

Final report for projects funded by the Leibniz Association's Competition Procedures
Project title: Religion, Morality and Boko in West Africa: Students Training for a Good Life ("Remoboko")

Project number: J34/2017

Executive Summary

Objectives and design

Remoboko (ZMO, June 2018–December 2024) examined how religiosity shapes secular higher education across four campuses—Niamey, Ibadan, Lomé and Abomey-Calavi. Using the "social curriculum" lens, the project analysed how their campus experience equips students with more than academic competencies, how campuses regulate morality and politics, and how secularism, Salafism and Pentecostalism interact. Core objectives were cross-country comparison, understanding Muslim-Christian interactions, and internationalization.

Achievement of milestones and budget

Fieldwork and archival research were completed at all sites. Output includes a monograph (De Gruyter, 2025) and an edited volume (LIT, 2023). Of the three PhD students, one defended (2023), one is on track (early 2026), and one is unlikely to complete. Activities were adapted for feasibility: subprojects narrowed from two universities per country to one flagship campus where necessary; a Nigeria–Niger comparison was refocused on Niger. COVID-19 required rescheduling and temporary remote methods. The project remained within budget; travel savings in 2020–2021 supported extended fieldwork and the 2023 final conference. Additional funding (€22,000, Fritz Thyssen Stiftung) underwrote the conference.

Activities and obstacles

The team combined coordinated fieldwork, archival work, and targeted events. Four anchor workshops/conferences (2018, 2021, 2022, 2023) structured the programme; 13 'Boko Café' sessions (2021–2024) sustained exchange; a 2023 film series introduced visual methods. Obstacles included pandemic disruptions, linguistic divides, visa denials, logistics and internal administrative procedures. Mitigation involved bilingual programming and output, hybrid participation, visa support, and strong local partnerships (notably LASDEL, Niamey).

Results and successes

Publications comprise one edited volume; one monograph; four peer-reviewed journal articles; nine peer-reviewed book chapters across major presses; a policy report; and a public-facing essay, with many items open access. An ethnographic film on Niger is in post-production. Across West Africa, Europe and North America, the team delivered 21 invited talks, panels and conference papers, consolidating the project's argument that campuses function as training grounds, moral spaces and political arenas.

Equal opportunities, career development and internationalisation

Coordination was female-led; among 93 collaborating researchers in 24 countries, 37.6% were women. The project sought balanced panels and provided targeted mentoring (including language support). Doctoral and early-career researchers presented internationally (e.g., ECAS 2023) and developed visual-anthropology skills through courses and multiple screenings of *Karamin Sani Kukumi Nèè / Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing*.

Structures and collaboration

Governance relied on regular unit meetings and the internal 'Boko Café' seminar for coordination and peer review. Key institutional partners strengthened feasibility and quality: LASDEL (methodology, access, co-organisation), University of Ibadan/IFRA-Nigeria (campus access, archives, mentoring), and Freie Universität Berlin (doctoral training and hosting).

Quality assurance and open science

ZMO procedures were complemented by continuous peer feedback in workshops and seminars, annual shared “Readers” (~20 texts), and structured doctoral milestones. The project prioritised peer-reviewed venues, open access with DOIs/stable links, and deposition in the ZMO Institutional Repository. Blog posts (17 entries) functioned as training in concise scholarly communication and widened dissemination.

Additional resources

€22,000, Fritz Thyssen Stiftung

Outlook and planned exploitation

Forthcoming work will: (1) finalise and circulate the Niger documentary; (2) engage partners and policy actors through talks and briefings on student governance, chaplaincy relations and religious pluralism; and (3) a final conference volume. Research priorities include trends in student associations since 2010, administrative governance of campus religion, post-graduation trajectories of activists, a strengthened gender lens on recruitment, leadership and space, and analysis of African Traditional Religions as a third actor in multi-faith campus settings. Together, these strands advance explanation of how student religiosity intersects with broader transformations of authority and coexistence in West Africa.

