

# Beyond Accommodation

Everyday Narratives of Muslim  
Canadians

JENNIFER A. SELBY, AMÉLIE  
BARRAS, AND LORI G. BEAMAN



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# Introduction

## Sabah, the Building Manager, and the Swimming Pool

I live with my younger sister. We rent; we share an apartment. And [pis<sup>1</sup>], in this apartment building, there's a swimming pool, there's a sauna, etc. The owner is so so nice ... that I didn't really need to negotiate. I only talked to him once. I explained my conviction. I explained my religion: that I cannot swim with the veil. He told me, "Well me, I respect this a lot [*Ben moi, je respecte beaucoup ça*], and I don't have a problem because after 8:00 p.m. the pool's normally closed," he told me. "I'll give you the key. You can make a copy of the keys," he told me, "but with the condition that you do not show everybody that you have a copy." He added, "You have the right to use [the pool] starting at 8:00 p.m." And that works for me. It works out well because I'm free [after work]. Sometimes I go to the pool, to the sauna. I even have sisters that live on the West Island who also come sometimes.

Sabah, aged thirty-eight, told us this story in a café on a cold November evening in 2012, in Montreal, Quebec, at a time when there were intense debates about a proposed state ban on visible religious garments.<sup>2</sup> At the time of our conversation, Sabah has lived in Montreal for almost twelve years, settling in the province's largest city after a brief stay in Germany following her departure from her native Algeria, where she

completed studies in engineering. Part of her family had already settled in the city. Their presence and her fluency in French influenced her decision to stay. “Going door to door,” she says, she quickly found work with an engineering company and now manages twelve employees in the same company. Active and gregarious, Sabah considers herself to be a practising Muslim.

Exercise is important to Sabah. She told us the pool story in the midst of a longer description about her sporting life. The women’s-only gym she attends does not have a pool and sauna, so she decides to approach her apartment’s building manager in the hopes of finding a solution. In her description of their interaction, the “very kind” manager acknowledges the sincerity and importance of her beliefs. She remembers that he said, “*Ben moi, je respecte beaucoup ça* [Well me, I respect this a lot],” *ça* referring to her religious beliefs that shape her need for sex-segregated swimming. Responding to her predicament, he offers a generous solution: to give her the master key to duplicate so she can access the pool and sauna space in the evening, after he normally locks the doors. In telling us this story, Sabah stresses the facility and simplicity of their conversation: “I only talked to him once.” The manager responds quickly with a solution. She shares the space with “sisters,” her female Muslim friends in a similar predicament. At the same time, the arrangement puts the manager in a vulnerable position; he must trust her discretion and asks her not to show the key to other inhabitants in the building. In giving her the key, he becomes responsible for anything that could happen when she uses the pool.

In retelling this story, we are not interested in determining whether giving Sabah the key was the best solution or whether her request for pool access was “reasonable.” Rather, our point in considering this mostly unremarkable story is that Sabah’s pool access was negotiated without fuss. We think the interaction that took place between her and the building manager is worthy of analysis because such everyday moments of negotiation have been generally overlooked by scholars who prefer to focus on memorable conflicts. And yet negotiations happen all the time. Our interviews are replete with incidents like that described by Sabah, which reveal the fabric of everyday life in both its richness and its mundaneness.

In this book we take moments like this one seriously in order to analyze the negotiation of religion in the public sphere from a different and a new vantage point. We were inspired to consider these mundane interactions in light of recent scholarly knowledge production on the constraints and complications faced by Muslim minorities in contexts in which discrimination and Islamophobia are on the rise. As the reader is likely well aware, social scientific research on Muslims in Western Europe, Canada, the United States, and Australia has exploded in the last fifteen years. Almost invariably, this scholarship focuses on problems – integration, failed political participation, undesired headscarves, problematic halal foods,<sup>3</sup> and unreasonable requests of all kinds (see Modood 2005; Cesari 2006, 2013; Bader 2007; J.R. Bowen 2007; Lamine 2014; Göle 2015; Jouili 2015). Specific to the Canadian context, these interactions have been most recently conceived and framed (in law, policy, and public discourse) by the notion of “reasonable accommodation.” Drawing on data from ninety interviews with self-identified Muslims, this book invites critiques of this model. We analyze and situate moments in which religiosity is “worked out,” sometimes so casually and subtly that we have described them as “nonevents” because they are not memorable or remarkable. One academic commentator on our work stated, “There is no such thing as a ‘non-event’ for Muslims.” This point, in fact, is contrary to what the vast majority of our interviewees told us. Many of our participants indicated that overemphasis on problems contributes to a pejorative foregrounding of their religious identities that they found unrepresentative and tiresome. There is no question that our study participants experienced racism and/or Islamophobia. Sometimes these moments were blatant, as with the experience of one participant, whose front steps of her home were defaced in what she described as a hate crime, or less blatant, as was the case for participants positioned by non-Muslims to be the resident workplace experts on Islam. Our aim is not to negate these experiences or to deny the exhaustion and pain that comes from attempting to deal with racism and ignorance. In the simplest terms, we seek to shift our gaze to these nonevents while, at the same time, being attentive to the layers of power relations that characterize these nonevents. The sociopolitical climate in which we conducted these interviews was also a factor. In Sabah’s case, we interviewed her

