

# THE SAHEL, THE MAGHREB, AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: FRONTIERS, TRANSITS, AND CONFLICTS

INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM & ROUNDTABLES

ISTOCK

28–29 MAY 2024

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DE LISBOA

AARON Y. ZELIN | BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY  
FRANCISCO FREIRE | UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA  
GONÇALO MATOS RAMOS | UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA  
HERMENEGILDO FERNANDES | UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA  
INÊS LOURINHO | UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA  
JOAS WAGEMAKERS | UNIVERSITEIT UTRECHT  
RAHAL BOUBRIK | UNIVERSITÉ MOHAMMED V DE RABAT  
RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT | BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY  
TIMOTHY INSOLL | UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

ROOM B112.D

10H00 – 18H00

ORGANIZATION  
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UNIVERSIDADE  
DE LISBOA

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## INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM & ROUNDTABLES

### THE SAHEL, THE MAGHREB, AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: FRONTIERS, TRANSITS, AND CONFLICTS

#### 28 MAY

10h00 – 10h30 | Welcome session

10h30 – 11h30 | Keynote conference | **Moderator** Inês Lourinho | Universidade de Lisboa

#### **JOAS WAGEMAKERS**

Conflicts in the Sahel, the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsula and Beyond: Frontiers and Transits in the Historical Development of Jihad

11h30 – 11h45 | Coffee break

11h45 – 12h30 | Debate

12h30 – 14h00 | Lunch

14h00 – 16h00 | **Moderator** José da Silva Horta | Director of the Centro de História

#### **GONÇALO MATOS RAMOS**

*Fronteira* and *fronteiro*: conceptualising the frontier in sixteenth-century Portuguese-dominated Western Maghrib

#### **RAHAL BOUBRIK**

La notion du jihâd au Sahara atlantique (fin 19<sup>ème</sup> – début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle)

#### **FRANCISCO FREIRE**

Was Daddah right? An interpretation of the *trait d'union* policy in contemporary Mauritania

16h00 – 16h30 | Coffee break

16h30 – 17h30 | **Roundtable** Frontiers and jihad

**Moderator** Hermenegildo Fernandes | Dean of the Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa

– With Francisco Freire, Joas Wagemakers, and Rahal Boubrik

#### 29 MAY

10h00 – 11h30 | **Moderator** Manuel Fialho Silva | Universidade de Lisboa, Gabinete de Estudos Olisiponenses

#### **TIMOTHY INSOLL**

An Archaeological Perspective on Medieval Sahelian Connections with the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula

#### **INÊS LOURINHO**

“Leaders of the Murabit Emirate”, an “article” on *Rumiyah* magazine: reflections on the Sahel through the lens of a jihadist piece of propaganda

11h30 – 11h45 | Coffee break

11h45 – 12h30 | Debate

12h30 – 14h00 | Lunch

14h00 – 15h30 | **Moderator** Gonçalo Matos Ramos | Universidade de Lisboa

#### **RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT**

Climate Change and Conflict in the Western Sahel

#### **AARON Y. ZELIN**

Abu 'Iyadh al-Tunisi: A Missionary of Global Jihad

15h30 – 16h00 | Coffee break

16h00 – 16h40 | **Moderator** Gonçalo Matos Ramos | Universidade de Lisboa

#### **HERMENEGILDO FERNANDES**

Personal overview and reflexions on the colloquium

16h40 – 17h40 | **Roundtable** Transits and conflicts

**Moderator** José Esteves Pereira | Director of the Observatório do Mundo Islâmico

– With Aaron Y. Zelin, Ricardo René Larémont, and Timothy Insoll

## JOAS WAGEMAKERS

UNIVERSITEIT UTRECHT

Conflicts in the Sahel, the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsula and Beyond: Frontiers and Transits in the Historical Development of Jihad

This presentation concentrates on the concept of jihad and how it has changed in various areas of the Muslim world, including the Sahel, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, throughout Islamic history. Apart from non-militant versions of the concept – fighting against one’s own sins, a social struggle, etc. – the interpretation of jihad as an armed struggle has passed several important transit points with regard to questions such as who is allowed to wage it and under what circumstances. The way this jihad has been waged has continually broken frontiers regarding what targets are allowed and where the circle of enemies ends. I argue that the history of jihad not only shows that it is a flexible concept that (even in its militant form) has been interpreted in multiple ways, but that its development should also not be seen as perpetually going into a more militant direction.

