

# 1 *Introduction: Schools of Faith*

This story is about American missionaries on the world's turf. It unfolds in two parts of the globe: East Africa and the United States. The opening themes are religion, education, secularism, and politics. Each is developed across years of growing political attention to religion's public significance worldwide.

At a certain moment in this story, the view looking backward becomes very different from the view looking forward. That moment is the early 1990s, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when East African governments began to pressure American missionaries to register as development agencies. Before this point, evangelical missionaries worked independently of nonreligious aid organizations, and development programs were administered by professional organizations such as Oxfam or CARE, or by governments working bilaterally. Behind East African governments' pressure was a bigger force, the World Bank, and behind the Bank there was pressure from its greatest shareholding power, the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The World Bank and the U.S. government encouraged East African governments to subcontract development activities with nongovernmental agencies, including faith-based groups. American evangelical missionaries were wary of this approach. They believed in the separation of church and state. Yet the U.S. government was touting faith-government partnerships as the new *value added* to development schemes. Linking religion to policy reframed nation-state interests by increasing their moral legitimacy. Some observers remarked that religion was America's new export to the world. One best-selling historian pinned his hopes on American evangelicals helping to build an empire rivaling the old British Empire (N. Ferguson 2002), and a nationally syndicated editorialist referred to Christian evangelists as America's new foreign policy force (Kristof 2003, 2008).

Popular commentators were right in their own way, yet the story is more complicated than they tell it. It has to do with competing visions of secularism in public life and with how religion crafts new moral geographies that politically secure and link distant lands. Put simply, much as

the United States had designed the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, the World Bank worked to develop parts of Africa in ways that were favorable to the political and economic control of its member states. The Bank went about this task in its typical fashion: by tying strings from its development efforts to grants and loans.<sup>2</sup> Bundling ideology with money continued (and likely will) for many years, but sometime around the end of the Cold War and before the U.S. “war on terror,” political ideology within international agencies began to take on a softer tone. These agencies began to cast economic relations in moral and religious terms. The thrust of development increasingly became not just to create codependent market economies but also to support ethically linked, morally like-minded communities that share common views about the value of religion for improving public life.

Lending and aid agencies, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank, began to identify religious organizations as key providers of basic education.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, James D. Wolfensohn, then president of the World Bank, together with Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey and His Highness the Aga Khan,<sup>4</sup> convened an interfaith organization called the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD). At a conference in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2000, the WFDD identified education as a priority area of action in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup> In January 2001, President Bush signed an executive order establishing the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI).<sup>6</sup> By 2003, OFBCIs existed in all eight departments of the federal government, in USAID, and in the Corporation for National and Community Service; and by 2008 some policymakers writing in the U.S. media were predicting correctly that faith-based policies would outlast U.S. presidential and political changes (Hein 2008; Kuo and DiIulio 2008).

This overt focus on religious organizations as social service providers marked a shift away from the tenets of high modernity. Whereas the nation-state school used to function as the primary locus of civic enculturation, it now served as a site where connections between religious and global communities were imagined. Some political scientists argued that this shift signaled the weakening of independent governments’ abilities to influence citizens (Reno 2001, 2004) and governments’ withdrawal from development functions (van de Walle 2001: 276). Other observers maintained that it represented a new ideological means for nation-states to extend their political influence and interests globally (for example, Hibou 2004; Roitman 2004). Despite these differing interpretations, the shift set in motion novel forms of control that recalled a long history of Western imperialism.<sup>7</sup> For some U.S. and international aid workers, these developments were disturbing, and for many they were outright wrong.

As would be expected, organizations that supported church-state separation disputed the legality of faith-based policies.<sup>8</sup> However, a surprising measure of discontent was also evident among East Africans who shared American faith groups' views. East Africans who worked closely with American evangelicals privately referred to Americans as "colonialists" and "people without history."<sup>9</sup> Some Christian East African teachers said they did not like the deceptive ways in which Americans advanced religion indirectly while teaching children. East African evangelists felt that Africans, not Americans, should lead the Christian Church on the subcontinent, and few elders within these evangelists' churches liked the fact that American congregations sending money to Africa continued to demand a say in how the funds were spent. First European colonists, then the World Bank, and now American missionaries, their argument went, treated Africans as childlike and incapable of self-governance. "American missionaries don't know world history; they're reproducing African dependency," said one Ugandan Bible school director of Christian life, who otherwise shared the missionaries' theological view that divine rule will come to bear on Earth.

