

"Communities" and the Creation of Political Order in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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The boundary between state and society in twentieth-century Africa has been both elusive and dynamic, shaped by a wide range of local, national, and transnational actors. Through both their co-operation and competition with the state, these actors have (re)made the African state and affected its ability to broadcast power territorially, functionally, and symbolically. This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of the creation of political order by analyzing the interaction between the state and different "communities" in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Although scholarship has demonstrated the constructed rather than essential nature of "community," in everyday usage the term almost always evokes something favorable and denotes either a collectivity that is culturally and politically homogeneous, or a geographic area that is defined by administrative boundaries. The argument promoted in this paper is that "community" is a construction that has long been in the service of different forms of modern rule. Various actors have imagined, identified, and deployed numerous "communities" in the pursuit of a wide range of goals. This paper draws on original ethnographic research and secondary data to examine the following questions: How have colonial, nationalist, and nongovernmental actors deployed the idea of "community" and with what objectives and outcomes? How have the "communities" used this recognition to carve out emancipatory political and social spaces?