**JOAS WAGEMAKERS** is an associate professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at Utrecht University and the director of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS). His research focuses on the intellectual history of contemporary Islam in the modern Arab world, with a focus on political thinking among Islamists. His work has concentrated on Salafism and particularly Salafi ideology; the Muslim Brotherhood; citizenship, women’s rights and Shiites’ rights in Saudi Arabia; and Hamas. Geographically, his interests lie in the modern Arab world, mostly in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian territories, although he also spends time reading international Jihadi-Salafi discourse, all of which have been the topic of his publications. His monographs include *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); *Salafism: Utopian Ideals in a Stubborn Reality* (Parthenon, 2014; in Dutch, co-authored with Martijn de Koning and Carmen Becker); *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); *The Muslim Brotherhood: Ideology, History, Descendants* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022). He is currently working on a book about Hamas.

## GONÇALO MATOS RAMOS

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

*Fronteira* and *fronteiro*: conceptualising the frontier in sixteenth-century

Portuguese-dominated Western Maghrib

Having conquered and/or revitalised formerly-occupied territories in the coast of modern-day Morocco, that is, in the westernmost part of the Western Maghrib, the Portuguese employed several local agents so as to further and consolidate their dominion over an unforgiving and politically volatile landscape. So as to accomplish this, tribe surveys were conducted and semantically-charged terms utilised during the process. This paper, thus, by focusing on the concepts of *fronteira* and *fronteiro*, intends to unveil their varying meanings in accordance with several contextual employments; it will confront them with possible/conjecturable synonyms in Muslim sources, even though Christian sources are far more loquacious than the former in this regard. Ultimately, the main objective will be to make use of the sources’ concepts so as to enrich the rapidly ill-defined and blurry term of *frontier*.

**GONÇALO MATOS RAMOS** is a PhD candidate in History who is about to defend a thesis on the Portuguese presence in the Western Maghreb (1415-1521). Having a BA and a Master degree in History, which have been granted by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Lisbon, he is also a researcher of its Centre for History. Between 2015 and 2019, his work has been financed by a grant of the Foundation for Science and Technology. In the last years, he has participated in national and international scientific meetings, namely in Leeds, Washington DC, Barcelona, Alicante, Paris, and Durham, and extensively published both in Portugal and abroad. Gonçalo Matos Ramos’s investigation has been awarded with several distinctions, such as prizes from the University of Lisbon, the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa, and the Foundation for Science and Technology.

## RAHAL BOUBRIK

UNIVERSITÉ MOHAMMED V DE RABAT

La notion du jihâd au Sahara atlantique (fin 19<sup>ème</sup> - début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle)

Notre communication sera axée sur la notion du jihâd au Sahara atlantique au moment de la colonisation. En fait, cette partie du Sahara était l’objet des premières actions coloniales à partir de la fin du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle à travers Rio d’Oro et la Mauritanie. Les hommes de religion ont réagi au nom du jihâd contre cette présence étrangère en lançant des appels aux tribus nomades pour combattre les « chrétiens » (*an-nasâra*) et défendre le territoire de l’Islam « *dâr al-islam* ». Nous allons étudier le cas du *Shaykh* Mâ’ al-’Aynayn (1831-1910), qui a appelé au jihâd contre les Espagnols dans premier temps avant de diriger un mouvement de résistance virulent contre les Français en Mauritanie à partir de son fief à la Smara (Saguet al-Hamra). Ces actions militaires étaient accompagnées de fatwas qui puisent leurs fondements dans la tradition du jihâd en islam.

