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Podcast Transcript

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EASR Publishing Roundtable 2019

Podcast with **Michael Stausberg, Gregory D. Alles, Joshua Wells, Valerie Hall, Jenny Butler, James White and Suzanne Owen** (28 October 2019).

Transcribed by **Helen Bradstock**.

Audio and transcript available at: http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/easr-publishing-roundtable-2019/

Suzanne Owen (**SO**): *Welcome, this evening, to the panel on how to get published – particularly in the Study of Religion – at the European Association for the Study of Religion in Tartu, Estonia. And we have here people that represent different areas of publication and career. So my furthest is Michael Stausberg, and he is editing a journal and he will talk about that in a minute; and also we have James White, who is at the University here, so a local; and Greg Alles who's also an editor of a series and journal; and we have Jenny Butler, considered early career – but has also ready done so much; and Valerie Hall, from Equinox publishers; and Joshua Wells, from the Routledge Publishers. And we want to have each of them introduce themselves in turn, and what they work on, and then we can start the discussion. So, let's start with you, Michael.*

Michael Stausberg (**MS**): What we work on? What do you mean?

SO: *What you edit, and your experiences.*

MS: Right, ok. Yes. Well, thanks for showing up! It's a bit weird to sit down here and be kind-of at your service. And I have been one of the two editors of a journal called *Religion* since 2008. My co-editor is the Canadian, Steven Engler. And *Religion* started around 50 years back . . . 49, basically. Greg was on the editorial board for decades, I suppose!

Gregory Alles (**GA**): Until you kicked me off!

MS: Right! (Laughs). And so the journal is published with Routledge since 2012, I believe. It had a

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series of publishers in between. And I also co-edit two book series. One called *Religion and Reason* for Walter de Gruyter and one called *Critical Studies in Religion* which is a bilingual series published by (a German publisher). I think that should suffice for the moment.

James White (**JWh**): Hello. So I'm James White. As our chair introduced me, I do work here at the University of Tartu as a research fellow. But actually, most of my career for the last three to four years has been spent at the Ural Federal University in Ekaterinburg, Russia. I'm a young scholar, at the beginning of my career – as that story wold suggest. I've probably published, in the last four - five years, about ten articles in both English language journals and Russian language journals. I do have some experience on the other side of the coin, because I'm actually the English Language Editor of (Russian name) which is the Journal of Russian Studies for Ural Federal University, currently on both Scopus and Web of Science. So I do have both the experience of a young, junior academic publishing, but also being on the editorial side of things. So, thank you very much.

GA: I'm Greg Alles. I wish I could say I'm at the beginning of my career. It would be nice to be a young scholar again. But of course I'm not. I've been co-editing *Numen* almost as long as Michael has been co-editing *Religion*. I started that in 2010 first with Olav Hammer and now with Laura Feldt. I was also, as Michael mentioned, on the editorial board of *Religion* for a long time. I think I started that in '94. And *MTSR* – *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* – I think in '96. Eventually they get tired of you being on the editorial board and rotate you off, right? Which is a good thing. And so maybe that's enough to say.

Jenny Butler (JB): I'm Jenny Butler and I'm based in the Department of Study of Religions at University College, Cork. I'm the secretary of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions. I've also been on a number of editorial boards. And I've guest edited some peer-reviewed journal volumes. And I published early on as a PhD student. I think that's what I'm here to speak about.

Valerie Hall (**VH**): Hi. I'm Valerie Hall (**5:00**). I work for Equinox publishing. I've worked there since 2004, which was the beginning of the company, and previously worked at Continuum. And I do the marketing for the books and journals. But I also do some editorial work on the book side.

Joshua Wells (**JW**): Good evening. My name is Josh Wells. I work for Routledge, and I'm one of two Religion editors at Routledge so my colleague, Rebecca Shillabeer does books for undergrads – so pedagogical stuff, textbooks – and my focus is on research-level books in Religious Studies – so

monographs and edited collections.

SO*: And I should introduce myself as chair of this panel. I'm Suzanne Owen, based at Leeds Trinity University in the UK. I am also editor for the British Association for the Study of Religions, and on editorial boards as well. So we will open to discussion very soon. But I thought, maybe to start with: how did you first get something published? And just say, for the editors or the publishers, what was your first going out to find something to publish? How did that work? How did you go about that? So Michael – sorry I mispronounced your name earlier. How did you first get published, and in what?*

MS: Good question. I think I started with book reviews. And I think my first proper article was published in a Scandinavian journal and at that time it was a Danish, Norwegian co-production. And that was based on a conference paper I gave. If that's sufficient.