Yet East African evangelical Christians agreed that the evangelical missionaries were right about one thing: the missionaries understood the value of religion for Africans while most academics (including anthropologists, they said) did not. The missionaries knew that religion happened not only on a certain day of the week and not only in private but also in public places. The Africans did not separate private religion from public life, including life in public schools. Religion and education were seamlessly entwined. Ritual and pedagogy were one and the same. The way evangelical missionaries conducted their work in East African schools, and the way they taught anthropology to Bible college students in East Africa, gave evidence to this point.

American evangelical missionaries conjoined faith with social action. They stressed the simultaneity of knowing and learning, of religion and education, and they saw religion as being everywhere and as inseparable from most aspects of social life. For East Africans and American evangelicals alike, the world existed as a *sacred cosmos*. Their mutually held worldview questioned secular-modern paradigms that separated private religion from public life. This shared conception—although different in details—created a context for collaborative faith-based work in which East African and American evangelicals together could—and did—offer free trauma counseling to American and East African embassy workers affected by the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Nairobi. Together they could—and did—provide technological expertise to business and civil service leaders in Uganda. Together they could—and did—provide free English instruction

to children in public primary schools in Tanzania. Faith-in-action was a shared method and mode for containing the secular-humanistic—and for some, satanic—forces they perceived as spreading politically and socially around the world.

The story presented in this book, then, connects two regions of the globe through an analysis of faith-based programs and missionaries' activities. In examining the work of evangelical Christians in East African public life—and the recruitment of religious groups for public service by international and U.S. governmental agencies—this book charts a new course for understanding faith in schools. It looks beyond a framework that distinguishes between the spheres of politics and religion, and it explores ethnographically and conceptually the many representational modes by which “religion goes public” (as expressed by Meyer 2004: 94) and by which, I add, the public goes for religion.<sup>10</sup> Seeing religion and education as dialectically related—including in anthropological and social theory—opens up a conceptual locus for analyzing how the public realm is transformed and how new governmental regimes emerge.

The ethnographic setting of this book starts at Christian college campuses in the United States where missionaries train, then follows the paths of these missionaries to parts of East Africa—central and western Kenya, eastern Uganda, and northern Tanzania—where they and East African evangelists work. The timeframe spans the convergence of major world political-religious struggles and, by association, U.S. and middle-eastern regional conflicts. Rocked by U.S. embassy bombings in Tanzania as well as in Kenya in the late 1990s; by Muslim-Christian tensions that coincided with American support for political leaders in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania; and by protests and riots between Muslims and Christians in cities and on the coast over rights to teach and preach publicly, East Africans in the decades on either side of the start of the twenty-first century were, as Brad Weiss (2002) has described, experiencing an upsurge of economic uncertainty and political-religious factionalism. The portrayal by U.S. lawmakers and leaders of American faith workers as “foot soldiers” in U.S. “armies of compassion” lent weight to some East Africans' claims that the work of missionaries was politically motivated—that it was a campaign to promote American policy by winning the hearts and minds of poor African children.<sup>11</sup>

Yet in the eyes of missionaries from American colleges (most missionaries were college students) who were working in East Africa, the motivating force of their work was faith, not global politics. Missionaries operated in a selfless mode of service work they called Christian witness, a public-oriented form of service-learning that casts faith work as allegiance to God, not allegiance to people in governments. Missionaries compared the service-learning projects supported by their universities to Jesus' work

of teaching and preaching, of helping those in need, and they compared their faith-based, service-learning mission work to participant-observation methods of anthropology. *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Kraft 2003), a widely used textbook in evangelical Christian anthropology, furnished missionaries with an explanatory framework for translating their message cross-culturally.