**RAHAL BOUBRIK** est Professeur à l’Université Mohammed V, Rabat. Spécialiste d’anthropologie et d’histoire, ses travaux portent sur la parenté, le religieux et le politique dans les sociétés Ouest sahariennes. Il est directeur de la *Revue Africaine des Sciences Humaines et Sociales* et membre du conseil scientifique du Centre Jacques-Berque (Rabat). Il a été directeur du Centre des Études Sahariennes (2011-2017) (Université Mohammed V), Fellow of Group Modernity and Islam Wissenschaftskolleg (Berlin, Germany) et Professeur invité à l’EHESS (Paris). Auteur de plusieurs ouvrages dont : *Saints et Société en Islam* (CNRS Éditions 1999), *La Ville dans la Société Bédouine* (Université Mohammed V, 2003), *Entre Dieu et la Tribu* (Université Mohammed V, 2011), *De la Tente à la Ville. La Société Sahraouie et la Fin du Nomadisme* (La Croisée des Chemins, 2017), *La Question du Sahara : Aux Origines d’une Invention Coloniale 1884-1975* (La Croisée des Chemins, 2023).

## FRANCISCO FREIRE

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

Was Daddah right? An interpretation of the *trait d’union* policy in contemporary Mauritania

The period following the independence of Mauritania was marked by the so-called “*trait d’union* policy” promoted by the country’s president Mokhtar Ould Daddah (1960-1978). This policy lost traction later in Daddah’s mandate, but was pivotal in the founding moment that ought to define the identity of Mauritania as an independent country. It is with some surprise that this (French) expression has more recently been reintroduced in Mauritania’s political agenda, either with an eminently security focus, attached to a commercial and economic standpoint, or as a feature inescapable to the country’s social landscape. This presentation highlights the elements related with the *trait d’union* argument in contemporary Mauritania, and suggests a re-interpretation of its uses from the late 1970s to the present.

**FRANCISCO FREIRE** is Assistant Professor of anthropology at Universidade Nova de Lisboa’s Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (NOVA FCSH), and a researcher at the Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia (CRIA). He was the Principal Investigator of the Capsahara research project, funded by the European Research Council, focused on the processes of identity reconfiguration among the *hassaniyya* speaking populations of the Saharan west. He is currently studying the emergent role of new political and religious actors that question a pervasive social idiom associated with the Sahara (and with Mauritania in particular), as well as the reconfiguration of Islamic scholarly traditions in a landscape now marked by renewed / global forms of mobility.

# TIMOTHY INSOLL

FBA, INSTITUTE OF ARAB AND ISLAMIC STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

An Archaeological Perspective on Medieval Sahelian Connections with the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula

Archaeological perspectives on Medieval Sahelian connections with the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula have often been configured around economics invoking a model where trade goods were imported from the north and commodities such as gold and ivory, and slaves, were exchanged in return. Within this the Sahel is viewed as a frontier, and the location of trade centres – Gao, Timbuktu, Tegdaoust, Koumbi Saleh, Essouk-Tadmekka – connected by trans-Saharan trade routes to the north. This model and the key sites will be introduced, and the point made that it masks complexity, unsurprisingly, considering the vast geographical space and significant time frame encompassed within ‘Sahel’ and ‘medieval’. This will be examined with reference to two archaeological examples that indicate different dimensions to the relationships that existed between north and south through considering Almoravid contacts with the Sahel and the inferences that can be drawn from recent metallurgical analyses. The gaps that exist in research will also be highlighted through evaluating the barriers created by the ‘three-area archaeological specialisation’ paradigm. Potential future archaeological research directions will also be outlined though for the Sahel and much of the Sahara the current political situation means that these will remain theoretical for the foreseeable future. Thus, conclusions will be drawn through highlighting the potential of the Iberian Peninsula for enhancing archaeological understanding of the relationship between these three regions in the medieval period.

**TIMOTHY INSOLL** is Al-Qasimi Professor of African and Islamic Archaeology at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK, where he is also the founding Director of the Centre for Islamic Archaeology. He has completed archaeological research primarily in sub-Saharan Africa with long-running projects in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Mali, and has also undertaken fieldwork in Pemba Island, Tanzania, the Dahlak Islands, Eritrea, and in Gujarat in western India. Since 2001 he has also worked in Bahrain. He has published extensively, most recently co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Archaeology* (Walker, Insoll, and Fenwick 2020). He is a Fellow of the British Academy, Society of Antiquaries, and Royal Asiatic Society.