SO: *Yes.*

JWh: Thank you. My first publications. Well, I have to echo the comments of Michael, that my first serious publications were book reviews. I think, good training for later. But my first serious couple of publications . . . the first one I did was an article which was translated to Russian for the journal for which I now work. I didn't work for it when it was published. I was asked by a colleague of mine, who was one of the only other people who specialises in the same subjects as I specialise in – because I chose an entirely irrelevant subject for my PhD Thesis! But my first, if you want to describe it in this way, major peer-reviewed English publication was for the *Canadian Journal of Russian History*. And of course it was an entirely different process with full peer-review, entirely different checks and balances that one had to tick off than publishing in the Russian journal, which was much more informal, and where the peer review team was internal and tended to be far less exacting. So that was my dual experience of publishing.

GA: I don't really recall, to be honest with you. I don't remember what the first publication was. I'd have to look at the CV and find out which came out first. No I don't have it. It's not there. I worked as an editorial assistant for a history of religions journal when I was a graduate student, so I kind-of knew the process. I knew what to do, right? I don't know that my first article came out in HR but as a grad student I also co-wrote several things with Joseph Kitagawa and did some work with (audio unclear) who's a specialist. And so I sort-of got into the business that way, right? So that's another way that you can do that, is to co-write with your senior supervisors and so on.

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JB: As far as I recall, the first publication was in a peer review journal called *Cosmos* produced by the Traditional Cosmology Society. And that was on the neopagan ritual year and gender. And it was a special issue of the journal that came out in 2002. Well it was dated 2002, but I think it had actually been backdated. So my first publication would have been . . . I think the first one was a book chapter in a book called *Communicating in Cultures* that was edited by (audio unclear). And it was published by Lit Verlag. You'll have to excuse me because I have a cold and I'm trying not to cough. (**10:00**) (Laughs).

VW: Thanks. I can't remember exactly the first one. But because I go to a lot of conferences – because I do the marketing at the academic conferences – my involvement with commissioning tends to be in talking to people at the conferences, where they can see the kind of books that we publish and approach us with proposals. So that's kind-of one of the main reasons why I go to conferences like this. And that is how I'm involved in commissioning.

JW: So it's also a while since I commissioned my first book. So I actually commissioned my first book as an editorial assistant. Before I was an editor. One thing I neglected to mention in my introduction is that I've been working at Routledge now for nearly ten years, but I've only been on the Religion list for three and a half years. And that's, maybe, something to bear in mind when you're preparing your proposal: that not every commissioning editor actually has their academic background in the subject that their commissioning in. So my academic background is in literature, and I commissioned my first book in Sports Science. So it was the absolutely vital tome The Science of Equestrian Sports. That was my first ever book. And similarly I happen to be attending a conference, and I met an academic there who wanted to publish. And the editor that was looking after me said, "Well, as you've made the contact, as a development opportunity you can see the book through the process." So I was supervised in doing that.

Question 1: *I'm Jason, a PhD student at the University of Tartu. My question is, is there a usual amount of time between a submission of an article and the decision on whether to publish it, and then the actual publication? Because I heard that a couple of journals, it takes them one to two years. So I'm just wondering what kind of range there is.*

SO: *We can start with the two at the end. James?*

JWh: Yes. My experience – I mean I assume we're talking about English language journals here? My

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experience has been, yes, a one-and-a-half to two years process. It can depend, as far as I've seen, basically on where you submit the article in terms of its content and the match between the content and the journal. So, for instance, I submitted a Russian history article to a general European History journal not very long ago. It took them a very long time to find peer reviewers, simply because they did not have, in their contact lists, specialists on Russian History. So it was . . . for what I regard as being a rather second rank publication, it took an extremely long time. But generally, yes. One-and-a-half to two years has been my experience.

GA: There are a lot of practical problems involved. And a lot of practical issues. On the one side, it's a matter of getting something reviewed. And that's often – I don't know what your experience is like Michael, or yours is like, James – but that's often outside of our control. Sometimes you get a peer review in within a week and it's very positive, and then you're waiting months and months. Somebody's agreed to review it. They don't respond, they don't respond, they don't respond.You nag, you nag, you nag, right? And that's a frustrating experience. That's on one hand. The other hand is in terms of how much copy you have in the pipeline. For a while, when Olav and I were editing *Numen*, we were both saying "Look, you're e a new career scholar. You're a junior scholar. We've got a backlog. We can't publish anything that you give us until 2019." So I recommended several people to go to other places because they needed to get published more quickly, right? That strategy also backfires because word gets out, "Oh, you got a backlog. It's going to take a while", and people stop sending you stuff, right? So, you've got to be careful about that. But you've got those two factors. And you want to be fair. I mean, if somebody's got an article accepted they're in line first. So you have to sort-of do that. It's hard to say, exactly. It's hard to predict exactly how long it's going to take. And you can always ask the editor. If I think you need a publication out sooner than I can get it out, I'll tell you. "This looks good, but you need to go someplace else, because you need to have that out."