1. Achievement of objectives and milestones

Hosted at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) from June 2018 to December 2024, Remoboko examined how religiosity shapes secular higher education in West Africa. The planned comparative design was implemented across four flagship campuses—Université Abdou Moumouni (Niamey, Niger), University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Nigeria), Université de Lomé (Togo), and Université d’Abomey-Calavi (Benin)—to analyse the entanglements of secularism, Salafism, and Pentecostalism. We operationalised the analytical lens of the “social curriculum” to trace how campus training and socialisation equip students with cultural, political, and economic competencies; how campuses act as sites of moral regulation and political negotiation; and how religious commitments align with collective and individual aspirations. This approach supported three core objectives: cross-country comparison; attention to Islam–Christianity dynamics; and mapping the circulation of ideas and practices. Although the project on Nigeria did not materialize, work on the case has opened new opportunities, including cooperation beyond the end of Remoboko and further internationalization, an essential goal of the project.

The project met most milestones and delivered the planned outputs. Fieldwork and archival research were completed at all four sites. The postdoctoral project (F. Madore, ZMO) has yielded a monograph (De Gruyter, 2025). Of the three doctoral projects, one dissertation was defended in September 2023 (M.B. Adamou, Université Abdou Moumouni, Niger); a second (V. Favier, Freie Universität, Germany) remains on track for defence in early 2026; the third (A. R. Adétòrò, University of Ibadan, Nigeria) is unlikely to be completed due to health reasons. The team launched the Remoboko website (<https://remoboko.hypotheses.org/>), organised thematic workshops, and convened a final conference. An ethnographic film based on the Niger case is in post-production.

The personnel concept and activities were adjusted where necessary. A project coordinator was recruited. Three doctoral students were recruited instead of two as initially planned. The postdoctoral comparison on Togo and Benin was narrowed from four institutions (Lomé/Kara; Abomey-Calavi/Parakou) to two (one per country: Lomé; Abomey-Calavi). This recalibration strengthened analytical quality while preserving comparative leverage. Similarly, one doctoral project originally designed as a Nigeria–Niger comparison was refocused on Niger, despite preliminary fieldwork in both countries, to reflect feasibility constraints. COVID-19 disruptions required the rescheduling of fieldwork and a temporary shift to remote data collection, followed by extended in-person research once travel resumed. All changes were documented and incorporated into the project timeline.

The project remained within the approved budget. The main variances relative to the original financial plan concerned (i) lower international travel and mobility expenditure in 2020–2021 and (ii) higher spending in 2022–2024 on extended fieldwork. Early-period travel savings were reallocated to support the final conference and to allow project extension to end of 2024.

2. Activities and obstacles

Over the funding period the team combined coordinated fieldwork, archival research, targeted academic events, and sustained dissemination. Comparative investigations were conducted on four campuses in four countries in close collaboration with colleagues and institutional partners, notably LASDEL in Niamey.

Four major academic events structured the programme. An initial methodology workshop at ZMO, 'Religion, Morality and Boko: Students Training for a Good Life. What to look for? How?' (11–12 December 2018), consolidated the comparative design and refined individual research questions. The ZMO workshop 'Religion in Higher Educational Institutions in Africa and Beyond: (Re)Conversion, Power, and Authority from a Comparative Perspective' (16–17 November 2021) deepened analysis of conversion and authority on campus. A LASDEL-hosted workshop in Niamey, 'Religions on Campus: Coexisting Traditions, Reformulating the Secular and Life Projects' (31 October–4 November 2022), advanced collaboration with partners in West Africa. The final ZMO conference, 'University Campuses in Africa and Beyond: Training Grounds, Moral Spaces and Political Arenas' (6–8 September 2023), funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, synthesised results and broadened outreach to include also case studies from the United States, Indonesia, and the Middle East.

Between May 2019 and October 2024, the team convened 17 'Boko Café' sessions to foster exchange with scholars working on related themes; the sessions fed the project blog through the 'Three Questions to our Guests' series. The 2023 screening series 'Mediating the Unknown' (7 March–30 June, ZMO) introduced a visual-anthropology strand on religion and education. In total, nine documentary films were screened, including four shorts. The bilingual Remoboko blog and the annual Readers ensured regular knowledge sharing in French and English.

Obstacles and deviations were managed. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the suspension of fieldwork—e.g., the Nigeria mission of one PhD student was cut short in March 2020—and delayed the first fieldwork of the postdoctoral researcher (2021). The team pivoted to literature reviews, remote interviews where feasible, and re-sequenced fieldwork to 2022–2024. Linguistic divides between francophone and anglophone West Africa challenged scholarly circulation; mitigation included bilingual programming online outputs. The initial comparative scope proved too wide for two subprojects as mentioned earlier. Organising events in Niger entailed significant logistical demands; partnering with LASDEL was essential for access, safety, and participant diversity. For events at ZMO, visa issuance posed major challenges for participants from the Global South. An initial overemphasis on Islam and Muslims was corrected through additional work on Pentecostal and Evangelical movements (targeted readings, invitations, and panels).