# INÊS LOURINHO

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

“Leaders of the Murabit Emirate”, an “article” on *Rumiyah* magazine: reflexions on the Sahel through the lens of a jihadist piece of propaganda

In the beginning of 2017, DAESH published an “article” on its *Rumiyah* magazine praising the founder and especially the second emir of the Almoravid potentate: ‘Abd Allāh b. Yāsīn and Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar al-Lamtūnī. Resorting to prestigious medieval scholars, such as al-Bakrī, Ibn al-Athīr, and Ibn Kathīr, but mostly to pre-colonial historian al-Nāsirī al-Salāwī, this piece of propaganda mixes journalistic techniques with an academic methodology to establish a direct link between the contemporary jihadist groups fighting in West Africa and the medieval scenario where the Almoravid project and its leaders thrived. This presentation aims at discussing possible motives.

**INÊS LOURINHO** is a researcher at Centre for History of the University of Lisbon. Her work focuses on the interconnections between Christians and Muslims, the political contexts, and the dynamics of the frontier warfare that enabled the foundation of the Kingdom of Portugal. The Almoravid and Almohad dynasties, the latter especially during its first decades, are her main fields of expertise. Currently, she is undertaking a post-doctoral investigation with the title “A look over the Sahel from the perspective of Medieval History: foundation of political units in the Sub-Saharan region of the ancient Almoravid Empire”. Among her publications: *Frontier of Gharb al-Andalus: Confrontation Ground between Almoravids and Christians (1093 – 1147)* (in Portuguese; University of Lisbon, 2020); “Portugal on its Way to Seville. The raid of Triana (1178)”, in *Fechos de Armas. 15 Hitos Bélicos del Medievo Ibérico (Siglos XI-XVI)* (in Portuguese; La Ergástula, Madrid, 2021); “Military Jihād against Muslims: ‘Abd Allāh b. Yāsīn and the Foundation of a Saharan Political Unit that Would Conquer the Maghreb and al-Andalus (Eleventh Century)”, *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 2022).

# RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, BINGHAMTON

Climate Change and Conflict in the Western Sahel

The states of the western Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and northern Nigeria) are politically quite fragile. Recent severe changes in climate are accelerating conflict and violence in an already economically desperate region, causing increased skirmishes between pastoralists and farmers, while depleting water resources and encouraging many to migrate either within the region or to North Africa. For millennia, pastoralists and farmers have attempted to share the land and water resources of the Sahel, but the quest for these resources has often resulted in armed confrontation. From 2016 until 2021, Sahelian countries experienced unprecedented levels of violence.

**RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT** is a political scientist and sociologist at the State University of New York at Binghamton University where he has been teaching Islamic politics and Islamic Law in North Africa and the Sahel.

# AARON Y. ZELIN

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Abu ‘Iyadh al-Tunisi: A Missionary of Global Jihad

Prior to the Tunisian revolution the country was not known for extremism or radical movements. Afterwards, it turned into a locale for the homegrown jihadi organization Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST) and a strong foreign fighter recruitment, facilitation, and logistics network for exporting Tunisian fighters abroad, especially to the Islamic State in Syria and Libya. The key individual behind these efforts was Sayf Allah ‘Umar Bin Hussayn better known as Abu ‘Iyadh al-Tunisi, who was the leader of AST and had been a top lieutenant for Osama Bin Ladin and later Ayman al-Zawahiri in al-Qaeda. The biography of Abu ‘Iyadh al-Tunisi provides an avenue to illustrate the transnationalism/transregionalism of the jihadi movement and the institutional knowledge he carried over multiple conflicts and decades since he has connections and travels to Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Spain, and Mali in his career. He also had connections to other locales outside of the Iberian Peninsula, Maghrib, and Sahel in the UK, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Syria. Abu ‘Iyadh’s beginning in Tunisia, middle that involved himself in the planning of the Madrid and Casablanca attacks in 2002-2003, and end in Mali provides a tapestry to highlight how he and the movement have traversed many regions and theaters over the years that link networks together over a broad swath of territory.