MS: Now I can only speak for *Religion*, and we do publish these figures roughly every other year in editorials where we list our referees (**15:00**). There we give the statistics about the time. Usually with *Religion*, and of course we are subject to the same factors as mentioned by Greg. It takes three months per decision step. So that means that usually we are able to provide a first decision after three months. But a first decision is very rarely to accept as is. That almost never happens. So then comes the second. And then you are, again, in this three month loop, right? So I think where much time is actually being lost, if you might say it like this, in this process where it adds up to these horrendously sounding figures like a year or two. It's actually that when the authors get their review back they have

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other things to do. So they don't do it right away sit down and revise and rewrite their articles. But then they get to it a couple of months later. And then they take their time. So sometimes we do not get a second version back until after a year. So that means, when you then, again, go for a the three months, and then maybe you have another round, and again you get it back after six months or so, then you end up with two years. But it has been with the journal only for twice three months. So you have to add the authors' speed to revise. And then you see different attitudes. Some authors try to cut it short by just doing superficial revisions – kind-of doing some sort-of lip service to what is required – while others basically rewrite their papers. And that, of course, takes much more time, but might be a more rewarding exercise. Because then, of course, if you do just superficial revisions the chances are high that you'll get it back again, that referees aren't happy yet. So then, of course, you can complain that it takes so much time, but it's also the authors who are involved here as the crucial factor. And now I agree that not all referees read the articles in the most sympathetic ways. But this is also their job as it were. The point is that as authors we are . . . I mean, we are not just editors we are also authors. So we are also subject to the same process. So we find ourselves misunderstood: "Why doesn't the referee get it, what I'm trying to say?!" Now you might say, as a conspiracy theorist, that "They don't want me published at all!" or "They're stupid!", or "They are malevolent", or . . . what do I know? But the point is often, really, what seems very clear to us, when we write, isn't very clear to others who read. So we then really have to take that to heart. I mean these people did a job; they did read the thing. And then, as authors, we should also actually . . . . It's the referees' duty to give us a favourable reading, but it's also our duty to give the referees' report a favourable reading. And that means that one really takes that seriously.

GA: I disagree just a little bit. I don't think it's the referees' duty to give you a favourable reading,

MS: But a fair reading.

GA: A fair reading, yeah. A fair reading and an honest reading. And I think the worst thing you can do as an author is not take a referee's report seriously. Take it seriously and revise. Probably the thing you don't want is a quick decision. If I give you a decision in two weeks, three weeks . . .

MS: It's not good! (Laughs).

GA: It probably means that I decided within twenty four hours that this was not really something that we really wanted. But I didn't want you to feel too badly, so I'm going to hold onto it for two or three

weeks and then give you a statement saying this is not for us, right? And maybe give you some indications. So the process is there to ensure that your work is the best work possible for this particular journal, and for your sake as well. So participate in the process and take it seriously.

SO: *I would like to add, I guess . . . . Would you say, generally, to expect some revision? Yes, so in my experience too, I think, you expect some revision.* (**20:00**) *We can move onto another question here.*

MS: Excuse me, may I just add one more comment? Please don't resend an unrevised article to a different journal. We see this happening all the time: that articles that have been rejected here and there appear exactly in the same form on other editors' desks. And this isn't really a good way to make use of the resources that go into the peer review process. On the one hand. On the other hand be aware that our field is a collection of niches. The pool of potential referees is fairly restricted, so the chances are very high that you'll run into the same referees everywhere. And we are getting these messages all the time, Greg don't we? "You know, I have seen this paper before for a different journal." And if you as an editor with a good conscience can say, "You know, you might have read it, but it's now a very different paper", then it might work. But it rarely is.

Question 2: *My name is (audio unclear). I'm from the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and my question is mostly directed towards the monograph side of publishing. So, very roughly, is it better to approach a series editor or the editor for the topic of religion in general? If there's a particular series at a publishing house that fits what the monograph would be about, which way would be better to go? Thank you.*

JW: So the answer to that, predictably, is that you can sort-of do both. And which would I recommend? Probably if you already have had some contact with the series editor and maybe you at least know each other by name, or have been at the same conference, it might be quite useful to approach them in the first place, because they'll be able to give you a bit of advice on how to put the proposal together in a way that's going to appeal to an editor like me. However, having said that, most editors like me are generally pretty friendly and looking for ideas. So actually, if you approached us with an idea we would give you guidelines and say, "This is how to submit proposals. These are the sort of things we're looking for." Maybe the only sort-of advantage of coming to an editor first is that obviously, if you go to a series editor, you might be limiting yourself to that series. And it might be, actually, that the editor says, "Well, actually I think there might be another series that it fits in a little bit better." So, obviously, we've got a wider view of our publishing output. And so rather than have the

slightly awkward situation where you've got to extricate yourself from a series, you might want to approach an editor first. So I think if you're very clear on which your proposal is for and it's definitely going to fit that series, and you've got a professional relationship with the series editors, I think it's absolutely not inappropriate at all to approach them. But it would be absolutely fine to approach the publishing editor as well. Because we'll have a conversation anyway. So whether it comes in via them or comes in via me, we'll always share that proposal and discuss it first.