To introduce methods and concepts used by missionaries, and to begin to analyze their work in relation to the secular-liberal principles at the core of cultural anthropology, I have divided this chapter into several sections: a description of missionaries' faith-based work in public Tanzanian schools, a liberal secular creation story on which missionaries' work (and much of anthropology) rests, missionaries' strategies for engaging East Africans in evangelical work, and the methodological strategies I have used in writing this ethnography. A final section provides an overview of the structure of the entire book.

In a nutshell, and to introduce the argument I develop across this book, missionaries' work in East Africa makes visible a dialectical relationship between religion and education. At the turn of the twenty-first century, religion and education operated in international policy circles and, in this evangelical faith group's work, through an emergent new logic of mutual encompassment. Put simply, faith-based policies framed the nation-state as the protector of religious groups, saw religious groups as equal with the nation-state before the law, and gave each the same rights to participate in public life and government. Evangelical missionaries, however, saw the relationship the other way around: religion authorized (good) government, and God, not government, determined morality; religion was government's protector, and even (especially) education provided by the state needed a good dose of Christian evangelism. Both evangelical missionary *and* faith-based governmental discourses framed religion and state-administered education as a relationship of mutual enmeshment—a relationship by which state-education discourses of accountability, efficiency, equal opportunity, and so on superseded and encompassed religious-moral ideas of borderless religious faith; *and* a movement by which religious-moral discourses of faith and spirituality infused and encompassed governing bodies (state and nonstate) with the ideals of providence and historical necessity (Stambach 2004).

This relationship—of the state encompassing religion and religion encompassing the state—unsettled classically understood models of governance by which the secular-modern nation-state alone enveloped lower reaches of society, including religious groups (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). To help readers understand the upshot of this mutual encompassment for religion's new powers in public life, I offer here an ethnographic study of

how the public is governed through competing claims of religion's superior geographic reach and higher moral scope.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this understanding, we need, I insist, to look at education, a pivotal site where multiple and crosscutting "schools of faith" (which exist in many forms—secular, liberal democratic, theological, and so on) inform and transform the nation-state.

### *The Biblical Creation Story*

As an initial example of Christian evangelism conceived as a form of participant-observation and service-learning, and of the deep connection between religion and education in East African settings, picture a Tanzanian public school in which American evangelical missionaries conducted fieldwork as part of their summer service work abroad. In this case, faith took the form of a spiritual rationality that motivated the missionaries' instructional methods and attracted members to the church.

Set some one hundred meters off a busy tarmac road near one of the city's center markets, Musoma Primary School is nestled among commercial sites. The day before the events recorded here, the dirt compound had been compacted by a series of brief rains, and clusters of impatiens and an occasional rose bush now flowered brightly in the sun. The school is laid out in typical u-form, with an outward edifice that provides a single entryway. Inside, classroom doors open onto an interior courtyard—a thinly grassed area that doubles as a soccer pitch—and the office of the headmistress is centrally located so that she may observe most of the surrounding activities.

A group of American missionaries arrived at 7:30 on a Monday morning. Allison, their leader and administrator, met briefly with a head teacher of the school, then called the rest of the missionaries, several of whom were new to the program that year, to observe something "really interesting." There, in the courtyard, most of the school's five hundred students were assembled, lined up in sections organized by grade. The headmistress, shouting to be heard, instructed the children to "sing that Father Ibrahim song!" Missionaries the previous year had taught this song to Standard 5 (Grade 5) students (ages eleven through thirteen), who in turn had taught it to the rest of the school. Enthusiastically and dutifully, the students burst forth in singing, in English, at the top of their lungs:

Father Ibrahim has seven sons,  
and seven sons has Father Ibrahim.  
I am one of them, and so are you,  
So let's all praise the Lord!

The students threw their left hands into an imaginary circle in front of them and shouted “left hand!” at the end of the first stanza. They shouted “left hand! right hand!” at the end of the second stanza and flung both hands, one after the other, into the air. By the end of the six stanzas they shouted “left hand! right hand! left leg! right leg! head! whole body!” and shook each of these body parts in turn.

