



Secularism on the Move

Annual Report

April 2023 – March 2024



SECULARISM ON THE MOVE LA LAÏCITÉ EN MOUVEMENT

OUR PROJECT

The Secularism on the Move project examines the growing presence of secular and nonreligious peoples, politics and ideas, and how they circulate transnationally and inform the growing legislation on secularism in the Francophone world. We hypothesize that the French language, along with attending histories of Christianity and colonialism, as well as social media, facilitates this transnational circulation. Our aim is to better theorize the diverse migratory, socio-political, ritualistic and everyday lives of secular migrants and their engagement (if any) with secular projects.

The SOM has four branches:

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Media
- Law

Our research objectives:

1. To document how secularism and *laïcité* are constructed in the Francophone world (2007-28) through discourse analysis of social and traditional media, parliamentary debates, legislation & court cases;
2. To chart the movement of secular-focused media discourses and people from eight countries [France, French Switzerland, French Belgium, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal and Lebanon] to QC with the help of interactive maps;
3. To connect the ideas and the increasing secular migration of the lives of Francophone newcomers, expanding knowledge on secular migrants' everyday lives and rituals, and their impact on diversity debates and secular legislation;
4. To develop new theorization to critique typologies of secularism and *laïcité* with less attention to nationstate or religion-focused models (Catholicism, Islam or Judaism), and with greater consideration, drawing on our data, to shared transnational politics of colonialism, language politics, race, and gender equality.

With thanks for funding from:

- SSHRC Insight (2023-2028), \$370,016
- Memorial University Seed and Bridge Funding (2021-23), \$19,794
- Programme d'Appui à la Recherche, Secrétariat aux relations canadiennes, Province de Québec, \$33,724 (2022-23)
- ACFAS (2022-2023) - Programme de coopération en recherche dans la francophonie canadienne de l'Acfas, \$2,956
- DARE positions - 3 summer students, York University, 2022, 2023 & 2024, \$15,000
- York University SSHRC Explore Grant - 2022-2023: \$3,500
- GradSWEP and the MUCEP positions, Memorial University, 2022-2024



SECULARISM ON THE MOVE LA LAÏCITÉ EN MOUVEMENT

RESEARCH TEAM

Co-Investigators



Jennifer A. Selby (*MUNL, PI*)



Amélie Barras (*York U*)



Dia Dabby (*UQAM*)



Géraldine Mossière (*UdeM*)



Sarah Wilkins – Laflamme (*U Waterloo*)

Research Collaborators

- Julia Martínez-Ariño (Sociology of Religion, University of Groningen)
- Lori G. Beaman (Religious Studies, University of Ottawa)
- Carlos Colorado (Culture and Religion, University of Winnipeg)
- David Koussens (Faculty of Law, Université de Sherbrooke)
- Jean-Michel Landry (Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University)
- Abdelwahed Mekki-Berrada (Anthropology, Université de Laval)
- Éléonore Lépinard (Social Science and Politics, Université de Lausanne)
- Mireille Paquet (Political Science, Concordia University)
- Saaz Taher (Postdoctoral fellow, Université de Québec à Montréal)

Current student team members:

Qualitative research team



Youssef Benzouine (*UdeM*); **Roshan Arah Jahangeer** (*MUNL*); **Alanah Broomfield** (*York U*); **Cyrine Bouajila** (*UdeM*); **M. Morad Bkhait** (*UQAM*).



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Law Team



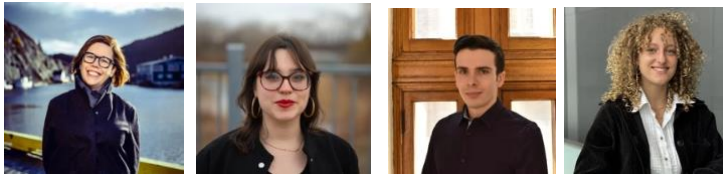
Audrey Proulx (UQAM); Sydney Simota (York U); Anne-Sophie Thauvette (UQAM); Megan Cumming (York U)