SO: *I think Michael Stausberg would like to answer this, too.*

MS: I think, as a series editor, of course I would like you to contact me! Because I mean usually, as series editors, you have a clear understanding of what kind of things you want to have in your series. And the publishers might not always kind-of have the same clarity in vision for a series. And even as a series editor of course you might say, you know, "May be you might want to take it to this series?" So we do not just say usually "We don't fit." But we might also suggest other alternative series. And please bear in mind that the national publication landscapes are very different. So when you work with the British press they usually operate very differently from the German press, for example. Or an Italian one. So there are very big national differences in terms of how to proceed with proposals or, for example, British presses or Anglo presses are more averse to publishing PhD theses as they are (**25:00**). Whereas this is quite normal in Germany, for example, where they would require only minor revisions and not a complete rewrite of your work. So be aware that the publishing requirements, and strategies, and procedures, and timelines, etc. are very different according to which country you go to. And previously, that was kind-of not really for you to worry about, because if you wanted to publish in English you had to go to an Anglo publisher anyway. But now since also German or Italian publishers, or French ones even, publish in English you as an author also have much more choice to draw benefits from this relatively non-homogeneous publishing landscape.

SO: *I'd actually like to take that kind-of question to Jenny and James about your experience of proposing for book-length projects?*

JB: I think part of it is knowing your own field. If it's quite a niche area or . . . I work in New Religious Movements. So in locating a list and a particular publisher I educated myself on where it would best fit. I looked at what had already been published, and also looked at a series. So in terms of marketing a monograph, it's usually good to be in a series. So to take those kinds of things into account as well.

SO: *You often have to cite this in your proposal as well - your own research, into the field that you're publishing in. You have to know it a bit.*

Question 3: *I'm Anya, I did my PhD at Cambridge which I recently finished, and I've started post-doc-ing there, as well. I have a brief question about inter-disciplinarity. I know that Religious Studies is its own thing, but many people approach it as a subject from other fields. And I was wondering if you have any suggestions for scholars who are outside of the core area of research who would like to publish within Religious Studies?*

MS: Well I think Religion has a very long tradition of trying to absorb work from scholars outside of Religious Studies. And so if you ask, "Does one get in, not being part of the tribe?" I'd say this isn't really an issue, is it? But I think, actually, when you look at open access, there are quite a number of interdisciplinary journals that are leading. And my impression is that the disciplinary journals, they have a long history and they are quite established. And sometimes new ones come up, and new publishers want to start publishing journals etc. But basically they're . . . the dyes are cast. And as long as these journals aren't run by an association that uses membership fees to sponsor journals that might feed into open access. I think the traditional journals are not really at the forefront of this, but in the interdisciplinary fields that is very different. Because they aren't kind-of part of these disciplinary power structures. So I think, on the inter-disciplinary field, the open access landscape is much more vibrant. And this might actually be a very interesting option for scholars to get published also more . . . and get a wider reading. Because you are in the open access landscape.

GA: I think it's really important point that you raise. But not quite the way you raise it. I don't think *Numen* would reject an article simply because you don't belong to the tribe. Because we don't actually know what tribe you belong to, in one sense. But I think what you really need to do, when you submit an article to a journal, is know what its editorial range is, what its agenda is, what its scope is. Because sometimes I get articles and it's like, "Well, this would be a great article for a journal specifically devoted to a particular topic." (**30:00**) But we're trying to reach a more general readership of all scholars of religions. So if it's too narrowly focussed then it's not right for us. But that does not mean it's not right for someplace else. And there are other ways that you can be out of scope as well. So have a sense for what the editorial policy of the journal is, what the journal is trying to accomplish, the kinds of article that they published in the past. It's no guarantee that they're not going to go out of that range. In *Numen* we've got a habit of publishing a lot of philologically very heavy material, but that doesn't mean we're not going to publish something that's not philologically heavy .I would welcome

things that aren't philologically heavy. So if you have something that isn't philologically heavy, think about our journal. But I think that's what you need to do. Figure out what's the editorial . . . what's the journal trying to do editorially, and submit to them. You can always contact the editor, and the editor will let you know.

Question 4: My name is John, and I would like to ask a question on: how do we meet the challenges of the twenty-first century? I mean, do people still read the paper journals? The general public, not scientists, not limited . . .? I mean, I notice that my grandfather reads, but I don't know what my children will be reading. Because the contemporary generation is only on the internet, not in the books any more. How do we, as scientists, meet this change and reach this audience, the general public?

SO: I know that Valerie Hall, at Equinox...

