



Secularism on the Move

Annual Report

Laïcité en mouvement

Rapport Annuel

April 2025 – July 2026

Avril 2025 – Juillet 2026

OUR PROJECT / NOTRE PROJET

The Secularism on the Move (SOM) project examines secular and nonreligious peoples, politics and ideas, and how they circulate transnationally and inform the growing legislation on secularism in the Francophone world. The SOM project hypothesizes that the French language, with attending histories of Christianity and colonialism, as well as social media and political influencers, facilitate this transnational circulation. Our aim is to better theorize the diverse migratory, socio-political, ritualistic and everyday expressions of secularisms.

The SOM has four branches:

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Media
- Law

Our research objectives / Nos objectifs de recherche :

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 nation state 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 / Nous remercions ces agences de financement pour leur soutien :

- SSHRC Insight grant (2023-2028): \$370,016
- CRIDAQ (Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la diversité et la démocratie, FRQ-funded) workshop fund (2023): \$5,000
- Memorial University Seed and Bridge Funding (2021-2023): \$19,794
- Programme d'Appui à la Recherche, Secrétariat aux relations canadiennes, Province de Québec (2022-2023): \$33,724
- ACFAS-Programme de coopération en recherche dans la francophonie canadienne de l'Acfas (2022-2023): \$2,956
- DARE positions - 4 summer students, York University (2022-2026): \$15,000
- York University SSHRC Explore Grant (2022-2023): \$3,500
- GradSWEP (2022-2025) and the MUCEP positions (2022-2026), Memorial University

RESEARCH TEAM / L'ÉQUIPE

Co-Investigators / Co-Investigatrices



Jennifer A. Selby
Memorial University, PI



Amélie Barras
York University



Dia Dabby
UQAM



Géraldine Mossière
Université de Montréal



Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme
University of Waterloo

Research Collaborators / Collaborateurs de Recherche

- 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 / Membres actuels de l'équipe étudiante

Qualitative Research Team /
Équipe de recherche qualitative



Youssef Benzouine
UdeM



Ruthneldha Attilus
York U

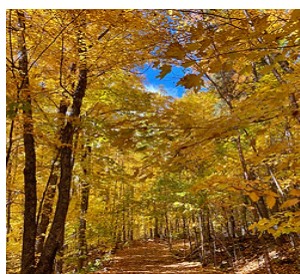


Jacob Legault-Leclair
U Waterloo

Law and Public Policy Team / Équipe Juridique et Politiques publiques



Assya Abdellaoui
UdeM



Laurine Hudry
UdeM



Faisal Alakoozi
York U



Gillian Dickson
Memorial U



Megan Cumming
York U

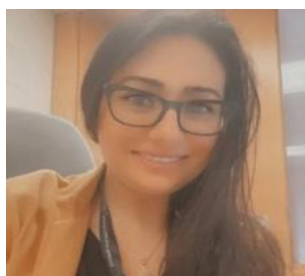


Timothy Boudoumit
McGill



Capucine Coustere
Concordia U

Media/News Research Team / Équipe de recherche sur les médias et l'actualité



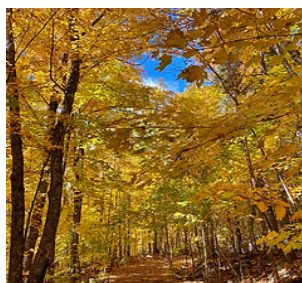
Zeina Al Attar
Carleton U



Timothy Boudoumit
McGill



Katherine Sfendeles
York U



Sabrina Paillé
York U

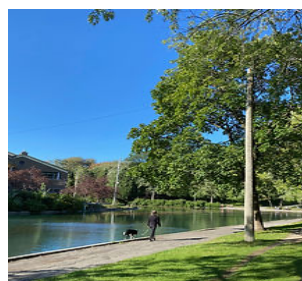


Rida Shah
Osgoode

Podcast Team / Équipe balado



Noa Crébassa
Concordia U



Natalia Rivero Gómez
Concordia U

Webmaster and Design /
Webmestre et Design



Alisha Mahek
MUNL

Social Media /
Coordinateur des réseaux sociaux



Md Golam Sharier
MUNL

OUR RESEARCH in 2025 - 2026 / NOTRE RECHERCHE 2025 – 2026

This report captures activities on our Team in 2025-2026. See activities in the two previous years on [our website](#) ([here](#), in French).