during a period in Quebec when a bill to ban religious symbols in the administration and reception of public services had been tabled in the provincial legislature, so her hijab was under particular scrutiny. In September 2013, the then provincial government introduced Bill 60 to the Quebec National Assembly.<sup>4</sup> The bill, entitled *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and the equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests* (popularly called the Charter of Secularism), developed a specific framework for the settlement of religious reasonable accommodation and de facto differentiated visible religiosity as a special case requiring specific accommodation rules. It also proposed to prohibit public servants from wearing visible religious symbols, as well as to prevent access to public services to individuals who cover their faces. The government was defeated in a provincial election in April 2014 before the bill was passed, but in October 2017 the current government passed Bill 62, *An Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for religious accommodation requests in certain bodies*, which similarly outrightly poses a specific framework.<sup>5</sup>

In our research, we encountered an overall desire to “get on with it” within an incredibly wide range of religious practices and negotiations that we have not seen in most contemporary social scientific treatments on Islam. The ways that people effectively negotiate in their day-to-day lives have remained largely invisible and have not been empirically and systematically studied. In part, therefore, this project was born out of a desire to chronicle these often excluded or forgotten narratives of religious beliefs, practices, and negotiations. This book focuses on the ways in which Muslims negotiate and navigate everyday life, a distinction we elaborate upon in a moment.

It is from this vantage point that we aim to rethink the reasonable accommodation model currently referenced in the management of religion and diversity in Canada and increasingly embraced by scholars and policy-makers in Western Europe. The notion of reasonable accommodation moved from its original location in employment-related religious discrimination and human rights law<sup>6</sup> to a broader application in the 2006 Supreme Court of Canada *Multani v Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* decision, a case about a young Sikh student’s request

to wear his ceremonial dagger (kirpan) at a Montreal public school.<sup>7</sup> The Supreme Court ruled that allowing the student to wear his kirpan, provided that it was sealed and secured under his clothing, constituted “reasonable accommodation” of the student by the school. The notion has since circulated and been subsequently referenced<sup>8</sup> and affirmed through public discourse, notably with the 2007 Bouchard-Taylor Commission and its recommendations in Quebec (Bouchard and Taylor 2008; Lefebvre and St-Laurent 2018). Over six months, the commission referenced the concept to determine which demands made by religious minorities were reasonable and worthy of accommodation within the sociopolitical parameters of Quebec. The model has since been lauded internationally for acknowledging difference, both as a legal concept and as a social framework for managing diversity. Our research does not focus on the legal concept of reasonable accommodation, though to be sure there is a link between the two, with the legal concept arguably being evidence of law’s influence over everyday life. That is not, however, our focus. As a social framework, reasonable accommodation circulates in everyday language as an organizing force. Moreover, as we will demonstrate, our participants’ narratives reveal significant fissures and power imbalances in how reasonable accommodation is translated and put into action.

Inspired by our on-the-ground narratives, one of the overarching objectives of *Beyond Accommodation* is to question the reasonable accommodation model as well as to propose an alternative approach that better captures the subtleties of how individuals work out their religious needs in their everyday lives. First, we are concerned about how reasonable accommodation is undergirded by (neo)colonial and often racialized power imbalances that ignore indigeneity and intersectionality, similar to how other authors have critiqued notions of tolerance (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004; Beaman 2011; Barras 2016). Individuals who feel compelled to make requests for reasonable accommodations are often members of religious minorities who may find themselves in a vulnerable position. In other words, the accommodation mandate proclaimed as reasonable and designed to foster inclusion and equality can negatively impact practical negotiations and lived identities and represents a barrier to achieving these laudable goals in everyday life. Religious minorities are often required to vocalize and simplify their religious need(s) to make



it legible to those in charge of deciding whether the need is worthy of accommodation. In so doing, in addition to being flattened, homogenized, and de-theologized, their religious practice becomes the de facto object of close scrutiny.