VH: Our journals are on-line, and definitely the print is going way down. So the preference is for on-line journals now, really. I mean, we have one journal which is only on-line. And I can see that others might potentially go that way. Or the other thing we're thinking about doing is perhaps having just one print volume at the end of each year, with all of the issues in it, rather than sending out individual issues throughout the year. So it's definitely moving towards on-line for sure, I think.

JW: I'll add to that that again, books are slightly different. We would sort-of find at Routledge that the increase in the share of where our revenue comes from is getting more and more from electronic, but not as quickly as you might think. So it was a very fast increase and then it's actually tended to plateau a bit. Do I think the technological changes are coming? Yes. But I think they're actually not in every area of academia. I don't think they're going as quickly as people suspect they might. Because they're still . . . some people still just prefer printed stuff, for all sorts of reasons. But I think all publishers are definitely having to react to people expecting . . . . The thing about making your content electronic is that it's just much easier to find, in the great sea of information. So adding discoverability tools. And I think a lot of publishers are looking at how they can organise their content, how they can deliver their content in a way that you can find it, simply and easily, by typing in a couple of key search words. So I think that's probably going to be one of the key challenges going forwards. It might still be in print but it'll have to probably be print and electronic at all times so people can find stuff – and they might buy the print anyway, after that.

SO: *And I don't doubt, briefly, Joshua and Valerie, that you are now advising the future of publishing*

as publishers. And maybe either warning, or preparing authors, or changing things? So what would you say that you think is developing, that we need to know about perhaps?

VH: I'd have to think about that!

SO: I *mean in terms of the commercial aspect, I guess that's always a priority.*

JW: OK. So, for many of us, governmental educational budgets, and maybe individual institutional library budgets have tended to shrink. (**35:00**)You know, it was the case that libraries would buy books just on the off-chance they might need them. But now, many of them have electronic systems where, basically, if enough people request it then they automatically order a copy. So that is obviously better for libraries, because they're only buying what people want, and what people use. And that's absolutely fair enough. But publishers are going to have to react to that by, it's not just enough to be in the general field and probably someone will pick it up. Actually it's got to be useful to somebody. So I would think, if you're thinking about putting your proposal together, quite a lot of that proposal should be explaining to me, as an editor who's going to read it, why is it useful? How does it fit into the general academic conversation that's going on in your field? Because we are having to be more and more judicious about what we put through. Because things that are being bought are things that people are actively requesting to use – increasingly, anyway.

VH: Yes, I would definitely agree with that. I mean one of the things we are trying to do is publish more textbooks, and less monographs, probably. Sorry, fewer monographs. But yes. It's definitely true about the libraries and it's a customer-demand-driven acquisitions model now. So definitely e-books are increasing and print books are decreasing, in terms of sales, I would say. And also library packages are something we're really pushing at the moment. So we have subject packages with journals and books, just journals, just books – libraries can choose which titles they want to have. You can have front lists, back lists, it's basically bespoke packages for different libraries. So that's kind-of where it's going for us really, at the moment.

SO: *And do people want to talk a little bit about what the process of reviewing is? You've indicated Greg, a little bit about the process, about where it goes to, and the stages. And is there anything more to add to that?*

GA: What do you have in mind, specifically?

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SO: *With the journals, in general. Do they all follow the same pattern, do you think? Do they all have a checklist? And they all have two reviewers?*

GA: I think the protocol these days has become two blind reviewers. If the reviewers disagree then I always try and get a third person, unless it's something that I know about. And then I also try and assess, do I think the reviewer's been fair? Or do I think the reviewer's done a decent job? Some reviewers are very, very thorough. Some reviewers aren't very thorough. Sometimes you can see personal animosity in the review, and you try and allow for that. And, as James said, you try and give the author some directions. I had cases where I've written to the author and I've said "This reviewer is just really a nasty person. Don't take it personally. I disagree with . . . . There are things here that are worth considering, but don't take it personally", right?

SO: *I have to say the first time I had something published was based off of a conference paper, because I was invited to submit the finished article. But it was still liable for revision or rejection. But that was my foot in. And I think that's why presenting at conferences is also . . . . Because there's lots of editors roaming around who might be looking for articles, as well. But obviously it depends. Some of these journals have this backlog. It maybe that you're not hunting them out, but there's probably lots of other journals who are actually looking for papers.*

VH: Yes, we often publish papers with thematic issues, special issues, which come from conferences. So that would just be papers from a particular conference and that's very successful. Sometimes they become book volumes as well, afterwards.

SO: *Do you want to comment on that?*

GA: I know Brill likes to have special issues for *Numen*, because they think that the different articles are going to feed off of each other. So if you've got a whole set of articles... like we had an issue on "Religion and Terrorism" that Jim Lewis edited. Mark Jeurgensmeyer was in there, Lorne Dawson was in there, and so on. And you know, that then attracts attention. Because it has higher visibility. So another thing to think about in terms of getting yourself published is not just to submit individual articles but try and get a group of people together to work on the same topic and then submit a whole block. (**40:00**) And that's often received much more favourably.

