



MARCH 2021

RRE Alumni Updates



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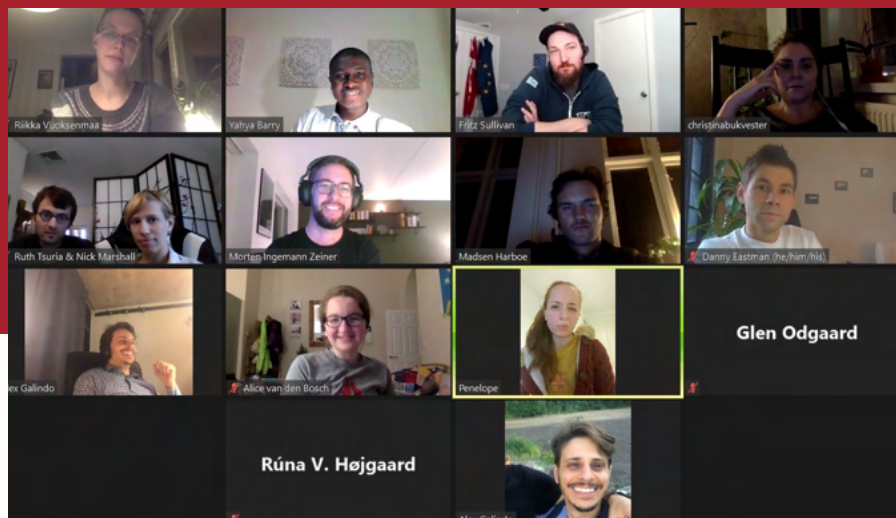
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ALUMNI MEETING

Summary and Next Steps Forward

WHAT HAPPENED?

*We had 14 alumni in attendance
One RRE Baby was made: Congrats
Ruth and Nick
Four main points of discussion*



It was destined to be a glorious Thursday evening 8pm CET on the 18th of March when a group of 14 alumni would meet online to catch up and discuss ways of moving the network forwards. We had people connecting from the US, Denmark, Finland, UK and Holland,

“

ALUMNI FACED CHALLENGES IN EXPLAINING WHAT THE DEGREE ENTAILED AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

”

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN A GROUP OF RRE ALUMNI MET ONLINE FOR THE FIRST TIME PERHAPS?

The Points of Discussion Summed Up

The RRE host institutions dwindled down to only three: Copenhagen, Lund and Oslo. Funding issues were highlighted as well as student recruitment to the programme.

The challenging job market post-RRE. A major issue highlighted by a significant number of alumni. Insights into the challenges following PhD routes were shared in compelling depth by Ruth and Nick.

The problematic title of the degree: MA 'Religious Roots of Europe' contributed to the challenge of the marketability of the degree. Alumni faced challenges in explaining what the degree entailed and its significance. Suggestions to emphasise particular aspects of the programme e.g. 'Culture vis-a-vis Religion/Religious' and suggestions for alternative titles e.g. International Critical Religious Studies ... International Cultural... were forwarded.

How does the network move forward? In beginning to address this, a further question(s) were posed: what do we expect from such a network? The following points emerged from this: Career concerns: a genuine need/expectation was voiced:

- Student recruitment (promoting the programme)
- PhDs ... providing support and assistance (mentoring)
- Augmenting the programme with 'practical elements/skills' e.g. Conflict Resolution
- Connections with companies and institutions to facilitate internships
- Marketing and leveraging our skills in the job market ... through conferences
- Sharing alumni bios and stories through regularly published newsletters
- Looking at other alumni networks for ideas

Heresy, Violence & Fundamentalism: A PhD project Studying Female Martyrs in Late Antiquity

Conversation with Alice van den Bosch

When Alice mentioned having a USP - Unique Selling Proposition in heresy, violence and fundamentalism with a lacing of female martyrdom, you knew she was going to "kill" that PhD selection process - yes literally.

After the MA RRE in Copenhagen, Alice moved back to the UK and worked in admin at a British university. The "scramble" for PhD positions was real and to stand out, Alice needed that USP.

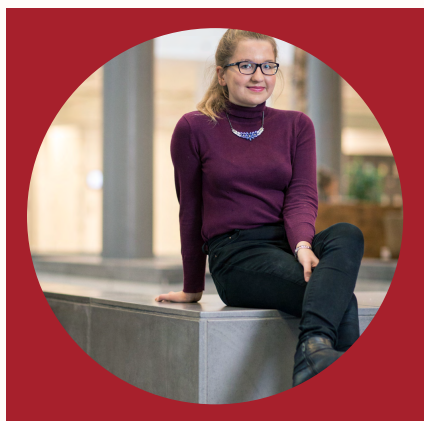
With a BA in Ancient History under her belt, Alice utilised her linguistics skills gained from the RRE in crafting a PhD research project to sell to the University of Exeter.

Hebrew and Arabic - in particular - were instrumental in her selection of case studies of female martyrs in the Muslim (Hadith) literature - Sumayya and Fatimah in the Shi'a tradition to complement the Christian cases which dominated her collection.

Now almost midway through her PhD, Alice recognises the importance of careful selection of what one chooses to research. In what can be a stressful endeavour, "it is important to enjoy what you are researching" she said.

Academia is not the career route one embarks on for "stability" necessarily she outlined. Alice pointed out the importance of "having one foot in the real world", giving examples of Think Tanks and community dialogue.

Her advice for current RRE students is firstly: "don't be anxious about not having concrete plans." Alice herself did not. Two years - she says - gives one an opportunity to discover and explore. "Follow the 'bits' that grab your attention in the RRE course, stay in touch with your course mates and make connections". Golden words of advice from the heresy, violence and fundamentalist female martyr expert.