Second, and partly as a consequence of these imbalances, the framework implicitly distinguishes and solidifies certain forms of religiosity as non-normative. Because of sometimes invisible structures ingrained in the fabric of Canadian society, not all expressions of religiosity require accommodation and determination of their reasonableness. In other instances, these structures encourage an assessment that too much accommodation exists. In effect, the everyday experiences of our participants point to how reasonable accommodation tends to require that they make their “Muslimness” visible (see Amiraux 2016, 2017, on mechanisms that maintain this identity). Even if they are comfortable with this precondition, doing so may also shelter a Christian normativity that permeates Canadian society. In many ways, therefore, our participants’ stories provide insights into what reasonable accommodation produces and overlooks and whom it privileges. Lastly, we are concerned that public discourse tends to focus on rare, litigious, and emotional cases where religion appears rigid and inflexible, while ignoring positive and productive moments like Sabah’s interaction. Her story offers innovative and rich insights into how individuals craft a place for their religion in Canadian society through the processes of negotiating and navigating relationships with others.

In reaction to these and other concerns, *Beyond Accommodation* invites the reader to consider an alternative approach to religious difference to better consider the richness and intricacies of everyday lived religion: a navigation and negotiation model. Each term captures different facets of these interactions. *Navigation* reflects an internal juggle of how one enacts and lives religious ideals. Sabah thought about swimming, an activity she enjoys, and decided she no longer wanted to swim in mixed-gender pools. More practically, before speaking with the building manager, she weighed the pros and cons of approaching him about her swimming predicament. Should she ask him for a women’s only swim period? If yes, how and when should she ask? How should she introduce and frame her desire for a sex-segregated space so that he, as a

non-Muslim, could hear her? *Negotiation* reflects how one interacts with others: Sabah describing her situation, listening to and assuaging the building manager's concerns and, eventually, going to a hardware store to have his key cut and discreetly use it after hours. Internal navigation was present in all the accounts we heard, regardless of whether participants embarked in a negotiation with others. We explore these multitudinous processes concretely through sites identified by our participants, from ski lifts and grocery stores to sports centres.

When we take these perspectives into account, a few neglected aspects of the reasonable accommodation approach become visible: first, few Canadians (religious or not) ever make formal accommodation requests. Most work out informally with themselves or/and with others a place for their needs. Second, religiosity is rarely rigid. Rather, it is lived as changing and dynamic, adapting to the complexity of life.<sup>9</sup> Third, while the navigation/negotiation model does not eliminate the power dynamics inherent in the reasonable accommodation model, it does acknowledge them insofar as requesters are not immediately positioned in a defensive or passive mode. By drawing our attention to how negotiation is internalized or navigated before an individual engages with someone else, our framework captures the dynamism and, as one participant said, the *délicatesse* (finesse) involved in crafting a place for religion in everyday life. It also shows how respect is a key motivating factor in the decision-making processes and internal or external dialogues in which participants engage. As they navigate and negotiate, participants seek to balance, combine, and assemble different values, responsibilities, and registers. Again, this does not mean that there are no incidents of Islamophobia, racism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and disappointment. However, contrary to the dominant narrative of conflict, demands, and dissatisfaction, the stories we heard involved a mutual and sometimes “agonistic” respect we thought was important to consider more fully. These moments can foster an agonistic relationship, where one “absorbs the agony of having elements of [her] own faith called into question by others, and fold[s] agonistic contestation of others into the respect that [she] convey[s] toward them” (Connolly 2005, 124).

With these critiques of reasonable accommodation in mind, drawing on Sabah's short description of her interaction with her building

manager, the remainder of this chapter details the methodological shift we propose with this study and the two cities where we conducted interviews. Finally, we provide a brief map of the chapters and structure of the book.

### **Methodological Attention to “Unremarkable” Moments**

Cognizant of how methodology shapes results, we agonized over how to ask questions that did not replicate assumptions about piety or reify religious identities and how to best locate and think about ongoing moments typically not granted attention. This approach posed certain methodological challenges. Because it proved cumbersome, and we wanted to include a larger sample, we ruled out asking participants to record their interactions (with a daily diary, phone call, or through video) and relied on their retelling. But even their recall could be a challenge. Because of their ordinariness, unremarkable moments can be difficult to locate and study. They are often fleeting – a meeting between friends, dinner with colleagues, interactions between coworkers, exchanges between private and government service providers and clients, playdates, neighbourhood activities – and are not necessarily memorable or exceptional. In hindsight, their unremarkableness is perhaps why few theorists have examined these not-easily-recovered, yet important and recurring, moments. There is counterexample research (see Deeb and Harb 2013; Turam 2015). Sociologists Valérie Amiraux and Javiera Araya-Moreno (2014: 111) suggest that to best consider how religious minority issues become the focus of public debate in relation to radicalization, one should focus on everyday interactions: “By looking at ordinary unease, at the day-to-day emotions emerging in the course of interactions in a pluralistic society, between people ignorant of or unfamiliar with another’s moral universe, we seek to avoid the classical and exclusive emphasis on pathological trajectories of radicalization and the functionalist modes of explanation.” In this spirit, we did not specifically inquire about our participants’ thoughts on their hijabs, why they grew beards, whether they fasted during Ramadan, or what they believed as Muslims. We did not inquire abstractly about their beliefs and practices by relying on a typology of the “five pillars” – a declaration of faith, daily prayer, charity, fasting in the month of Ramadan,

