

# Conversation: *In the Name of...* Femonationalism and Islamophobia in Europe

Houda Asal, Sara R. Farris, Edwin Nasr

*In the Name of...*

Femonationalism and Islamophobia in Europe

With Sara R. Farris and Houda Asal, moderated by Edwin Nasr

Thursday May 6, 2021

Qalqalah قلقلة and Hostile Environment(s) have invited Sara R. Farris (Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London) and Houda Asal (independent researcher) to discuss their respective work on femonationalism and islamophobia in the European context. Amid rising hostility towards decolonial, feminist and intersectional discourses and positions, we asked how to reclaim vocabularies that have been diverted by neo-liberal and neo-conservative voices; how to enact radical alternatives; and how to practice situated solidarities. This online event was moderated by Edwin Nasr (writer and independent researcher).

In her book *In the Name of Women's Rights* (Duke University Press, 2017), Sara R. Farris examines the demands for women's rights from an unlikely collection of right-wing nationalist political parties, neo-liberals, and some feminist theorists and policy makers. Focusing on early twenty-first-century France, Italy and the Netherlands, Farris labels this exploitation and co-optation of feminist themes by anti-Islamic and xenophobic campaigns as "femonationalism". Her book offers a transnational and transversal perspective that allows us to reflect on the current backlash taking place across Europe against individuals and organizations who support decolonial, anti-racist, feminist and intersectional positions. Presented as a necessary response to a crisis of values by sections of the media and by political forces ranging from the far right to the secularist left, these attacks translate into the production of new, reactionary laws that fuel concrete acts of islamophobia, racism and discrimination.

In *Identifying as Arab in Canada* (Fenwood Publishing, 2020),<sup>1</sup> Houda Asal explores the migration from Machrek (the Middle East) to Canada from the late nineteenth century through the 1970s. She examines the public, collective existence "Arabs" created in Canada in order to analyse their political mobilization and understand both the identity they have constructed for themselves here and the identity that has been constructed for them by the Canadian state. After Houda Asal received her PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, she pursued her research at McGill University before coming back to France where she now works as an independent researcher on racism, islamophobia and discriminations. She is currently preparing an essay analyzing the circulation of the terms "islamophobia" and "separatism" and its translations in French, English and Arabic languages; and how it reflects or crystallizes the current conflicts over so-called French Republican values and, more broadly, the generalization of unabashed

islamophobia in Europe, blurring traditional political divides (to be published on qalqalah.org this summer).

Both Qalqalah **قلقلة** and Hostile Environment(s) were founded in response to “hostile” political environments and discourses pervading our respective working contexts. We are interested in the use and misuse of language in this political context; in how certain terms are misinterpreted, confiscated or repurposed in order to serve ideological agendas; and how translation and mistranslation (of vocabularies, discourses and ideas) play a role in that. The event “*In the Name of... Femonationalism and Islamophobia in Europe*” is part of a series of commissions, conversations and events respectively produced by each of our platforms to address these issues, as an attempt to reclaim an alternative and emancipatory use of language and translation within these contexts.

**Hostile Environment(s)** is a platform developed out of research by architect Lorenzo Pezzani (Forensic Oceanography / Goldsmiths, London) and is co-edited with Silvia Franceschini (curator, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture, Hasselt), Roberto Gigliotti (professor, Unibz – Faculty of Design and Art, Bolzano) and Emanuele Guidi (artistic director of arge/kunst, Bolzano). Qalqalah **قلقلة** is an independent trilingual editorial and curatorial platform founded in 2018 in France and collectively run by Line Ajan, Virginie Bobin, Montasser Drissi, Victorine Grataloup, Vir Andres Hera and Salma Mochtari.

Hostile Environment(s) and Qalqalah **قلقلة** invite Sara R. Farris (Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London) and Houda Asal (independent researcher) to discuss their respective work on femonationalism and islamophobia in the European context. Amidst rising hostilities against decolonial, feminist and intersectional discourses and positions, we will ask how to reclaim vocabularies that have been diverted by neo-liberal, neo-conservative voices; how to enact radical alternatives; and how to practice situated solidarities. This online event will be moderated by Edwin Nasr (writer and independent researcher).

More information on [hostileenvironments.eu](http://hostileenvironments.eu)

The media can only be viewed online

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1. Originally published as *Se dire arabe au Canada : un siècle d'histoire migratoire* (Presses de l'université de Montréal, 2016) ↩

Sara R. Farris

Sara R. Farris is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, and the author of *Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics, and Orientalism in the Sociology of Religion* (Brill, 2013) and of *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke University Press, 2017). Her work focusses on theories of gender, race and social reproduction, particularly as they apply to the analysis of migrant women in Western Europe. It examines theories of racism and nationalism; the specific gendered forms of Orientalist/Westcentric representations of women in the Western public discourse; the mobilization of women's rights by right-wing nationalist parties within xenophobic campaigns; the multiple forms of exploitation and domination that characterize female migrant labor in the care and domestic sector in particular; the commodification of care and social reproduction and its links to processes of racialization; the dialogue between intersectionality theory and Marxist feminisms.

Prior to joining Goldsmiths in 2013, Sara R. Farris worked at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, University of Amsterdam and King's College, and held Fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (2012–2013), Institute for Advanced Studies in Konstanz (2011) and Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht (2009–2010). She is currently a member of the Editorial Board of *Historical Materialism* and international book review editor for *Critical Sociology*.

## Houda Asal

Houda Asal holds a PhD in socio-history. Her doctoral thesis was published in English: "Identifying as Arab in Canada - A Century of Immigration History" (2020, Fernwood publishing). She was a postdoctoral fellow at McGill University in Montreal and associate of the Maurice Halbwachs Center at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. Her work focuses on immigration, social movements, racism and islamophobia in France and Canada. Asal has published more than 15 articles and book chapters and given talks to a wide variety of audiences on these topics. As a researcher at the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse of Quebec, she conducted a major study of xenophobic and islamophobic hate acts in the province (2019). Her last article analyses the denial of the phenomenon of Islamophobia in France (published in the collective book *Racismes de France*, 2020).

## Edwin Nasr

Edwin Nasr (b. 1994) lives and works between Amsterdam and Beirut. He is the Assistant to the Director at Ashkal Alwan, a non-profit organization dedicated to artistic production and research, where he takes part in the development of public programs, publications, and exhibitions. His essays have been published in *Afterall Journal*, *Bidoun*, *The Funambulist*, *n+1*, *Jadaliyya*, and *ArteEast Quarterly*, and were commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation, Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement - Geneva and MMAG Foundation. Nasr has worked on several editorial projects, including Beirut Art Center's *The Derivative* and the inaugural Sharjah Architecture Triennial's *Rights of Future Generations*. Additionally, he sits on the editorial board of *Journal Safar*, Beirut's biannual independent visual and design culture magazine, and regularly translates texts written in French and grounded in decolonial thinking. Nasr is a participant of de Appel's Curatorial Program 2020-2021.

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<https://qalqalah.org/en/activities/conversation-in-the-name-of>