

*Background of the development of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. The case of Boko Haram*

**Description for the general public**

The aim of this project is to research the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria basing on the study of backgrounds of the development of the Boko Haram organization. The organization represents the fighting branch of radical Islam. Boko Haram preaches the necessity to eliminate Western influences in Hausa civilization in northern Nigeria. They put a special pressure on proving the destructive impact of Western, laic education on the morals of Hausa Muslim youth and therefore they ban attending to secular schools. The other aspect of the Boko Haram teachings is the idea that federal Nigerian state is illegitimate. The organisation tries to overthrow the secular state and rebuild the structures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sokoto Caliphate. What is peculiar for the Boko Haram organisation is the broad usage of the Islamic *takfir* concept. According to *takfir*, it is impossible to accept the fact that a Muslim could act in a way that contradicts Sharia. Everybody that acts in such a way should be regarded as unbeliever (Hausa: *kafiri*). Basing on the *takfir* concept the Boko Haram members have killed thousands Hausa people as those who deserve death because they do not oppose secular state structures and send their children to laic schools.

Realisation of this project will enable us to answer the question of the circumstances favouring the development of Boko Haram and then apply the results to better understanding the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. The hypothesis of this project reads as follows: contrary to the popular conviction, development of the Boko Haram organisation does not result from the rising popularity of radical Islam on the globe. The Boko Haram rebellion is favoured by the local circumstances, such as cultural and historical factors, socio-economic situation in the north of Nigeria and the local nature of Islam.

This project will contribute to the development of knowledge on Islamic fundamentalism. It will also help to determine the role of socio-economic, historical and cultural factors in the process of strengthening radical attitudes in Hausa society. The research will be fulfilled by the analysis of circumstances favouring the emergence and rapid development of the Boko Haram organization. Boko Haram's hard-line activity, which is expected to lead to the implementation of socio-religious reform, as well as clear references to the most prominent thinkers of fundamentalist school in Islam, let us perceive Boko Haram as a standard model of Islamic radical organization that could be used as a reference point to conduct further research on fundamentalist groups in other regions. The similarity between socio-economic circumstances in Nigeria and other states of the Sahel, as well as coincidence in the history of these states in the field of the colonial experience and their specific religious and cultural nature let us apply the results of the research on Islamic radicalism in northern Nigeria to explore the situation in other states south of the Sahara. The Boko Haram rebellion has universal qualities, thereby the analysis can be traced to further research on the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism in Nigeria, in the Sahel, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions across the world.

The present project is a continuation of my recent research on northern Nigerian movements of Islamic revivalism. I have been conducting the research since 2010. Within the framework of my research I have published a scientific monograph regarding the 'Yan Izala organization and its role in the development of Islamic fundamentalist thought in northern Nigeria. The 'Yan Izala movement could be called a primary organization for the later Boko Haram members, because many of them had joined it in the past. What is more, the teachings of the 'Yan Izala movement were reinterpreted by Muhammad Yusuf and later used to build the ideology of Boko Haram.

Within the work on my doctoral thesis I study the concept of Islamic reform created by the Boko Haram ideologues and leaders. All these research projects could serve as a starting point to the analysis of factors that accelerated the creation and development of the Boko Haram organization, as well as for defining their role in the process of the movement's radicalization.