Developments in the research field informed these adjustments. Renewed debates on decolonising higher education, the expansion of visual methods in African Studies, and the reconfiguration of religious practice due to the pandemic sharpened our questions about moral regulation, authority, and students' life projects.

3. Results and successes

Publications. The project produced an edited volume, *Religiosity on University Campuses in Africa* (LIT Verlag, 2023), and a single-author monograph, *Religious Activism on Campuses in Togo and Benin* (De Gruyter, 2025). Additional outputs include four peer-reviewed journal articles (*Ufahamu*; *Politique africaine*; *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies*), nine peer-reviewed chapters across major presses (Brill; Routledge; Göttingen University Press; LIT; Palgrave), a peer-reviewed policy report (*Bulletin FrancoPaix*), and one public-facing essay (*Welt-sichten*). Many outputs are open access. Collectively, they substantiate the project's central claims—campuses as training grounds, moral spaces, and political arenas—and operationalise the “social curriculum” lens.

Scientific events. Eight major academic events punctuated the period: the methodological kick-off workshop (2018); comparative symposia at ZMO (2019, 2021); a methods workshop (2022); the LASDEL Niamey conference (2022); two thematic meetings (2023); and the final international conference, ‘University Campuses in Africa and Beyond’ (2023). In parallel, the team delivered 21 invited talks, panels, and conference presentations across West Africa, Europe, and North America.

Theses and early-career training. One PhD was completed within the project (M.B. Adamou, 2023). A second dissertation (V. Favier) is advanced, with a companion documentary film in post-production and defence planned for early 2026. The dissertation on the University of Ibadan (A.R. Adétòrò) is unlikely to be completed. Supervision, methods workshops, and language support were provided throughout the project.

Third-party funding. Fritz Thyssen Stiftung support (€22,000) for the 2023 final conference expanded the international network and strengthened visibility.

Transfer and outreach. The bilingual blog provided regular research updates, debate pieces, and event documentation; all published texts are archived in the ZMO Institutional Repository for long-term preservation. Remoboko ran the Boko Café series (2019–2024) to connect communities of scholars; it curated the 2023 ZMO film series ‘Mediating the Unknown’ to introduce visual methods and stimulate public discussion on religion and education. Public lectures and media contributions extended reach beyond academia.

Planned exploitation of results. Next steps prioritise: (1) finalising and circulating the Niger documentary through screenings; (2) sustained engagement with partner campuses and policy actors via talks and briefings on student governance and campus religious pluralism; (3) and a post final conference volume, reinforcing network and collaboration.

4. Equal opportunities, career development and internationalisation

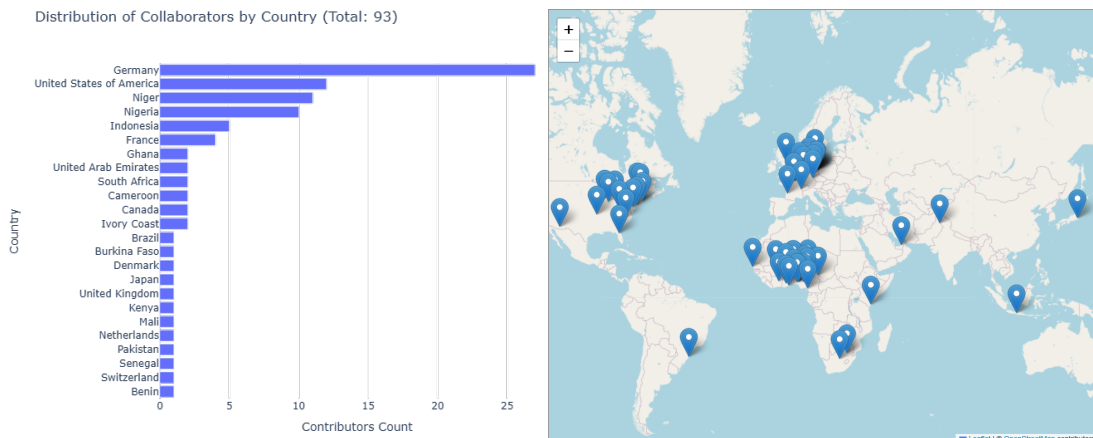
Project coordination was female-led throughout, and one of the three PhD students was a woman. We monitored participation and sought balanced panels and author line-ups, mindful of the persistent under-representation of women in several West African academic systems. Across external collaborations, 93 researchers in 24 countries were involved, 37.6% women. Where feasible, women were invited as co-convenors, speakers, and visiting fellows (e.g., M.T. Oladejo; C. Danfulani, L. Assaf, E. Apar, H. Hoechner), and doctoral researchers such as A. R. Adétòrò (Nigeria) received targeted mentoring. Staff development emphasised equitable access to opportunities (presentations, visiting slots, skills workshops) and detailed feedback on manuscripts and grant applications.