Qualitative Team / Équipe qualitative

- Barras and Selby compiled, wrote, and helped produce a new podcast episode - in English and in French - with our podcast team, Natalia Rivero Gómez and Noa Crébassa; they were released in September 2025: *Vivre en tant qu'immigrants francophones: naviguer la diversité religieuse en Ontario et au Québec* ([31 minutes](#); [available in English here](#)).
- Barras and Selby completed additional interviews with directors of international *Lycée français* schools;
 - Students Grégoire Boily and Ruthneldha Attilus verified the interview transcriptions;
- Selby and Barras co-authored several conference papers drawing on the project's qualitative data to date;
- Selby and Barras ran a workshop on Ethnographic Secular Sensibilities at York University in October 2025.

Media Team / Équipe des medias

- With students Sabrina Paillé and Timothy Boudoumit's coding of 368 articles on the Bedford School affair, Barras, Dabby, and Selby collaborated on an article examining the topic.

- Selby presented a paper based on this work at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) meetings in May 2026.
- With Shah, Selby and Barras continued compiling a bilingual "[Secularism in the News](#)" database that is searchable by month/year, country, and theme. The page was recently enhanced to improve filtering and search functionality thanks to our work with website designers at the College of the North Atlantic. Sharier worked to update it with data compiled by Megan Cumming.

Quantitative Team / Équipe quantitative

- Wilkins-Laflamme and Legault-Leclair gathered longitudinal data (1981-2021) on French immigration to Québec and Ontario, as well as data on race and religion, which will appear in a forthcoming chapter.
- To this end, Wilkins-Laflamme worked with Selby and Barras to write an overview presentation on French immigrants to Canada and they collaborated to complete a forthcoming chapter in a volume edited by Bénédicte Brahic and Sylvain Beck.

Law Team / Équipe Juridique

- Barras, Taher, and Selby received an honorary mention for their significant contribution to Canadian law and society scholarship for their article, "*Québécois Laïcité and Its Canadian Multicultural Other in the Debates Surrounding Law 21*," *CJLS*, 39(2), (2024).
- Dabby is continuing her work examining soft law uses of *laïcité* in comparative contexts.
- Barras and Selby with the support of Laurine Hudry and Assya Abdellaoui are working on an article that traces the references to the European Court of Human Rights' decisions on religious freedom in media articles and governmental reports in Quebec, France and Switzerland on the regulation of religion.

EVENTS / ÉVÉNEMENTS

Inaugural Religion and Culture in Québec Field School June - July 2025

Amélie Barras and Jennifer Selby led the Religion and Culture in Québec Field School for undergraduate students from Memorial University and York University. Combining classroom ->



Dr. Amélie Barras and Dr. Jennifer Selby with students from the Religion and Culture in Québec field school at the Augustine Monastery in Québec City in July 2025.

-> instruction with experiential learning, the month-long multi-sited field school explored religion, secularism, politics, history, and cultural diversity in contemporary Québec.

Barras and Selby thank their institutions for providing administrative support (especially to the formidable Katie Gribbons at York) and the Religious Studies Department at UQAM for their collaboration and support. They also recognize SOM team members and others for generously contributing to parts of the field school including Frédéric Dejean, Frédérick Strack, Youssef Benzouine, and Lina Elbakir.

Learn more about the Field School: [Memorial University - Study Away program](#) | [2025 Field School on Instagram](#)

Ethnographic Secular Sensibilities Workshop York University | October 16, 2025

Selby and Barras hosted a one-day Workshop on Ethnographic Secular Sensibilities at York University, bringing together scholars from Canada, Germany, Switzerland, France, and the United States to explore ethnographic approaches to secularism and religion in contemporary societies. The workshop featured presentations examining secularism through the lenses of law, politics, migration, gender, nationalism, religion, and everyday lived experience. Several participants will contribute to a special issue for consideration by the journal, *Secular Studies*.