SO*: Yes. To propose a group of papers in a theme, or particular problem that you are addressing, together. Yes.*

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MS: If I just may comment on the backlog. There are different procedures, of course, among the journals. So for example with *Religion*, we first publish digital and then eventually it comes in an issue. But there can be a year, or one-and-a-half years, between these two dates. Whereas other journals . . . I think *Numen* still doesn't have that. So then you are kind-of more dependent on when the next slot is free. But let me just add this. I think we do have very many journals out there. And the publishers, apparently, are eager to put out more journals because it gives kind-of payment up front if you have subscribers. So it's apparently a lucrative strategy. And the field is an ecology, or a market, where all the time new players want to come in. And the question is are they sustainable? Is the thematic range too small or, I don't know, or key actors disappear or shift their interest. But in general there are very many journals in the field. And in that sense, really, it shouldn't be impossible to be published. It's rather the contrary. The contrary fact is that there are very few good, or very good, articles out there. If you get them to us, we'd be delighted. So I think we can just say that. You get many articles, but the ones that really kind-of make a point, argue solidly, give a clean argument, have good documentation, make some contribution, are well-written and somehow relevant, are not that many. So I just wrote that down. I wanted to get that across. So on the one hand there aren't that many good, or very good, or even shining articles out there. On the other hand, there are many journals. So don't be kind-of discouraged. Try to seek journals that fit your articles. Don't necessarily go to a generalist journal. If you have something that, for example, specifically deals with fieldwork then there is a particular journal on fieldwork in religion, which maybe isn't of interest for a generalist journal. So try to screen the journal landscape and you'd be surprised how many journals there are. They are all craving for content, right? And that is basically... yeah. You want to add something?

GA: (Laughter) What I would say, coming to this . . . and I was thinking, there are plenty of opportunities out there. All you have to do to get published is have something important to say, and say it well, right? Have something important to say, and say it well. And then find somebody who wants to hear it. And you know, be really self-critical. But then also write, and write, and write. Human beings and human brains did not evolve to write, we've evolved to speak, right? Writing is a skill, writing is an art. It takes practice. But the more you do it, the easier it gets. And sometimes you may think you have a great article. Be critical. I mean you can write an article and then look at it: "I'll bin this. This is garbage! Why did I write this?" Because you just don't like it any more. But then, turn to something else and move on from there. But if you have something important to say, and you can say it well, somebody will publish it.

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SO: *We got to you in the middle, I think. You haven't asked a question yet.*

Question 5: I'm Monica, from SOAS. And I'm doing my PhD there now. And I would like to know how you deal with the different scenarios of knowledge production between the Global North and the Global South. So at the moment, your articles have to be paid for and a lot of people are being excluded, right, from accessing the knowledge and being part of the system of knowledge production? And, as somebody who is working in the Global South, I really would like to have my work being accessible to the people I'm working with. So now I'm facing this moral dilemma. On the one side, that is there, but on the other side I also would like to pursue a career in academia. So do you see any solutions to this, or any suggestions on this please?

SO: *I'm thinking Greg Alles?*

GA: Yes this is . . . I think that's a really, really important question. And it doesn't just involve publication, but it involves the entire academy. I think there's . . . . It's probably, maybe, a question that's under people's radars, right? But it's still there. It becomes a real problem because scholarly conventions differ from one place to the next, to the next, to the next, right? And it's not always easy for reviewers, for editors to . . . . I try and see, try and discern where people are coming from and see potential, and see whether they can be made into something that's worthwhile, and try and give advice in that way. During my time at *Numen*, I've really wanted to bring in authors from different parts of the world. We don't get much submitted from the Global South – I wish we did. You know, we don't get much submitted from Asia. There are certain problems there in terms of linguistic facility, also certain problems in terms of the audience that people want to address. This is only tangentially related to what you asked. But one thing that's been really frustrating for me . . . . But I understand where it's coming from, because I've written in German. I can talk in German but my written German isn't great, right? English, if you're writing in English, or German, or French, whatever language you're writing in, if it's not your native language there are certain kinds of errors that people tend to make. And those, unless you learn the language at age five age six . . . . I think it was this room I heard a woman do a talk on language learning by adults, versus language learning by kids. And there are certain kinds of mistakes that adults are just going to make routinely, simply because of the way they learned languages, right? And as an editor, I've spent a lot . . . . When I first started with *Numen*, we didn't have a copy editor and I spent a lot of time revising articles sentence by sentence, by sentence, by sentence – just reworking the English language. And that's frustrating. And so it would be in your best interest, if English isn't your first language – or German, French, whatever it is – to have someone read

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over the language and improve the language, so that it looks as good as possible when it's submitted. Because it could be very interesting. But if it's going to cost me a hundred hours of time to put it in a readable fashion, I'm going to think three times before I accept it. And, you know, I've spent way too much time revising people's English. I'm happy to do it, but after a while one just says, "Enough is enough". So keep that in mind. Because a lot of people here . . . .