and pilgrimage to Mecca – which is a common construction of the traditions of Islam. Rather, we asked participants about their beliefs and practices in relation to particular contexts and situations. Referencing Kim Knott’s (2005, 2009) work on the centrality of space in shaping the lived experience of religiosity, we deliberately directed our interviewees to describe and to reflect on their social interactions in different places in their everyday lives, such as at restaurants, on buses, in mosques, at work, in grocery stores, at the dinner tables of friends, at public pools, at community events, and so on. In other words, instead of asking, “How do you express your Muslimness?” we could ask, depending on their work and social status, “How do you express (or not) your religiosity when you are invited by [a friend, colleague, Muslim, or other] to their home?” “What specific steps do you take (or not) at work to feel comfortable and express your religiosity as you would like?” We hoped that such precision and spatiality would bring us closer to how Islam is lived through individual lenses.

For this reason, we have sought to underscore a “lived religion” approach, both in our research design and in our discussion of it here. As we completed interviews and began our analysis, we spent some time thinking about the “arithmetic” or the processes present in our interlocutors’ descriptions of these unremarkable moments and interactions in their everyday lives. We sought to untangle their descriptions of what took place – physically, emotionally, linguistically – in these moments of exchange. Social scientists have long been interested in considering lived realities, both through the lenses of what has been called the everyday (following Goffman 1956; de Certeau 1984; D.E. Smith 1987; McGuire 2008) and through recent social scientific research on Muslim realities (Schielke 2009a, 2009b, 2015; Deeb 2015).

We also draw on these everyday moments to demonstrate and decentre the notion that there is one Islamic orthodoxy or truth, a common misunderstanding about Islam and Muslims. This aim may not seem to be particularly original. And yet, from our vantage point, despite the recognition that Muslims live out their practices in myriad ways and come from Sunni, Shi’ia, Sufi, and other backgrounds, branches, and sects, this observation is rarely translated in scholarship. We recognize the danger of going too far with this moderate social constructionist

approach (following Beckford 2003); we may find ourselves in a position of there being “no there there,” or no fixed Islam, as anthropologist Abdul Hamid el-Zein (1977) proposes. Our more modest aim is to consider how our participants navigate and negotiate what they define as Islam or practices related to being a Muslim, recognizing that being Muslim is not their only point of reference. Despite an imagined Islam that is made up of the five pillars mentioned above, and despite a tendency to measure practice by these and other standards of orthodoxy, as with any religious group Muslims practice in innumerable ways.<sup>10</sup> Examination of their stories of quotidian life reveals this multiplicity.

This is not to say that religion is not important to the people we interviewed. To many, it is. But for the most part, as for Sabah, religious commitments do not define all that they are.<sup>11</sup> These moments speak to the porousness of boundaries between identities and to the idea that religious practices are not fixed but often evolve in function of context for those who are highly observant and for those who are not. Our sample in Montreal, Quebec, and in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, included mostly Sunnis, a half-dozen Shi’ias and about 15 percent who identified as “cultural Muslims” in that they felt Muslim related to their ethnic or cultural background rather than to their religious practices (see Gans 1994; Eid 2007; Duderija 2008; and Moghissi, Rahnema, and Goodman 2009).<sup>12</sup> Unless pertinent to their narratives, we do not identify participants by ethnic groups, the most common way Canadian mosques and community groups self-identify or are located. We did ask participants to specify their sectarian identities within Islam in our initial identifying questions, but given that it came up in only one narrative (Hassan, who made clear he was Sunni and whom we will meet in [Chapter 3](#)), we chose not to identify individuals using these categories. Indeed, we point to other scholarship on Muslim Canadians that confirms this insight, that these sectarian differences are less important than readers might expect (see [Chapter 2](#); Bunting and Mokhtari 2007; Saris and Potvin 2010; Macfarlane 2012b; Selby 2016b). This is not to say that we did not encounter diversity. While identities and theologies can be characterized by a certain discursive coherence, we found that this coherence shifts when translated into practice and when confronted with the diversities, ambivalences, contradictions,

and respect that underlie these interactions. For these reasons we take a lived religion approach in our examination of the experiences of the self-defined Muslims we interviewed in Montreal and St. John's. As we show in our review of the scholarship on Muslims in Canada, to date there have been few empirical studies that take account of these moments in mosques and Muslim associations, but even fewer that also include more mundane places.