The students rippled with enthusiasm and glee. Their headmistress beamed. She was pleased that these public primary schoolchildren were speaking English and were so full of energy on this first day of the missionaries’ English language program. Faced with competition from private schools, which were attracting some of her best (and wealthiest) students, Headmistress Ulomi had contracted with evangelical Christian missionaries from the United States to teach a free English course during midyear break. She had tried to introduce English as the language of instruction in all classes at Musoma Primary, believing that English would prepare her students for future employment, but Tanzanian Ministry of Education regulations required that she continue conducting regular classes in Kiswahili, the national language. Her idea for this English course was being used at another, nearby public school where the same group of American missionaries had also been teaching for four years consecutively. The English program in both schools had been approved by district and regional authorities and was an exception to what was offered in most public schools in Tanzania. Technically, religious instruction was to be taught as a separate subject, not integrated into an academic lesson such as this English program—unless, as in this case, special terms had been negotiated.

The missionaries were college students; most were from nondenominational Christian colleges in Texas and Tennessee. Some were preparing for careers in world evangelism and had come specifically to preach and convert, but most said they had come to fulfill service-learning requirements and teach English to young Tanzanians. The college students—white and middle class—were part of a group of Africans and Americans who called themselves the Zebra Team. African evangelists affiliated with a Bible college in Nairobi preached on Sundays, led prayer groups on Wednesdays, and like these U.S. students, spoke English fluently. A different configuration of the Zebra Team worked in eastern Uganda, where Americans and Africans also sought to educate and evangelize the community.

When silence had settled on Musoma Primary’s soccer pitch, the head teacher invited the missionaries to take over. They divided the Standard 5 students (about seventy children) into six groups of roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. Three groups went to different parts of the exterior courtyard, and three moved to the corners of the school’s assembly hall.

One missionary moved with each group to each of the six activity centers (drama, games, songs, reading, conversation, and art), and two other missionaries—a male-female pair—stayed at each center to teach the center’s activity to the successive groups.

This first day’s lesson was numbers, taught using the biblical creation story. At the reading center, one of the missionaries read the entire story, then asked each student to read a sentence aloud:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On the first day, God said, “Let there be light.” And there was. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

On the second day, God made the sky. He filled it with white, fluffy clouds. Below the clouds He placed a gentle rocking ocean.

On the third day, God created dry land. He commanded the seeds in the ground to grow. The land was filled with trees, grass, and flowers.

On the fourth day, God made the sun to warm the day. Then He made the moon and stars to brighten the sky.

On the fifth day, God filled the oceans and rivers with swimming fish. He filled the sky with flying birds, and he filled the land with roaming animals.

On the sixth day, God created something very special: a man in His own image. Man was given a special job too. He was to take care of the earth and all its creatures.

On the seventh day, God looked at His creation and said, “It is good!” Then He rested.

The missionaries integrated the Bible story with the academic lessons but did not saturate the lessons with religious meaning or openly interpret the creation story. Their purpose was to use the creation narrative as a backdrop for more general lessons about counting and reading and speaking English, and thus to lay religion as the foundation for building the public edifice of education. They expressed their religious beliefs matter-of-factly, including their belief that human history is divided into divinely ordered epochs, or dispensations, in which (as historian Richard Hughes writes about these nondenominational churches) “God used unique means to bring his rule to bear on the earth” (Hughes 1996: xii). East African churchgoers shared the missionaries’ faith in Jesus’ Second Coming, but they differed, as we shall see, in their view that blessings and offerings rather than godly dispensations marked and ushered in Jesus’ ministry.

When the last Tanzanian student finished reading aloud, one of the missionaries instructed her to “strike the bell” (that is, to strike a hanging metal disc with a wooden rod), at which time each of the six groups moved to a different center. The Pink Flamingos (the missionaries had given each group of students a color-animal name) moved from the reading center to

the conversation center. Here a missionary had written on the board, “Hi, how are you?” “Fine, thank you.” The students took turns reading the dialogue while standing in front of their peers. At first the Pink Flamingos’ participation was lackluster and mechanical, but when the missionaries changed the dialogue to “Hey, what’s up?” “Not much. You?” the exercise energized the group. Alex, the head teacher-missionary at the center, asked the Pink Flamingos, “Who would like to be a part of this exercise?” He called on Amina, a Muslim student wearing a head scarf, to read half of the dialogue. Amina stood in the front of the room with another student, Michael, and together they recited the dialogue, with difficulty at first. Alex corrected their pronunciation and encouraged them to continue. Amina and Michael repeated the exchange, much to the amusement of their classmates. Clearly everyone, including the missionaries, enjoyed this exercise.