SO: *Make it easy for them.*

GA: Make it easy for us. If you're submitting an article in English, and I guess most people are. We're supposed to publish in German and French, but we haven't done it for years. If you're submitting an article in English, have a native speaker look it over so it reads well. Because otherwise, it's just a real headache. And then you're going to think twice about it. So keep that in mind. Also keep in mind the scholarly conventions where you're trying to publish.

SO: *And now you're also talking about access to the Global South as well. Not just from the Global South to publishing, but access to the Global North.*

Monica (**M**): Yes, and how I personally can find a balance between on the one side trying to pursue a career in the West, where I'm living . . . (**50:00**).

SO: *In English language journals.*

M: And at the same time having my writings accessible to the people whom I'm working with, so that I also get a very honest and critical feedback. So that the knowledge is not legitimised only from one side.

SO: *As far as I know, if something's in translation you can publish it independently, I mean through a different publisher.*

JW: That would depend on your contract.

M: But with the indexing . . . . Then it's not part of one of these journal titles.

SO: *Yes. Do you have partners with other . . .? I don't know if that's the kind of question you're looking at. But you want your people that you work with to be able to read it?*

M: Yes. So for example, in the university . . . . In, say, a university in Saudi. I have studied there as

well, and I have seen that so many of the journals are just not accessible because the universities do not have the subscriptions. So it just becomes very difficult. And there is a very one-sided knowledge which is legitimised from the West, even though we are talking about other areas.

SO: *Just briefly, yes.*

VH: The only thing I can say is that for some journals we do have preferential rates for some parts of the world, so it's worth looking on the journal website. Some of them are much cheaper.

SO: *Sure, James. Yes.*

JW: Simply that, as maybe the only other person on the panel who works on a non-English speaking journal, a non-English language journal: for a start, to make our work accessible to my colleagues in Russian universities – and we publish from a Russian university – our journal is open access, and is devotedly open access. Despite offers from Elsevier last year, we have decided to remain open access, to provide access to our Russian colleagues. And I have to reflect and repeat the sentiments offered earlier, that basically, of course, I have many excellent Russian colleagues who wish to publish in Western journals, who wish to publish in English. And often the boundary . . . the problem isn't language; they can write perfectly acceptable English with a few corrections here and there. It's simply the academic Russian style and the English or Anglo academic style are almost . . . are extremely different. And when you've put this into . . . when a Russian has written an English article, it does look, you know, very different. And it sometimes won't be accepted by an English or Anglo Academic journal precisely because the style is different. The Russians, they like their point-by-point argumentation rather than a narrative, for instance. I'm a historian, so in British historical journals in particular, we like a nice narrative, a nice story. We don't like this point-by-point analytical argumentation.

SO: *I just wanted to say that we haven't actually talked about the pay-to-publish . . . which you might feel under pressure to do as a new scholar. And don't do it. Try to find other ways first. But I would like to end, actually, with our final advice in maybe one sentence. I know Michael has a list. But if you can give some final advice about what you wish the people who approach you had in mind, or could do, before they approach you to submit an article?*

MS: Let me say something more general, please. On the one hand, please don't let yourself be irritated or discouraged by the fact that everybody else seems to be publishing much more than you do. This is,

I think, something that we all think. "All the others are much more productive." I mean set yourself a realistic goal: what can I achieve given my constraints? Don't think of, I don't know, seven pieces or articles when you have lots of teaching to do. Make clear what you can achieve, and don't try to get kind-of distracted in all sorts of directions. And also, don't try to overpublish. There is the tendency to think that if you have a publication list of twenty titles, you'll get hired. If you only have three, you don't. I think it doesn't really work that well if you have ten articles that basically all say the same thing, (**55:00**) and quote the same sources. That will also, basically, at some point, be held against you by some committee. So, rather, try to do some really good pieces rather than do tons of things that are basically identical. And another thing is, I think there are two pitfalls. One is you can be a perfectionist and the other one you can be sloppy. And you should avoid both. If you are a perfectionist you will never end up publishing anything, because you will always be unhappy. So even if you are unhappy, spread the paper. Often people really like what you write, even though you don't. So it helps you to kind-of get . . . it's always good to get . . .

SO: *Other perspectives.*

MS: Not only to get the criticism, but also to get encouragement. But don't be sloppy, either. I mean, really work on your writing. Get your argument across, and don't try to take short cuts. So I think it's in between. It's in between these two things. And one final thing: something we do very little still in Religious Studies, or the Study of Religions, or whatever you might call it, is co-author. We get very few articles that are co-authored. Don't you also, Greg? And I've co-authored with a handful of people. And it's always been a very rewarding process. And some of the things that we've been talking about here actually become then part of the set up: that you comment on each other's pieces. And I think this will be, also. . . . And when you get the reports back, you aren't kind-of alone in receiving the feedback. I think this is really a rewarding experience. And I think we are still doing this to far too little a degree.