More generally, we come to this project with related but differing interests and perspectives and with training in the disciplines of anthropology, law, political science, religious studies, and sociology. Amélie Barras comes from a political science background. She is particularly attentive to documenting the interactions between modes of religious governance, religion, and gender. Lori Beaman's background is in law and sociology. She is interested in religious diversity and how it is cast as a problem to be managed. Jennifer Selby has a religious studies and anthropology background and also relies on qualitative methods – particularly interviewing and participant observation – to think about Muslim lives and their expression amidst putatively secular countries like Canada and France. The amalgam of these disciplinary realms has, we hope, fostered a constructive dialogue between us, which translates into our approach to the interview data we collected.

And lastly, in a more self-reflexive move, in our research design and analysis we aim to locate our situatedness as researchers and as white, perceived-Christian women. In addition to the socioeconomic and political climate in which our study was undertaken, as with all qualitative research (see M. Fischer and Abedi 1990; Bourdieu 1977), our identities (and perceived identities) as researchers invariably shaped the data we collected, including the voices and stories that we heard and those we highlight. As Aaron Hughes (2015: 39) reminds us, “How we bring our data into existence, the rhetorical moves we make to re/present it are not, simply put, natural acts.” Our intention here is to attempt to name potential asymmetries (our statuses, gender, privilege, funding to undertake this research, and so on), not to eliminate them but to remain reflexive about how they may impact the premises and outcomes of this project. We are tenured and tenure-track faculty members who are encouraged to undertake research. We are not Muslim and are not

racialized. But unlike some scholars, we do not necessarily believe that our nonmembership excludes us from undertaking this research.<sup>13</sup>

### **Montreal, Quebec, and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador**

The narratives we examine are drawn from ninety interviews we conducted with self-identified Muslims. In 2012–13, Beaman and Selby conducted interviews in St. John's and Barras in Montreal. All participants were over eighteen years of age, and just over half were women. Reflecting the overwhelming similarities we found in our combined data, our analysis is not comparative, a decision made following our collection and analysis of the data. Given the political moment in which we conducted interviews in Montreal and the differences between Montreal and St. John's in their geographies, size, immigration histories, percentages of visible minorities, and sociopolitical make-ups (including Quebec's language politics and sovereignty debates and Newfoundland's geographic isolation and relative ethnocultural homogeneity), we expected greater difference. Initially we saw St. John's as a counterspace to Montreal because it is not in the province of Quebec and also because it is not one of Canada's larger and more diverse cities to which scholarly discussion regarding diversity tends to be relegated. It was an opportunity to conduct research outside the four Canadian cities where most research on Muslim Canadians has been conducted (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton).<sup>14</sup> We hope to show how the similarities in the data point to something about the Canadian context that shapes the everyday negotiation of religious identities in ways that cannot be ignored.

Interviews in Montreal were conducted in the midst of a debate on the Charter of Secularism, so that many of our Québécois participants were especially aware of their perceived or visible religiosity. Questions of visible religiosity in Quebec are part of a long, publicly debated history. Anticlericalism fostered the *Révolution Tranquille* (Quiet Revolution) in the early 1960s, which sought to shift the province's earlier Catholic influence to a putatively secular one.<sup>15</sup> The rapid shift towards secularization, as well as the possibility of political sovereignty in two referendums that posed the question of independence, continues to impact Muslims living in the province of Quebec. Other international

geopolitics have further compounded the visibility of Québécois Muslims, as in the remainder of Canada. But minority politics in Quebec are configured differently and shape sharp critique of the country's broader multicultural ethos, which explains why some scholars have promoted an ethos of *interculturalism*, a paradigm that emphasizes social cohesion and integration in Quebec through common values (see Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 19–20, 120–21).

There are other visible differences between these cities. Montreal is 65 percent francophone (up to 82 percent province-wide), and St. John's is 98 percent anglophone. There are more Muslims per capita in Montreal than in St. John's. According to 2011 data, almost 6 percent of Montreal's population lists itself as Muslim, while 0.05 percent of St. John's population does. Another significant difference is that in contrast to Montreal's 20.3 percent visible minorities, approximately 3 percent of St. John's population constitutes visible minorities.<sup>16</sup> Muslim Canadians are not necessarily visible minorities, but these figures reflect a more general sense of diversity and how it might be experienced in these places. Almost half our Montreal participants were born in Canada, signalling the longer settlement of Muslims in that province. Only two of fifty-five, or 4 percent, of our St. John's participants were born in Canada, both of whom converted as adults. A slightly higher number of participants in Montreal were of North African origin. Still, in both cities our participants were born in twenty-five different countries, including Canada, demonstrating the heterogeneity of their origins no matter whether they live in Montreal or St. John's.