**AARON Y. ZELIN** is a Research Scholar in the Department of Politics at Brandeis University. Zelin is also a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and Founder of the widely acclaimed website Jihadology. He is author of the book *Your Sons Are at Your Service: Tunisia’s Missionaries of Jihad* (Columbia University Press, 2020), which was nominated for the Neave Memorial Book Prize in 2020. Zelin is currently working on a second book tentatively titled *Heart of the Believes: A History of Syrian Jihadism* (Cambridge University Press). Zelin’s research focuses on Sunni jihadi groups in North Africa, the Sahel, Syria, and Afghanistan and has conducted field research in Tunisia, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Turkey.

# HERMENEGILDO FERNANDES

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

Personal overview and reflexions on the colloquium

**HERMENEGILDO FERNANDES** is Full Professor at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL), where he was elected Dean in 2024, and a researcher at the Centre for History of the University of Lisbon. His research focuses on the transitions from Islamic to Christian societies in medieval western Iberia, dealing mainly with the integration of Islamic institutions, both economic and territorial, in the Christian kingdom of Portugal. More recently, he has also been concentrated on the history of medieval universities. Among his recent publications, one can highlight the work, co-authored by Flocel Sabaté, “Muslim and Christian polities, 700-1200”, in *An Economic History of the Iberian Peninsula 700-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), and “Models of Funding, State Institutions and Economic Trends in Universities (14th-16th centuries)”, in *CIAN-Revista de Historia de las Universidades* 24 1 (2021).

**THE SAHEL** has been especially affected by instability during the last decade. The shattering of the Libyan regime, in 2011, the returning of the Tuareg battalions to their home territories after being recruited by Mu‘ammar Khadāfī with the promise of support in the foundation of the state of the Azawad, and the firearms trafficking generated by the dismantlement of the president’s arsenal are known direct causes. In an ecosystem where, by nature, every element is interdependent, we can add to the Libyan scenario the recent history of Algeria, where the presence of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has the potential to shape the succession of events in neighbouring territories.

In tandem with the end of the war between Afghanistan and Russia, in 1989, that involved the returning of most Muslim combatants to their countries, these groups are also direct heirs of the Algerian civil war, which ended in 2002, after a decade of bloody conflicts following a military coup which prevented the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) from acceding to power despite winning free elections.

More recently, the fall of Raqqa, in 2017, and the shattering of DAESH in the Middle East, after a decline which was already perceivable since 2015, had also the returning of many Maghrebian combatants to their home territories as a consequence: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia, but also to the Sahara Desert, where cells of the movement founded by the Jordanian ‘Abū Mus‘ab al-Zarqāwī and later headed by the Iraqi ‘Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī have been provoking continuous tensions with AQIM-affiliated groups, thus worsening the nature of these regional conflicts.

The consequences of politics become even more severe due to environmental issues. Climate changes and the retreat of river basins provoke famines, trigger conflicts between the nomad pastoralist societies and farmers, and put populations under migratory pressure, at the hands of human trafficking. The dispute for natural resources, such as oil, uranium, and gold, is another factor of instability – and the illegal fishing in West African waters disrupts species’ stocks and the already frail livelihoods.

Yet, a medievalist might suspect that these dramatic causes are mainly triggers that unbalance dynamic systems, interdependent ecosystems of causes and effects. All this leads to a question: do the networks that link the Sahel to the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean through the Maghreb involve elements of continuity since the Middle Ages, in a region where history and memory are constantly evoked by political and social agents to legitimise themselves?

The challenge of this international colloquium is to observe a vast territory from a long-term perspective through the lens of concepts such as centre and periphery, tribe and state, ‘*asabiyya* (clan loyalty), frontier, networks, and circulation. Concepts related with religion and politics – two inseparable dimensions in the Muslim world – must also be considered, since they contribute to shape those same centres, peripheries, frontiers, networks, loyalties, and territorial units. That is the case of *takfīr*, or excommunication proffered against rival factions, of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, or the friendship devoted to fellows in the same vision of the religion and the disavowal of adversaries, and of the military *jihād* as a narrative aimed to stimulate the cohesion of the group and the combat against rivals, whether inside or outside the *Umma* – the community of believers.

These questions may be triggered by medievalists. Yet, the answers demand a composite answer. Only the insights of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and experts in international relations and political geography – put together – can provide a cross-section look at the Sahel, the Maghreb, and the Iberian Peninsula.

## MORE INFORMATION

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