



## CONTENDING RELIGIONS, IDENTITIES AND SPACE

MACERATA, NOVEMBER 12 -13, 2015

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**PAPER'S TITLE:** THE BOKO HARAM *FRANCHISE* AND THE WAR ON TERROR IN NIGERIA

### ABSTRACT:

The so-called “Boko Haram” terrorist group undoubtedly stands out as the most notorious offspring of the Islamic revivalism movement in Nigeria. Though, it seems to have lost whatever was linking the group to the unspecified form of Salafi tradition which its founder – late Mohammed Yusuf – claimed as a basis for his action. Nowadays, the organization worldwide known through its Hausa sarcastic nickname – roughly translated as “state education is a sin” - no longer appears the religious-political creature conceived at its very first stage. In parallel with the global tendency found among militant Islam-inspired terrorist groups in the world, Boko Haram has proved able to establish its own form of control over territories – the sought-after Caliphate – by increasing kinds of more and more brutal exercises of terror tactics. The religious bond that was able to legitimate its outbreak more than five years ago, and to gather a certain degree of public acknowledgment, has yielded to more materialistic attitudes. The somehow risky definition of *franchise*, instead, applies very well to describe the evolving nature of Boko Haram. The group's economic ramification into the realm of the rewarding kidnappings-business (as well as other criminality-related activities) has thus allowed a more rapid integration in the informal economic processes of the greater Lake Chad region, leading to the diffusion of several inter-related cells. The success of the insurgency collectively operated under the “Boko Haram” designation against, mainly, Nigeria and Cameroon, has finally worked to unite regional and Western actors to implement a new War on Terror front in Central Africa. The pledge of allegiance to Iraq's Islamic State (ISIS) has further strengthened Boko Haram's position inside the “terrorist archipelago” as a global threat and procured the explanation for an umpteenth militarization of one of the most sensitive areas in the world. But by what measure are military anti-terrorists operations contributing to re- establish a safe-space and promote good governance and civil as well human rights?

This work draws from the observation of local newspapers (Sahara Reporters, L'Oeil du Sahel, Al-Wihda Info, etc.) and from field-research conducted on Nigerian ground during the second half of 2014: it aims to show that the insurgency developed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad is progressively leading to a reconsideration of the conflict's nature.

### AUTHOR'S SHORT BIO AND ACADEMIC PROFILE :

Alessio Iocchi holds a B.A. in Political Science from University of Rome III and a M.A. in International Relations with focus on African politics from University of Naples L'Orientale. His thesis work has brought him to Kano (Northern Nigeria) in order to investigate the evolution and economic aspects of Boko Haram. During his time in Nigeria, participated in the International Conference on Hausa Studies held by Bayero University with a paper dedicated to “The Construction of Identity Patterns in Contemporary Kano” (due to be published in 2015). From his experience on the ground, Iocchi has developed a paper entitled “Boko Haram: Kidnappings Business, Regional Linkages and the 'Bush Economy'”, that has been accepted for publishing by the Annual Review of Islam in Africa, Center for Contemporary Islam (CCI), University of Cape Town. He has also been invited as a guest for a workshop that will be held in late July, 2015 in University of Palermo, as part of the programme of the doctoral school in Human Rights.