Nevertheless, overall we found the similarities in our participants' narratives remarkable, so much so that a comparative analysis would be neither illuminative nor compelling. Although there are occasional differences to which we draw the reader's attention, for the most part the geographic location was irrelevant. In part this was because many of our participants have lived in multiple locations and told their stories drawing on the wealth of their experiences across geographies. Like most Muslims in Canada, the majority of our interlocutors were born outside of Canada. In both cities we interviewed self-identified Sunnis, Shi'ias, Sufis, cultural Muslims, and nonpractising Muslims. We suspect that the overwhelming similarities are also tied to the predominantly



Catholic population of Quebec and to the largely Protestant population of Newfoundland and Labrador, which result in a Christian normativity that permeates the lives of our respondents, an observation that echoes scholars who have argued there is a Christian hegemony present in Canada (Beaman 2008; Berger 2010; Klassen 2015).

Also, in both cities, our interlocutors live in a Canadian climate of heightened surveillance and securitization of Muslims and those perceived as Muslim. A number of studies have demonstrated how this climate impacts Muslim Canadians, some of which we detail more closely in [Chapter 1](#).<sup>17</sup> For example, a 2004 study by the Council on American-Islamic Relations–Canada found that 43 percent of participants knew of someone of Arab origin and male who had been questioned by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), or local police.<sup>18</sup> The detainment, ten-month imprisonment, and torture of Maher Arar, who was later acquitted of all charges, is one of the most dramatic examples in recent Canadian history of this kind of profiling (see Zine 2012a: 16), not to mention the Omar Khadr case, which we turn to in greater depth in the next chapter. In sum, contemporary securitization and Islamophobic-inspired attention on the lives of Muslim Canadians shape our interlocutors' daily lives, no matter their age or gender.<sup>19</sup>

Given that fewer than half of our participants attend mosque regularly, a figure that correlates with quantitative studies on mosque attendance,<sup>20</sup> participant recruitment varied. In the St. John's case, because there are two formal Muslim associations – the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Muslim Students' Association in the city's one university – we approached both organizations to recruit participants. In Montreal, we recruited through associations, including Muslim Students' Associations on university campuses. In both cities, we relied on personal networks and snowball methodology to ensure we did not overemphasize institutional or association membership as a reflection of Muslimness. This approach also reflects our strategy to imagine ways of being religious that might not be immediately visible or accessible (see Jeldtoft 2011: 1139–40; Gökariksel and Secor 2015). Sabah, whom we met at the beginning of the Introduction, was recruited through a friend whom we also interviewed.

## Chapter Overview

In the five chapters that follow, we explore facets of the narratives of our participants that contextualize and forefront their negotiation and navigation of religion in everyday life. **Chapter 1** interrogates the context in which these negotiations take place. It is framed by our experience on a local radio program about Muslims in Newfoundland. Drawing on the dynamics of the on-air interview and linking them to the broader literature that critiques the social construction of Muslims (e.g., Mamdani 2004; Shryock 2010), we problematize the radio host's insistence on rendering Islam and the four Muslim guests as "peaceful" and his "welcome to the province" discourse that conjures the figures described below. We show the pervasiveness of these constructs, whether through overt discrimination or more subtle microinequities in interlocutors' narratives. We focus on what we have conceptualized as five central figures – the Terrorist, the Imperilled Muslim Woman, the Enlightened Muslim Man, the Foreigner, and the Pious Muslim – in the Canadian social imaginary and how they are manifest in the lives of our participants. Sometimes these figures appear as spectres, invoking fear or moral outrage or a more subtle reversion to "our values." At other times they appear as reassuring presences (like the Enlightened Muslim Man), often in tandem with a spectre. Even though the figures are shaped, produced, and reproduced through discourse, their impact on the lives of our participants is real. They drive the creation of laws and policies that heighten religious difference, sanction securitization, and fuel public fears. Through more than a dozen evocative stories, we map our interlocutors' (re)production, their (re)appropriation, and refusals to engage with them, in part to understand Islam in Canada. We also consider how the figures were present in our research design.

**Chapter 1** also considers contemporary knowledge production on Islam, with attention to social scientific scholarship on Muslims. Obviously, the kinds of questions we pose, the ways in which we collect data, and the knowledge we create do not exist in a vacuum. We consider the implications of the post-9/11 boom in scholarly literature attentive to Islamic revivals or pious Muslims and the related context of a heightened securitization where Muslimness remains politicized and ostracized in Canada and elsewhere. The abundance and relatively limited focus of this

post-9/11 scholarship may protect and project stereotypes that pigeonhole Muslims as apologists (at best), as only pious, or as extremists (at worst), where piety is identified as *the* overarching identity, therein overlooking the multiplicities and complexities of daily life.

In contrast, [Chapter 2](#) invites readers to understand the lives of Canadian Muslims through a different lens. Here we chronicle the historical settlement trends of Muslim Canadians by drawing on two stories of immigration – a Lebanese family to Northern Alberta and a Moroccan family to Montreal – that capture some of the sociocultural and political variances in which Muslims settle in Canada. We draw out differences in the stories to illustrate the shifting political, social, and economic landscapes of settlement from the late nineteenth century to the 1990s and 2000s. A consideration of the scholarly work on Muslims in Canada appears alongside this historical account. While there is a pervasive idea that there is little written on Islam in Canada before the 1990s, we found the opposite to be the case. We conclude by highlighting a lack of empirical in-the-field research that, even if inadvertently, contributes to a narrow narrative of Muslim life in Canada. While we are aware of its normative trappings, it is in part to address this lacuna that we chose, with a lived religion approach, to chronicle more mundane moments of Muslim realities in Canada, like Sabah’s experience with her apartment manager.