From the conversation center, the Pink Flamingos moved to the art center, where each student received two pieces of construction paper glued together, with seven doors cut into the upper sheet. The students numbered the doors one through seven and drew the day’s creation episode under each. A missionary reread the creation story and showed those who did not know what to draw how to order and sketch the days. The students were especially eager to use the crayons and felt-tipped pens that the missionaries had brought. They seemed little interested in counting in English, because most of them already knew how to do so.

After completing the art activity, the Pink Flamingos rotated to the drama center, where they were given costumes. The costumes depicted images representing the days of creation and included hats and t-shirts to wear. All of the students participated by shouting out the sequence, “On the first day” this happened, “on the second day” that happened, “on the third day . . .” and so on.

Gaining confidence to the point that some of the missionaries began to wonder if the students were not becoming too rambunctious, the Pink Flamingos moved next to the games center, where they learned to play Pingle Mingle. In this game, the students milled around until one of the missionary-teachers called out a number—such as “Three!”—at which point the students quickly had to organize themselves into groups of that number and “mingle.” The girls mostly mingled separately from the boys, and the boys seemed to want to include as many students as possible, despite stating that they understood the number concept.

From the games center, the Pink Flamingos moved to the songs center, where they learned several verses that involved counting.

By 10:00 A.M. the session was finished and the students returned to their regular classes, which were taught in Kiswahili. The missionaries departed

to have lunch at their director's rented house (which some of them called "Little America" and saw as their home away from home). There, in the living room, Allison, as the missionaries' leader, stressed the importance of engaging the students in "fun activities," and most of the conversation among the group's members revolved around what the Tanzanian students had seemed to enjoy most that morning. Allison advised the missionaries not to get carried away in using examples from American pop culture but to stay focused instead on examples that were "wholesome" and "universal." Referring to such skits as "Hey, what's up?" she cautioned that slang sometimes degenerates into vulgarities that they would not want to promote. Yet she also said that she thought Tanzanian students needed some "loosening up" and that their learning style was mechanical.

At the end of the meeting, Allison asked George to pray for the missionaries' work. (In these churches, men typically led group prayer; women would do so if only women and children were present.) Everyone then moved to the dining room for lunch before going to Kikweli Public Primary School, where they offered a similar version of the creation story lesson.

### *Preaching While Teaching?*

On the face of it, this account of evangelical missionaries' use of the creation story to teach English may seem parochial—concerned with the activities of only a handful of missionaries working in two schools. However, between 1992 and 2001, the number of U.S. missionaries working internationally increased by about 16 percent (to 44,386), and financial support from the United States for such work increased to more than \$3.8 billion dollars, up by about 45 percent from nine years earlier. Welliver and Northcutt (2004: 13), whose survey research documents these changes, note that from 1992 to 2001 a slight shift occurred "away from evangelism/discipleship activities toward education and relief/development activities." In a follow-up study, Weber and Welliver (2007: 35) note a continuing increase through 2005 in the number of mission agencies reporting community development activities.

In step with these trends, the public school English language program in which these evangelical student missionaries participated was just a small part of what the Zebra Team did. In town, the student missionaries tutored secondary school students; on weekends they built bed frames for a rural orphanage. With the Kenyans, they recruited people to church, which was held in a former clinic above a store on Main Street. Also, as illustrated ethnographically in later chapters, they performed similar projects elsewhere in Kenya and in Uganda.