We had thirteen participants and eleven papers:

- Secular Sensibilities and the Preventive State: “Islamism” and “Antisemitism” in Contemporary Germany - *Schirin Amir-Moazami, Berlin Freie Universität*
- Islamophobia and Secular Sensibilities in Canada - *Nadia Hasan, York University*

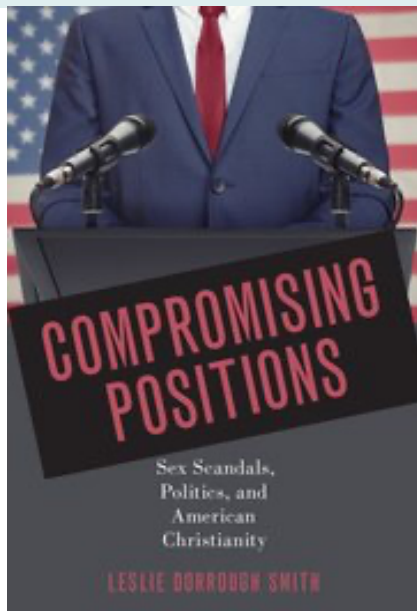


- Divorcing the Catholic Church: Secularism as Second-Wave Feminist Emancipation & Reproduction of White Nationhood - *Jessica Stallone, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto*
- Looking Secular without Being Secular: How Orthodox Jews Adjust Their Faith to Secularism - *Frédéric Strack, University of Sherbrooke*
- Are Psychological Subjects Secular? Reflections from Ethnographic Fieldwork Among Body-Energy Practitioners - *Géraldine Mossière, Institut d'études religieuses, Département d'anthropologie, Université de Montréal*
- "My Mission Is to Win Souls for Jesus!" How to Deal with Secular Sensibilities in Spreading the Gospel? - *Frédéric Dejean, University of Quebec in Montreal*
- A Cross atop the Panthéon: The Theological and Historical Formation of Secular Paris - *Elayne Oliphant, Department of Anthropology and Religious Studies, New York University*
- Narratives of the Secular and the Anthropology of Religion - *Pamela E. Klassen, University of Toronto*
- Making Unruly Subjects: The Legal Disciplining of Veiled Muslim Women in France - *Eléonore Lépinard, University of Lausanne*
- Québécois and Ontarian Secular Sensibilities: French Immigrants and Canadian Public and Private Schools - *Jennifer (Religion & Culture/Political Science, Memorial University) and Amélie Barras (Department of Social Science, York University)*

NEW BOOKS LIVE: SECULARISM, GENDER, LAW AND POLITICS

Our ***New Books Live: Secularism, Gender, Law and Politics*** online series, hosted by Selby and Barras, continued with several events this past year. These one-hour online sessions engage authors on their new books.

Upcoming Events / Événements à venir :

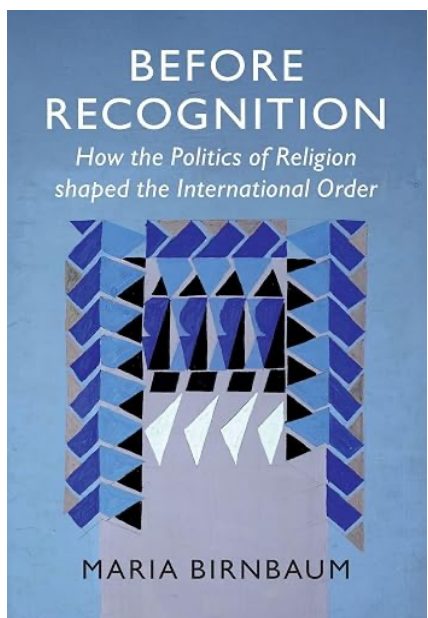


Leslie Dorrough Smith (Avila University) will discuss her book, *Compromising Positions: Sex Scandals, Politics, and American Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

This event is co-sponsored by the Departments of Gender Studies, Political Science, and Religion and Culture, with support from Memorial University's Scholarship in the Arts Funding program and the Nexus Centre at Memorial University.