[Chapter 3](#) turns to our participants’ myriad experiences of encountering (and, at times, enacting) the secular, including at Christmas parties, with prayer in public spaces, and with expectations around handshaking and physical embrace in social interactions. We draw on scholarly literature on secularism and note how its contours are folded into and interwoven with a host of other normative notions that are managed and protected through the delimitation and location of the religious. This theoretically driven scholarship tells us a great deal about the political systems at work, the coconstructed relationships between secularism and religion, and the historical conditions that have shaped and promoted the secular. Even though Canada has no constitutional separation of church and state, it is often understood as a secular and religiously neutral space. Our participants suggest that it is not lived as such. They live within a country they recognize as intrinsically Christian.

Church bells ring on Sunday mornings, prayers are said before municipal council meetings, oaths are sworn on bibles, Christmas lights adorn public streets in December, and “ethics and values” courses in public schools retain a decidedly Christian narrative. Yet, these are imagined to be “cultural”; they are part of “our heritage.” These assignments demarcate those bodies, to quote Stuart Hall (1996: 612), that “participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture” and those bodies that do not.

In relation to religion, while mainstream Christianity is imagined as being successfully privatized, invisible, and confined to the private realm, minority religions (especially Islam) are constructed as being inherently visible and public. Our interlocutors’ stories reveal how this silent privileging of Christianity on the one hand and the hypervisibility of Islam on the other are experienced and lived. They identify a number of locations where this interplay unfolds, including at the annual Christmas or holiday parties in many workplaces. Some readers might stress that attending this annual party has nothing to do with Christianity. We are not interested in assessing whether these spaces are intrinsically or symbolically Christian. We *are* interested in how our interlocutors may have experienced the holiday party as such. It is precisely this instability that constitutes and reconstitutes the power of this secular model.

With this analysis of the Canadian context in mind, in [Chapter 4](#) we ask: How do our participants navigate and negotiate religion in their everyday lives? We describe how the narratives we heard called us to move away from the prevalent language of accommodation and demand to a language of navigation and negotiation. This chapter presents a navigation/negotiation lens that comes out of our interviews and, we believe, better conveys the complexity of how participants work out and balance their religious practices with other self-identified important areas of their lives, which we situate in relation to theory on working consensus (drawing on Goffman 1956), moral registers (Schielke 2009a; Deeb and Harb 2013), and cobbling (James 1998). We see our participants’ descriptions of their quotidian navigations and negotiations as challenging dominant narratives of conflict that often underpin the notion of demands for accommodations and dissatisfaction with visible religious difference (whether through hijabs or through various requests). Though

much emphasis is placed on conflict and, at times, on formal resolution of accommodation needs, the analysis in this chapter points to how differences are more often than not worked out informally.

Power dynamics remain ingrained in our proposed model. As sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987: 89) reminds us, the everyday and the writing about it are replete with power relations. Even insisting on examining the everyday lives of Muslims comes with its own normative assumptions. Unremarkable events like the scene described by Sabah are fragile and occur in the midst of such power asymmetries. One can easily imagine alternate resolutions under other circumstances or for different individuals. The apartment manager could have responded negatively or disrespectfully. He could have dismissed the religious or gendered elements of her appeal or the request altogether. He could have been empathetic but offered no concrete solution. While her situation is the result of skewed power relations – she could not locate women’s-only pool hours in a large multireligious city – recovering her internal and external dialogue also sheds light on how religious diversity is lived and negotiated.

Building on the exploration of negotiation and navigation we introduce in [Chapter 4](#), [Chapter 5](#) considers the often overlooked respect undergirding these moments. Focusing on our participants’ stories about food and dietary requirements, we consider the conditions that both facilitate and impede mutual respect. The narratives we examine illustrate how social circumstances require flexibility and an appreciation for the porousness of boundaries between identities. They also build on the idea that practices (including religious practices) are not fixed but often evolve in function of context. Taking mundane interactions as our point of departure, we examine narratives about unexceptional fleeting moments.

