colonial administration, the volume traces the attempts of administrators to alter the relationship of the colonial populace with the land, with the idea that this change in Kultur would ultimately change locals from a population of tropical indolence to one that is enterprising and hard working. Unangst also explores the shaping of the German peoples’ idea of their new colony, including the images sent home from Carl Peters and his contemporaries, along with the media lionization of Emin Pasha, the German expatriate administrator of the Equatoria province in Sudan. The volume ends with an examination of techniques and populations imported from across the colonized world to attempt to finally establish Kultur in the colony, including the imposition of hut taxes and the encouragement of South Asian immigrants to serve as local examples of labor practices for Africans. However, as Unangst notes, most of these practices ultimately were compromised, if not abandoned, by the eruption of the Maji-Maji Revolt across the southern half of the colony in 1904-5.

Ultimately, the volume does an excellent job tracing the efforts of German colonial agents to shape perceptions of space and race across the first twenty years of German engagement in East Africa. By using cultural geography as a foundation, Unangst explores the continued evolution of race and its relationship to the perceived space of the colony within the eyes of both Germans involved in the colony and those back in Europe who supported imperial efforts in Africa. Unangst
ably uses this disciplinary framework to interpret a plethora of contemporary sources. His evidence and analysis allow him to craft a compelling argument for the unique shaping of the German East Africa colony as both a social and cultural space and as an idea among the German populace. As a result, *Colonial Geography* should be a critical work for any scholar of German imperialism or East Africa. For the latter, the book may be of special interest to scholars of the independence era, as Unangst’s framework of colonial officials attempting to reshape the populations’ relationship to land offers an interesting perspective on later attempts of independent Tanzania to shape its cultural identity through shared work and villagization, attempts that found deeply rooted resistance as profoundly opposed to the Tanzanian state as to German colonizers.

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