However, it is not just what the missionaries did but how they did it that was so powerful and carried force beyond specific classes or lessons. They established an unstated but particular orientation to learning in which religious value was embedded. They presented biblical texts as ordinary readings from which ordinary lessons might be drawn, and they reinscribed their claims that they were teaching Christianity with the argument that their lessons were universal. Put another way, these missionaries operated through a particularly Protestant belief in the power of the Bible to transform diverse peoples and save the world. As both English lesson *and* socio-moral cultivation, the creation story, as the missionaries taught it, involved the Tanzanian children in ideas and activities that included and excluded, and oriented and reoriented them to, old and new ideas and arguments, as well as particular communities, temporalities, and moralities. The missionaries taught aspects of the lesson didactically, that is, they used methods of direct instruction and call-and-response, for example, "Speak more clearly," "Repeat after me," and "You should raise your hand before you speak." They used these phrases to urge acceptance of their lesson through social conformity.

This didactic instruction, however, like proselytization, was the least of teaching or preaching in that greater inculcation occurred through lessons conveyed in everyday rituals. Like catechists' kneeling and praying, or like an apprentice's work with a master, the missionaries' work was a matter of disposing the students to accept a particular moral authority; they were not so much preaching while teaching as organizing the social conditions of the students' work. A long-standing tradition in anthropology has analyzed the inculcation of moral authority as a matter of adult generations creating homologous categories of value that structure habits and social practices. Drawing on Aristotle's *Poetics* ("man . . . is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons," from Part IV), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), for instance, developed the idea that moral predispositions are achieved by transposing various "techniques of the body" (a phrase previously attributed to Mauss 1973) onto parts of the entire social system.<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu's work, inflected from Durkheim (2008 [1912]), informed a revision of symbolic anthropology (itself associated with the work of Clifford Geertz) and illustrated how people imagine counter-representations of state, society, and culture through their bodies (that is, how they use their bodies metaphorically, as in, for example, talking about the "body politic"). Taking a more synesthetic approach to morality as "body sense" and "body learning," Asad (1993: 76–77) proposes "inquiring into the ways in which embodied practices (including language in use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience"; he suggests that in some contexts, "the inability to enter into communion

with God becomes a function of untaught bodies.” Whereas Asad critiques symbolic anthropology (and particularly Geertz’s work) for its unreflective Christian borrowings, Saba Mahmood argues that anthropological conceptions of religious expression and human agency are narrowly grounded in a liberal-secular, not only privatized religious, tradition.<sup>14</sup> Sam Kaplan (2006) extends this point by developing the concept of the “pedagogical state,” a phrase that captures well how governing interests implicitly craft and explicitly convey citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

These and other recent works (such as Benei 2008; Coe 2005; Hurtig 2009; Lukose 2009) reveal that education is much more than a tool for advancing individual achievement, more than an extension of the nation-state, more than the activities of schooling. It is as well, and in various contexts, a moral disposition, a habit that paradoxically both produces normative ideas and in many contexts contains a constructive language for critiquing the very forms it valorizes.<sup>16</sup> Like ritual in some contexts—and for that matter, like some media<sup>17</sup>—pedagogic reasoning creates the many realities it also inscribes. Reading, writing, and arithmetic, for instance, provide tools for acting that include conceptual schemes for seeing and understanding the world; but education often juxtaposes social realities that sit uneasily in relation to one another. Despite the conventions that formal schooling sets up, it often articulates a diversity of views—including views about the scope and limits of schooling and about how religion should be understood and taught. Studies within the field of education—particularly those that see schools as agents of change—sometimes overlook this unstable and paradoxical quality of education. Many researchers have reproduced in their writings an unreflexive liberal secular faith in schools—a faith that includes assumptions about the need for and inevitability of separating private religion from public life. Many have also put their faith in the hope that schooling can draw out and change inequalities, as though schooling can solve all problems everywhere and all the time.

To avoid the mistake of applying a Eurocentric historical framework of public education and private religion to ethnographic and textual materials—and to avoid this mistake without discounting the liberal-secular premises on which anthropological analysis stands—the arguments in this ethnography have been derived from the empirical contexts the book analyzes. What must be theorized and stated at the outset, I maintain, is that secular-modern ideas of schooling, which evangelical Christians work within yet also seek to change, stand on a foundational myth that is also at the core of social theory.