Media / News Team



Romain Crouton (UdeM); Zeina Al Attar (Carleton U); Rida Shah (Osgoode); Sabrina Paillé (York U)

Podcast Team



Angela Antle (MUNL); Noa Crébassa (Concordia); Clément Lechat (Concordia); Elena Meyer (Concordia)

Quantitative Research Team



**Jacob Legault-Leclair
(U Waterloo)**

Research Coordinator



**Elizabeth Knight
(MUNL)**

Social Media



**Kiara Falia Tjala
(MUNL)**

Webmaster and Design



**Aman Gangani
(MUNL)**



SECULARISM ON THE MOVE

LA LAÏCITÉ EN MOUVEMENT

OUR RESEARCH

Qualitative Team

- Barras and Selby completed more than 100 interviews in 2022-23 with French immigrants in Montréal and Toronto;
- Jahangeer, Benzouine, Broomfield, Bouajila and Bkhait completed 38 interviews with Francophone immigrants in Toronto and Montréal;
- Barras and Selby are currently interviewing directors of *Lycées français*; Simota and Knight are compiling background data on how these schools engage secularism.

Media Team

- With Shah, Selby and Barras have compiled a bilingual “[Secularism in the News](#)” database that is searchable by month/year, country, and theme.
- We also launched a case-study database available [here](#).
 - Landry, Barras, Selby, Al Attar and Crouton undertook an exploratory media study on contemporary secularism/sectarianism in three newspapers in Lebanon (two in Arabic and one in French). Our case study on a 2023 time-change controversy is available [here](#) (a second one will be uploaded shortly).
 - Taher, Barras, Selby, Paillé and Crouton are undertaking a similar exercise in Switzerland with two French and one German newspaper. A case-study on a 2016 hand-shaking controversy will be available on the website soon.
 - Barras and Selby are working with Bouajila and Al Attar on a media database on transnational burkini debates. They have compiled data in Lebanon and Switzerland, and are working on data s in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

Quantitative Team

- Wilkins-Laflamme and Legault-Leclair gathered longitudinal data (1981-2021) on French immigration to Québec and Ontario;
- Wilkins-Laflamme has begun work with Maia Hutton on an annotated bibliography of 2000-2024 public opinion data and reports on Canadian attitudes towards immigration, religion, religious diversity and Islamophobia.

Law Team

- Taher, Barras and Selby completed their research on parliamentary submissions on Law 21 and co-authored a forthcoming paper in the *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*.
- Cumming is assisting in compiling an overview of secular-related law in our 8 countries, which will be available on our website in Fall of 2024.
- With Proulx and Sauvette, Dabby has been analysing the expert reports submitted in the context of the Law 21 legal challenge, as well as newer pieces about *laïcité* and emergency powers in a comparative context, and on the normalization of exceptional powers, such as the use of the notwithstanding clause.
- Dabby will continue examining soft law uses of *laïcité* in a comparative context in 2024-2025 in a sabbatical year as visiting professor at the Faculty of Law at McGill University and at the CIRC at the Université de Saint-Louis in Brussels (*Centre interdisciplinaire de recherches en droit constitutionnel*).



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EVENTS

Team Workshop at UQAM: 18-19 mai, 2023

Regulation, Migration et Non-religion: La laïcité dans le Québec et le Canada Contemporain. Workshop for Secularism on the Move team (led by Dia Dabby and David Koussens), CRIDAQ.

Our thanks to Camille Ranger (CRIDAQ) for all her assistance in coordinating this event.

Our book series: New Books - Live - on Secularism, Gender, Law and Politics (hosted by Selby and Barras with Dr. Melanie Adrian, Carleton University)

Upcoming events:

1. **September 20, 2024:** *La France, Tu L'aimes Mais Tu La Quittes: Enquête sur la diaspora française musulmane* (Seuil, 2024) with Olivier Esteves, Alice Picard, and Julien Talpin.
2. **October 18, 2024:** *Secularism as Misdirection: Critical Thought from the Global South* (Duke UP, 2024) with Nivedita Menon.
3. **November 15, 2024:** *Faith in Rights: Christian-Inspired NGOs at Work in the United Nations* (Stanford UP, 2024) with Amélie Barras.
4. **February 7, 2025:** *Entangled Domains: Empire, Law and Religion in Northern Nigeria* (Cambridge UP, 2023) with Rabiata Akande.
5. **March 21, 2025:** *Devotion to the Administrative State: Religion and Social Order in Egypt* (Princeton UP, 2024) with Mona Araby.