SO: *I think rather than everyone answer, if somebody has something to add to that, that's different? Greg, do you have something different to add to that? Or Valerie?*

JWh: I'm just going to add, from my perspective as a young career scholar, in both the jobs I have now the attitude still is "publish or perish". And you have to take that into account, as you're publishing. As much as we would like to take all the time in the world to perfect and get our articles right, there is always going to be pressure on you from grant bodies, from university bodies, to publish

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as much as possible. This can make it difficult, sometimes, to get the kind of quality that you would like. I know from my position, I have to publish a certain amount in a year. You are going to have to learn to deal with this, I think, most certainly, to try and balance these two things between quality and pressure. But the thing that I would emphasise – especially if you haven't published an academic article yet, you haven't published your book – is, it is a learning experience. Your experience of writing so far is a long form dissertation, or long form thesis, not a ten thousand word article. It takes time to perfect that. So if your first article that gets published doesn't satisfy your desire for quality, well, over time you'll get better at short form writing, I think. Over time you'll be able to perfect short form writing. I've certainly found, comparing my first ten thousand word article to the last couple I've written is, personally, I'm more satisfied with how I write short form now. So that's my only advice.

GA: Two pieces, actually. One: don't get discouraged. I don't know how you feel. Writing for me is a very personal thing. I sort-of bleed myself onto the page, in a way. And if you get somebody who's criticising you, that could be taken very, very personally. It can be a very discouraging experience. Don't let that happen. You have to have a certain amount of self- confidence. Everybody gets criticism. Everybody gets rejected. And you can't let that stop you. So I think that's a really, really important point about where the writer comes from. The second thing – and maybe we've gotten away from this a little bit – for a while, everything that was published was "ground-breaking", was "brilliant", was "paradigm-shifting"! (**1:00:00**) I just hate that inflated rhetoric! I'd rather people be honest about what the contribution is that their article is making, and their manuscript is making, and not say "This is changing the paradigm! It's going to change the way people think for the next two hundred years!" Because that just isn't going happen. In most cases it's not going to happen. So, just be honest to yourself and be honest to the people you're selling the material to, about what the contribution is.

JB: I'll add a very general piece of advice. The "publish or perish" situation is true. But try not to think of it that way – or try not to focus on that. Try not to focus on what will get you hired, or what will be funded, because it's important to have passion for what you do. Because you need that if you're going to be an academic. You need to love what you do, what you research, and to be enthusiastic about it. And when you publish, it opens up other opportunities. And the academy is a community. And there are many positive outcomes, and all of the different aspects of academia are interconnected. So, for example, people tried to dissuade me from publishing on areas that really have nothing to do with my main area of research, things that I'm personally interested in. So I am interested in popular culture and film studies, which is not the area that I work in. So I published something on that many years ago,

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and now I'm in a position to merge that into Study of Religions, into what I'm mainly doing now. So you know, follow what you most want to do.

SO: *I have two audiences as well, and two fields. So you know it's ok to do that. Last advice?*

VH: Yes, I don't have a lot to add. Just the idea of collaboration is brilliant, I think, for book projects and journal articles as well. And if you're not collaborating, just try and get as much feedback from other people as you possibly can, and make sure that the kind-of remit of the piece of writing is appropriate for the word length that you're given, as well. I think that can be a problem sometimes.

SO: *And lastly, Joshua?*

JW: Yes, ok. So I think I would say, firstly, that as a publisher I want your book to be good – because I want to do good books. So don't feel like you have to come to me cap in hand. It's actually . . . if you've got a good idea and a good book, I want to hear about it. I think, secondly, just think about how you're explaining that idea. So if you can try and come out of your involvement with it for a second and think about it . . . put yourself in my shoes. If you've just got this email through, how might you react to it? And just a very small practical thing, if you were emailing someone like me out of the blue. What I quite like in an email: introduce yourself, say what stage you're at, maybe a paragraph or something just explaining the book and then say, "Does that sound interesting?" Because if you just send me your thesis and go "Do you want to publish it?", very honestly, I don't have time to sit and read your whole thesis. I've got hundreds of emails a day, hundreds of projects to look through a year. So, just a brief summary that I can get the general gist of it, and that's going to make me much more likely to respond to you quickly. If you leave it quite vague, I'm going put that on the I'll-get-to-that-in-a-bit pile. That's just a bit of honesty. Brief, concise detail in your initial contact with me will probably go a long way.

SO: *Well, I think we will end it here. And I'd like to thank our speakers here answering questions, and also all of you for coming, and staying this long, and asking questions. And so thank you very much, and enjoy the rest of the conference. And come and speak to the publishers!*

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