Monday, October 5, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. NST (10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. ET)

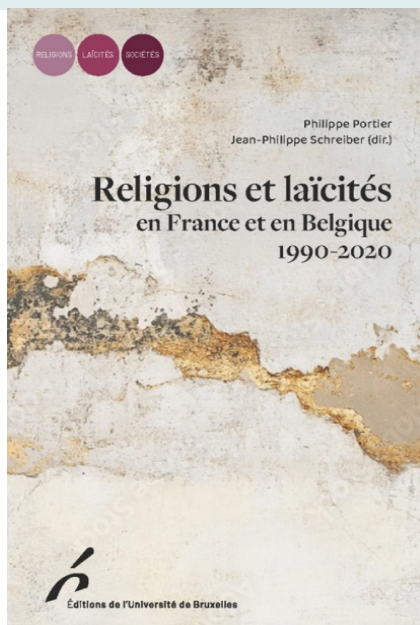
To register for a Zoom link: <https://shorturl.at/Jluww>



Friday, November 13, 2026 | 12-1p.m. ET / 6-7pm CET

Maria Birnbaum (University of Basel) will discuss her book, *Beyond Recognition: How the Politics of Religion Shaped the International Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2026).

To register: <https://shorturl.at/czF6d>



Friday, December 4, 2026 | 10:30-11:45am ET / 16h30-17h45 CET

Religions et laïcités en France et en Belgique: 1990-2020

(Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2026)

Participants:

- Philippe Portier (CNRS), co-directeur
- Jean-Philippe Schreiber (Université Libre de Bruxelles), co-directeur
- Anne Lancien (CERI, Sciences politiques, CNRS)
- Juliette Masquelier (CSO, Sciences politiques, CNRS)

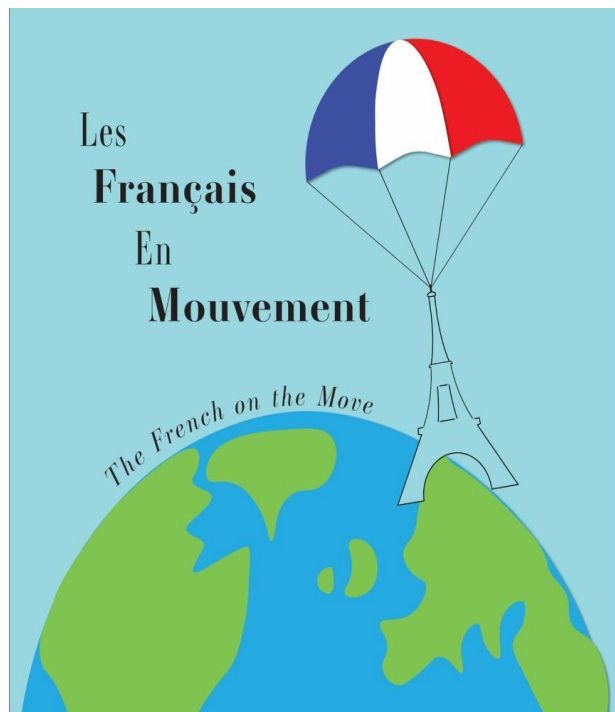
To register: <https://shorturl.at/VFJ2a>

See [our website](#) for updates about our three sessions in the Winter 2027 semester.

Seven New Books Live Events this past year / Les évènements de l'année dernière

1. Friday, May 23, 2025 with Géraldine Mossière for [Portraits de la modernité \(non\) religieuse : quelques confidences de baby-boomers au Québec](#) (in French).
2. Friday, September 19, 2025 with Elizabeth Shakman Hurd for [Heaven Has a Wall: Religion, Borders, and the Global United States](#) (in English).
3. Friday, October 10, 2025 with Jennifer Selby for [Secular Sensibilities: Romance, Marriage, and Contemporary Algerian Immigration to France and Québec](#) (in English).
4. Friday, December 5, 2025 with Carol Ferrara for [Muslim and Catholic Experiences of National Belonging in France: Rethinking Boundaries, Inequities, and Faith in the Republic](#) (in English).
5. Friday, February 6, 2026 with Sharmin Sadequee, editor, featuring Roshan Jahangeer, Nakita Valerio, Fatimah Jackson-Best, and Zeinab Diab, for [Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia](#) (in English).
6. Thursday, March 26, 2026 with Frédéric Strack for [Les juifs orthodoxes en France \(1980-2023\): Une minorité religieuse face à l'État laïque](#) (in French).
7. Friday, May 8, 2026 with David Koussens for [La laïcité organisée en Belgique francophone: Un culte pas comme les autres](#) (in French).

