

What is a School? Religion, Education and the Politics of Categories in Colonial Northern Rhodesia

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Taking colonial Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) as the empirical example of a historical ethnography, the paper explores the discursive framing of ‘school’ (as an institution in the domain of ‘education’) in its relation to ‘church’ (as an institution in the domain of ‘religion’). More particularly, by tracing the historically changing definitions of ‘schools’ by British colonial administrators, on the one hand, and members of African Christian movements, on the other, and examining the controversies between these social actors with regard to the issue of religious schooling for Africans, the paper argues that colonial agencies in Northern Rhodesia embarked on the separation of ‘school’ and ‘church’ only *after* African Christian movements had actively appropriated the early colonial practice of coalescing the two. Thus, taken together, it can be shown that the process of educational modernization in the form of a functional differentiation between ‘religion’ and ‘formal school education’ represented an attempt to hegemonically control the indigenous population – just like the colonial mission societies’ earlier coalescence of ‘church’ and ‘school’.