Events this past year:

1. May 31, 2024: *Courts, Pluralism and Law in the Everyday: Food, Clothing and Days of Rest* (Routledge, 2024) with Cinzia Piciocchi.
2. May 3, 2024: *In / Visible Bodies: Gender, Religion and Politics / Corps In/visible: Genre, Religion et Politique* (Laval University Press, 2023) with Florence Pasche-Guignard, Amélie Barras, Géraldine Mossière, Catherine Larouche, and Audrey Rousseau.
3. February 16, 2024: *La Laïcité du Québec au Miroir de sa Religiosité* (Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2022) with Jean-François Laniel, Jean-Philippe Perreault, É-Martin Meunier, Stephanie Tremblay, Jacob Legault-Leclair, and Guy Jobin.
4. January 26, 2024: *Religion and World Politics: Connecting Theory with Practice* (Routledge, 2023) with Erin Wilson.
5. December 8, 2023: *Nonreligion in Late Modern Societies: Institutional and Legal Perspectives* (Springer, 2022) with Anne Lancien, Anne-Laure Zwiling, and Helge Arsheim.
6. October 27, 2023: *The New Heretics: Skepticism, Secularism, and Progressive Christianity* (New York University Press, 2023) with Rebekka King.
7. September 21, 2023: *Secularism(s) in Contemporary France: Law, Policy, and Religious Diversity* (Springer, 2023) with David Koussens.
8. April 23, 2023: *Religious Diversity and Nationhood in the Secular West* (Rutgers University Press) with Marian Burchardt.



KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

1. Publications

Legault-Leclair, J., & Wilkins-Laflamme, S. 2023. The many facets of negative public opinion towards Muslims. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 52(4), 575-600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084298221149695>

Wilkins-Laflamme, S. 2023. And then there were none: Regional dynamics of non-religious identities, beliefs and practices among Canadian millennials. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 52(3), 358-380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084298221102926>

Taher, Saaz, Amélie Barras and Jennifer A. Selby. Forthcoming. “Quebecois *Laïcité* and its Canadian Multicultural Other in the Debates Surrounding Law 21” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 33 pgs.

Selby, Jennifer A. and Amélie Barras. Accepted with revisions. « Appels alternés entre la liberté d'expression et la liberté de la religion : Mise en relation de moments politiques au Canada contemporain.” *Studies in Religion/ Sciences religieuses*.

2. Conferences and talks

Upcoming:

Dabby, Dia, organizer. “Sustainable laïcité? A Roundtable Discussion on Law 21 and its Aftermaths.” Panelists: Lori Beaman, Vrinda Narain, David Koussens, Natasha Bakht and Dia Dabby, Canadian Law and Society Association, June 2024.

Selby, Jennifer. “The *Lycée français* (French school) system as Vector of Nonreligion: The case of the French “National Secularism Day” in Montréal, Canada,” for panel, “Organized Forms of Nonreligion,” International Sociological Association, Sociology of Religion Conference, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 2024.

Selby, Jennifer, Amélie Barras and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme. “Qualitative Research on Contemporary Francophone Migration to/in/from Canada: A roundtable on methodology, social class, religion and race,” Zoom roundtable, September 2024 (Rescheduled from the CPSA meeting).

AAR Panel Session, “Theorizing Secular Sensibility Through Ethnography.” with papers by Géraldine Mossière, Schirin Amir-Moazami, Elayne Oliphant, and Jennifer Selby and Amélie Barras, San Diego, CA, November 2024.