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION / MOBILIZATION DE CONNAISSANCES **(2025-2026)**



The French on the Move Podcast ***Le balado Les français en mouvement***

In 2025-2026, we released a third bilingual episode of The French on the Move Podcast / Le balado Les français en mouvement (co-written, produced, and narrated by Jennifer Selby and Amélie Barras):

Vivre en tant qu'immigrants francophones: naviguer la diversité religieuse en Ontario et au Québec ([31 minutes](#)) / **Navigating Religious Diversities in Ontario and Québec: The Case of Francophone Immigrants ([31 minutes](#)).**

Available on:
Apple podcasts ([here](#))
Spotify ([here](#))

Thanks to our research assistants, Natalia Gómez and Noa Crébassa, and to team members Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, Jacob Legault-Leclair, Roshan Jahangeer, who participated as experts.

Publications Related to our Project / Publications liées à notre projet

In Press. Barras, Amélie, and Selby, Jennifer A. "La loi 21 et la "Nation du Québec" : Constructions d'imaginaires dans le Journal de Montréal et le Montreal Gazette." In *Pluralisme, justice et laïcité au Québec : perspectives critiques pour un État de droit renforcé*, edited by Legault-Laberge, Raphaël Mathieu, Gélinas, Claude, and Kebboura, Mounia Ait. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

In Press. Selby, Jennifer A., Barras, Amélie, and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme. "How Privilege, Policy, and Prevailing Imaginations of Canada's "Two Solitudes" Shape French Migration to Québec and Ontario, Canada" for *Public discourses on French nationals living outside French national borders* (Vernon Press), edited by Eds. Benedicte Brahic and Sylvain Beck.

Under Review. Barras, Amélie, and Selby, Jennifer A. "Migration des débats français sur la régulation du religieux en Suisse : le cas des affaires du niqab et du burkini dans les médias." In *Laïcités confisquées*, edited by Strack, Frédéric, Dabby, Dia, and Koussens, David. Presses de l'Université Laval, 24 pages.

Under Review. Dabby, Dia. “Vestiges ou héritages? La Loi de 2004 mise à l’épreuve au Québec.” In *Laïcités confisquées*, edited by Strack, Frédéric, Dabby, Dia, and Koussens, David. Presses de l'Université Laval, 14 pages.

2026. Selby, Jennifer A., Barras, Amélie, and Benzouine, Youssef. “Privilège et migration : la non-religion et la blanchité des Français au Canada.” *Migrations Société*, 38(203), 49-64.
<https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.203.0049>

2025. Mossière, Géraldine. [*Portraits de la modernité \(non\)religieuse : Quelques confidences de baby-boomers au Québec*](#). Presses de l'Université Laval.

2025. Selby, Jennifer A., and Barras, Amélie. “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*. 54(4), 423-446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084298251330636>

2025. Selby, Jennifer A., and Bihya, Kawtare. “La religiosité polarisée au Québec : Le cas des femmes d'origine algérienne à Montréal.” In *L'islam vécu au Québec : voie/x de musulmans et musulmanes*, edited by Marcotte, Roxanne D., and Mossière, Géraldine. Presses de l'Université Laval, pp. 153-184.

2025. Selby, Jennifer A. [*Secular Sensibilities: Romance, Marriage and Contemporary Algerian Immigration to France and Québec*](#). University of North Carolina Press.

Conferences and talks / Conférences et discussions

“Laïcité et ‘soft power’ : Le cas d’étude des lycées français à l’étranger”, with Jennifer Selby and Amélie Barras, presented at the Laïcité et citoyenneté workshop during Les Rencontres sociologiques, Bergamo, June 29 - July 2, 2026.