Respect is central to these interactions but is often not easy. In most cases, our interviewees seek to protect their interlocutors from discomfort, embarrassment, or exclusion, approaches that can necessitate the suspension of a sense of truth, even if they foster a kind of “agonistic respect” (Connolly 2005: 124). Significantly, we also found that they are typically more process oriented than outcome based (Van Quaquebeke, Henrich, and Eckloff 2007). In other words, rather than approaching recognition

as an end in itself, we situate navigation and negotiation as mechanisms that, in addition to often being fragile and complicated, also include care, generosity, respect, even playfulness, and fun. These interactions are constitutive of how pluralism and coexistence are worked out in contemporary societies. At the same time, in documenting their fragility, flexibility, and creative potential, we draw attention to situations where mutual respect falls apart. Our emphasis is on the potential to imagine alternatives based on stories from the everyday.

Our Conclusion argues for the importance of considering all these narratives alongside one another for a more sophisticated and balanced characterization of what we heard from our participants. We describe the significance of our methodological approach to get to sometimes mundane and often forgotten moments when religiosity is worked out – when, from our interlocutors’ perspective, it is successfully navigated and/or negotiated. All our readers might not agree with these determinations. One scholar who heard Tobias’s story of how he negotiated the end-of-year Christmas staff party at his workplace – having his assistant purchase alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages (see [Chapter 3](#)) – deemed this outcome far from positive. We have left the determination of a “positive” experience with our interlocutors. Tobias is a practising and self-described devout Muslim. He laughs as he shares this Christmas party story in our interview and appears not to see his facilitation of an at-work social drink as undermining his religious self, as our scholarly interlocutor assumed. At the same time, the conclusion revisits how, in general, these moments are fragile and changing and require parties to listen and interact with one another while withholding judgment. Lastly, we return to our critique of reasonable accommodation in Canada.

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One of our central goals in this book is to take seriously the narratives of our participants with attention to religion in their everyday lives. Their stories reveal complexity and flexibility and depict examples of the shaping and workings of contemporary pluralism. Sabah’s description of her navigation and negotiation regarding the pool in her apartment building with which we opened this Introduction is a case in point. Delving into this brief interaction reveals dynamics that are too often overlooked or

silenced when we ignore the mundane. And yet, as we have argued, this moment is rich. First, it speaks to the dissonance between how a language of accommodation situates Muslim practices and how most Muslims actually work out their religion in their everyday lives in informal ways that legal regulatory frameworks both miss and dismiss. Second, while Sabah's religious identity is important to her and motivated her decision to approach the building manager, her narrative also shows the importance that her love of swimming played in her decision. Her religious identity in this story is not all-encompassing. Rather, it is entangled with her multiple other intersectional identities as a swimmer, neighbour, friend, and so on. Third, her negotiation with the manager is devoid of difficulty: the situation is worked out with a generosity and flexibility that characterizes many of the situations described by the participants in our study. And yet, fourth, Sabah and the manager's arrangement speaks to the fragility and trust that are constitutive of these moments. Sabah is vulnerable when she shares her beliefs about sex segregation and swimming with the building manager. These are intimate details about her beliefs and practices that she does not readily share with male nonrelatives. The conversation carries the possibility that her beliefs will become subject to discussion, criticism or, worse, contempt, or discrimination. Sabah also has to be ready to deal with how their conversation might impact their future relationship. And in taking her needs seriously and finding a concrete solution, the manager too is put in a fragile position vis-à-vis other tenants and the owner of the building. Still, while their interaction is delicate, we invite the reader to also see how mutual trust and respect shaped their interaction and its outcome.

Situations like Sabah's may be worked out without great fuss, but that does not mean these moments are devoid of power relations. On the contrary, power relations are constitutive and ingrained within everyday life and mark the fragility of these moments. Sabah finds herself in a position, like many of our participants, where she feels that she has to approach her manager to negotiate a place for her faith. This disruption is partly because she has been unable to locate swimming facilities in Montreal that offer women-only hours. In addition, the manager has the authority to decide whether an arrangement is possible and to dictate its terms. In fact, as we will discuss at a greater length in [Chapter 5](#), one of

the reasons why this moment is worked out is perhaps precisely because both parties are aware of and acknowledge these power asymmetries. Both are concerned by the feelings of the other and take care to protect each other from discomfort. They *both* navigate and negotiate.

Attention to these power dynamics is part of recognizing the complex terrain in mapping when religious life appears in the everyday. As will become clear, some of our participants, particularly women who wear headscarves, undertake far more navigations and negotiations in Canadian society than others do. Their everyday lives are marked by colonial and neocolonial politics, coloured by secular mores that problematize visible religiosity, and shaped by global Islamophobic discourses and racialized images. More generally, it should be clear that Muslims in Canada are often required to negotiate their religious difference (see Jamil and Rousseau 2012; Barras 2016). And yet, we propose to do more than simply unravel these asymmetries: our methodological shift reveals how these power relations are lived, played out, and, in many cases, worked out in daily interactions. This perspective invites us to be attentive to the richness and intricacies of diversity as it is lived, elements missed by the pervasive scholarly and popular perspective on reasonable accommodation.