Past:

Dabby, Dia. « Logique d’urgence au profit de la laïcité : un regard juridique du Québec », Des laïcités confisquées? Ce que la loi française de 2004 sur le port de signes religieux à l’école publique a fait aux laïcités dans les espaces francophones, Université Sherbrooke/SoDRUS, May 17, 2024.



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Barras, Amélie, Saaz Taher, Jennifer A. Selby. “Migration des débats français sur la laïcité en Suisse: le cas des affaires burkinis dans les médias,” for the workshop “*Des laïcités confisquées? Ce que la loi française de 2004 sur le port des signes religieux à l’école publique a fait aux laïcités dans les espaces francophones,*” U Sherbrooke, May 17, 2024.

Selby, Jennifer and Amélie Barras. “Le privilège et la blanchité de l’immigration française au Canada” (invited participant to *Au-delà du transit: Repenser les temps et les espaces de la migration dans l’ère des trajectoires complexes* at Toronto Metropolitan University, March 7, 2024.

Dabby, Dia and Howard Kislowicz. “Let us Compare Ontologies: Interpretation between Law and Facts in Religious Cases in Canada”. *Les approches évolutives en matière d’interprétation constitutionnelle au Canada* (Centre de droit public de l’Université d’Ottawa), Ottawa, Canada. November 2023.

Selby, Jennifer and Amélie Barras. “Laicity, Race and Indigeneity in Media Conceptions of Law 21’s “Nation du Québec” for the invited Resetting the Agenda Workshop, Memorial University, September 2023.

Selby, Jennifer and Amélie Barras. “Ritual life among the secular and nonreligious: The impacts of context and secular debates among French migrants to Toronto and Montréal, Canada” for the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network Conference, June 2023

Taher, Saaz, Amélie Barras and Jennifer Selby. “Québécois Laïcité and its Multicultural Canadian Other” for the Canadian Political Science Association, June 2023

Barras, Amélie. “Secular on the Move Project- Presentation” Workshop, Université de Lausanne, Switzerland, 12-13, June 2023.

Dabby, Dia. “Two birds, one stone? Reshaping nationhood and secularism through the regulation of religion in Quebec, Canada”. Thirteenth International Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society, Athens, Greece. June 2023.

Dabby, Dia. “Author Meets Critics: Dia Dabby’s Religious Diversity in Canadian Public Schools: Rethinking the Role of Law (University of British Columbia Press, 2022)”. Chair: Amélie Barras Respondents: - Natasha Bakht - Colin Grey - Bruce Ryder - David Seljak. Canadian Association of Law & Society, Toronto, Canada. May 2023.

Selby, Jennifer and Amélie Barras. « Complexifier les critiques de la loi 21 dans la presse anglophone canadienne » for the SQÉR (*Société québécoise pour l’étude de la religion*), Université de Québec à Montréal, April 27-28, 2023.

Selby, Jennifer. « Laïque à Montréal : La migration et la traduction de la laïcité comme religion vécue, » invited plenary talk for the SQÉR (*Société québécoise pour l’étude de la religion*), Université de Québec à Montréal, April 27, 2023



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LOOKING FORWARD

Other Activities

In June 2024 Barras and Selby will record four podcast episodes of “Les Français en Mouvement” with support from RAs Antle, Crébassa, Lechat and Meyer. Our trailer will be available soon and we plan to launch it in September.

Our sincere thanks to co-investigators Dia Dabby, Géraldine Mossière and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme who participated as experts.

We’ll also start up our speaker’s series in September. Our first talk with the authors of *La France, tu l’aimes mais tu la quittes* (Seuil, 2024) will be co-sponsored by the Canadian Association for the Study of Islam and Muslims (CASIM).

Team Gatherings

We are thinking of potential future gatherings as our research ramps up.

Let us know if you have thoughts/suggestions.

Some ideas include:

- Congress: CLSA, CSSR, CPSA in Toronto, June 2025?
- End of August or September 2026 (dates to be determined) at the Signal Hill Campus in St. John’s, NL?

Thanks to everyone for a great first year of our project together, especially to our team of research assistants.