“Laïcité and Stir: Examining a Manufactured Scandal in a Montréal Public School”, presented by Jennifer Selby, with Amélie Barras and Dia Dabby at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion meetings, University of Manitoba, May 29-31, 2026.

Roundtable discussion, “Canada at a Constitutional Crossroads? On Laïcité and the Notwithstanding Clause”, presented as part of the Nexus Centre’s HSS on Our Worlds series, Memorial University, featuring Amélie Barras, Dia Dabby, Meg Gaudet, Adnan Hussain, and Jennifer Selby, March 2, 2026.

“Entre laïcité et symboles religieux : une ethnographie franco-québécoise de la différence sexuelle”, with Jennifer Selby to the Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités, CNRS, EPHE-PSL, Paris, December 18, 2025.

“Secularism through the Prisms of Lived Religion and Ethnography”, with Jennifer Selby, Department for the Study of Religion, St. Mary’s University, November 14, 2025.

“Theorizing Invisible Migrants: The Case of Nonreligious White French Immigrants in Montréal and Toronto, Canada”, with Jennifer Selby and Amélie Barras at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston, November 2025.

“Laïcité, symboles religieux et fabrication de la différence sexuelle : une ethnographie franco-québécoise”, with Jennifer Selby at the CIRRES, Institut d'études religieuses, University of Montreal, October 15, 2025.

“Neutral or Not? The Fight over Secularism in Quebec and Canada”, with Jennifer Selby at the Department of Religion and Culture, University of Winnipeg, October 9, 2025.

“Color-blind Secularisms in Contemporary France and Québec”, with Jennifer Selby at the Department of Religious Studies, Northwestern University, October 6, 2025.

“Three Books on Translocal Secularisms”, presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion meetings, George Brown University, featuring Amélie Barras, Géraldine Mossière, and Jennifer Selby, with respondents Andie Pras, David Seljak, and Sanobar Umar, June 2, 2025.

“Hard/soft law in the production of nationalist secularism: the view from Quebec”, with Dia Dabby at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology, University of Sussex, May 27, 2025.

“Les vies de la loi : la soft law, la laïcité et les sensibilités transnationales”, with Dia Dabby at the Centre interdisciplinaire de recherches constitutionnelles (UCLouvain Saint-Louis), May 19, 2025.

Upcoming Conference Presentations / Présentations à venir

“Un “répertoire commun” : Mobilisation de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme (CEDH) pour délimiter et réguler le religieux dans les sociétés francophones du Nord global”, presented by Amélie Barras with Jennifer Selby at the Réseaux transnationaux des nationalismes religieux dans l'aire euro-atlantique workshop, Sciences Po, Paris, November 4-5, 2026.

Jennifer Selby and Amélie Barras will serve as workshop organizers for “Secular and/or Nonreligious Myths, Rituals and Aesthetics” at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion Conference, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 15-20, 2027.

Other Congratulations to Team Members:

- Hearty congratulations to Dr. Jacob Legault-Leclaire on the completion of his PhD at the University of Waterloo and upcoming 2-year postdoctoral fellowship at the University College London!

- Congratulations to former postdoctoral fellow Dr. Roshan Jahangeer on her appointment as tenure-track professor in the Department of Social Justice and Community Studies!
- Congratulations to former graduate assistant Saaz Taher on her appointment as tenure-track professor in the Département de communication social et publique at the Université de Québec à Montréal!
- Congratulations to Rida Shah on completing her law degree at Osgoode Hall Law School!
- Congratulations also to Noa Crébassa and our other former RAs from Concordia University's School of Journalism (Clément LeChat and Elena Mayer) on completing their studies!
- And lastly, congratulations to all of our other RAs who have completed their undergraduate studies and are about to embark on exciting new opportunities at graduate school and law school!

*You will find [ici](#) a succinct summary, in French only, of our work
during the 2025-26 year.*

Lastly, our sincere thanks to everyone else who contributed to the third year of the SOM, especially our qualitative study participants. *Merci !* Thank you!