Doctoral and early-career researchers were encouraged and supported to present at international venues, notably the European Conference of African Studies (ECAS) 2023 (Cologne) (panel ‘Training for good life or a good society? Religious students’ individual and

collective aspirations in public universities in sub-Saharan Africa', co-convened by Vincent Favier). Training and dissemination skills were strengthened through visual-anthropology and research-film activities—e.g., Ethnographic Film Course (University of Manchester) and multiple screenings of *Karamin Sani Kukumi Nèe*. These activities improved public-facing communication, knowledge transfer and portfolio development for the PhD students.

5. Structures and collaboration

Collaboration combined a core team at ZMO with an extended network of partners and contributors. Over the funding period, the Remoboko group interacted with 93 researchers across 24 countries.



Governance centred on regular ZMO unit meetings, monthly reports and the internal work-in-progress meetings, which coordinated fieldwork, shared drafts, and scheduled events; ad hoc planning calls were added before major workshops and panels to align timelines and responsibilities.

Institutional partnerships were pivotal to scientific quality and feasibility. LASDEL contributed methodological expertise in qualitative/ethnographic research, local facilitation, and access to Nigerien networks, which strengthened comparative casework and event co-organisation. The University of Ibadan / IFRA-Nigeria provided campus access, archival support, and senior mentoring that deepened the Nigerian strand and improved cross-country comparability. Freie Universität Berlin offered a strong doctoral training environment, seminar platforms, and co-hosting capacity in Berlin that enhanced peer feedback and dissemination for one PhD candidate. As partners and advisors, colleagues Abdulkader Tayob (University Cape Town, S.Africa), Robert Launay (Northwestern Univ, USA) and Timbely Sekou Sala (Universite de Segou, Mali) contributed to the expansion of the group's network.

The main challenges concerned: (1) mobility: several invited colleagues were unable to attend workshops or conferences because of visa delays or refusals; and (2) internal bureaucratic and administrative regulations have not always helped with autonomy and internationalization.

6. Quality assurance

Quality assurance rested on ZMO's procedures for good scientific practice, complemented by project-level mechanisms for continuous peer feedback. Regular unit meetings and work-in-progress meetings ensured systematic discussion of methods, fieldnotes, and draft chapters, while thematic workshops provided focused peer review of emerging analyses. Each year, the team compiled a "Reader" of approximately twenty key texts aligned with the project's themes; these were collectively read and discussed to maintain conceptual coherence and shared bibliographic standards. Doctoral researchers received structured feedback from the PI and

the postdoctoral fellow at key milestones—proposal, fieldwork, and write-up. Extended research stays at ZMO for PhD students further embedded early-career colleagues in a scholarly environment with broad access to expertise and documentation.

Open access and dissemination were integral to quality assurance. Publications were placed, whenever possible, in peer-reviewed venues and released open access; outputs carry DOIs or stable links and are deposited or archived through the ZMO Institutional Repository, in line with funder and institutional policies. The Remoboko blog functioned as an additional open scholarly channel and training device: doctoral researchers were expected to publish regular posts, individually and collectively, resulting in 17 entries over the funding period. Presentations at ZMO's *Projektversammlung* and unit meetings widened internal peer review and integrated feedback from colleagues outside the immediate project team.

No animal testing was conducted.

7. Additional resources

The project was granted €22,000 by Fritz Thyssen Stiftung towards its final conference. See also financial plan.

8. Outlook

Future work will address the trajectory of student associations, the regulation and co-production of religious life, student's post-graduation life and gender dynamics. Conceptually, it will prove insightful to go beyond the binary Islam-Christianity to include African Traditional Religions (ATRs), to examine how overlapping affiliations reshape pluralism; how boundary work, cooperation, and conflict are recalibrated in multi-faith settings.