

# STATE-LED NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN TANZANIA

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State-run museums are central to the study of national identity formation because they are tangible, relatively uncontested sites of state-articulated national narratives. Throughout the summer of 2014, I spent time in nine museums and visited multiple public monuments across six different cities in Tanzania. I also went to the Kenya National Museum in Nairobi. I was fortunate enough to be the recipient of a FLAS fellowship and a Center for African Studies Pre-Dissertation Grant, so I combined intensive Kiswahili classes at the University of Dar es Salaam with preliminary fieldwork for my future dissertation project.

My research is primarily concerned with identity formation and the ways that states try to create consensus through narratives that delineate who belongs to the nation and who does not. Tanzania is at the center of my research project because it arguably represents a case in which independence leaders and the

postcolonial government were largely successful in encouraging national identity formation. Further, there is a relevant and complex racial and national dynamic that exists between mainland Tanganyika and the Zanzibar archipelago. The salience of this identity divide is heightened by ongoing maneuvering for potential constitutional reforms. My purpose this summer was to look at how state-led nation building continues today, fifty-three years after independence. Additionally, I hoped to investigate the inclusiveness of the narrative enshrined in the family of national museums.

I was able to spend time at museum sites in Dar es Salaam, Bagamoyo, Stonetown, Songea, and Arusha. The national stories told in each of these museums, excluding the National Museum of Zanzibar, were strikingly consistent. Each of these places was a touchstone in an overarching narrative that celebrates the ruling party (CCM), memorializes its guidance into independence, and largely glosses over its policy failures. This is

not an altogether surprising telling of history, but the fact remains that it appears to be significantly one-sided. This bias also extends to representation of racial subnational groups in Tanzanian museums.

The National Museum of Zanzibar in Stonetown was a surprising departure from the museums on the mainland because the identity that it memorialized was almost completely oriented toward the Indian Ocean and the Arab world. Perhaps what is most interesting about this museum was its lack of any exhibit or commemoration of the archipelago's union with the mainland. This is particularly surprising because the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of union was ongoing this summer and widely propagandized on the mainland, but hardly mentioned in the museum Zanzibar. I mention this to draw attention to the puzzling and complex relationship between the two formerly separate states that make up the United Republic of Tanzania, particularly as it pertains to the idea of an overarching Tanzanian national identity.

This summer provided me with a valuable foundation, both in terms of research and language skills, upon which to build future research projects. I plan to expand the work I did this summer, both within Tanzania and within other cases in East Africa. Although I focused this trip on state-articulated national stories, my future work will also be concerned with the acceptability of these official narratives to ordinary citizens, as well as with grassroots alternative national histories and identity articulations.

Victoria Gorham is a PhD student in political science. Pre-dissertation travel funding provided by the Center for African Studies and the UF Office of Research.