From RRE to Business: Falling Back on Analytical Skills in the Software Industry

Conversation with Fritz Sullivan

How do you go from writing a thesis on Temple Destruction in Ancient Rome to being Project Manager at Oracle? Fritz, waking up at 4am in the US to make the 11:00 CET appointment wasted no time telling us.

He was unemployed the first few months after the RRE, landing a job as founding partner with a tech start-up called 'Match My Thesis' - a company that pairs Business and Engineering MAs with companies. He accepted a role to be a Treasurer on the Board of Directors of a charity organisation working in Sierra Leone. It gave him further business experience.

An immigrant in Denmark, Fritz found jobs hard to secure. Not having a business degree and lacking perfect Danish exacerbated things. He returned to the US, did an MSc in Business Analytics and moved into the tech industry. A silver lining is there: despite his Business MSc, Fritz finds the analytical skills acquired from the 'liberal arts' through his BA and RRE to be what he relies on more in his day to day job. The distance-learning element gave him the skills to be successful working with clients and colleagues remotely across the globe on his projects. The RRE therefore opens a diverse range of career possibilities for its alumni - challenging but also rewarding.



“WITH DANISH EDUCATION BEING ABOUT SPECIALISATION, YOU ARE EXPECTED TO WORK IN ”

Christian-Muslim Reflections Growing Up in Northern Nigeria & Working on Religious Migration in Denmark

In Conversation with Clement Dachet



Background

Having answered a vocational call as pastor in Northern Nigeria, Clement recalls always being interested in “the religious divides, especially between Christians and Muslims”. Currently a research consultant at the Danish InterChurch Council, he fondly recollects intimate experiences reading Muslim scriptures at his Muslim friends’ traditional Qur’anic school. Hailing from the Hausa tribe, Clement disclosed having both Christian and Muslim family members. “There’s now a lot of mistrust on both sides” he remarked poignantly. Applying for the MA RRE was seen by him as a step in the right direction given his outlined interests.

Job Market Experiences

Upon graduation, Clement found immediate employment hard. “It is a shame to have done the RRE programme and not be able to work with it. Alumni face two hurdles: how to ‘sell’ their skillsets and tapping into the right networks” he articulated.

He fell back on the writing skills he had honed through RRE’s famed weekly assignment essays to create blog content, even contributing to Danish journals on his topic of interest.

Networks started to open up. He observed that agencies in Denmark tended to perceive Nigerian Christian-Muslim relations as antagonistic. His lived experience however informed him just how complex the situation is.

He collaborated with a number of agencies such as the Centre Against Human Trafficking and the YMCA in ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. Building networks was crucial: “finding people in the same sphere and connecting with them. You need to make yourself known in the careers world. You need to be unique to stand out”

Career Trajectory

Clement is developing a portfolio career with the Department of Interfaith Relations (Migrant Cooperation) at the InterChurch Council of Denmark. He shared some research interests: the challenges of belonging to the Church of Denmark for migrants and definitions of Danish and Migrant Christianity. Fieldwork with some of the 250 migrant congregations uncovered how some – especially the African ones – risk being a “misfit in the system but hold a lot of power in influencing people’s lives.” By comparison, while Muslim ethnic religious groups had relative success in their abilities to create faith spaces, they are “problematized” in Danish society.

Recommendations & Advice

Interfaith relations and Migration became ‘fields’ for Clement to “squeeze” himself in. He found he had to seek further studies Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Studies and questions why the RRE programme didn’t give a foundation for elements in these areas of expertise. In retrospect, he found RRE to be stronger on the historical contextual vis-à-vis the contemporary.

In the careers world, the degree title RRE needs “a lot of explanation”, so one needs to do a bit more “leg work” to outline for employers who they are and the skills they have. The situation – for those resident in Denmark – is more challenging for non-ethnic Danes ... “here, to get a place in the job market, you have to really prove your worth” stated Clement.

“ Alumni face two hurdles: how to ‘sell’ their skillsets and tapping into the right networks ”

THE DAY AFTER RRE: PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIONS

Editorial by Penelope Diamantopoulou

Is the RRE programme a ticket to a PhD only? Does it solely offer an academic career trajectory or could it lead to other professional pathways?

Our editorial team conversed with three RRE alumni to address this important topic. We spoke with Alice, Clement and Fritz who delivered a joint tutorial to current RRE students on career options. We present the piercing insights, trends and lived realities shared by the wonderful trio.



Fritz Sullivan
Project Manager, Oracle



Clement Stephen Dacht
Consultant, Danish InterChurch

Competing in a particular labour market such as the Danish one posed another set of challenges for the alumni. "To get a place in the job market, you have to really prove your worth" remarked Clement. Fritz agreeing to that added "we can't compete with the Danes ... it's about what you bring to the table, cutting your own niche and creating one's own market".

In the end, although there was a resignation to the hard fact that clearly defined and 'practical set jobs' for Religious Studies graduates are few and far between, the appreciation of knowledge in this area of the humanities was defiantly manifest. As one of the alumni put it, "we still appreciate curiosity".

It is here, with this particular point in mind that praise was heaped on the RRE programme along with its contingent of teachers and instructors. We wish to see the programme go from strength to strength and we know we also have a role to play in this.

Mirroring the diverse ways the students entered into the RRE programme, they departed embarking on varying career pathways. Alice is a PhD candidate in the subject area of Late Antiquity, Clement is a research consultant for the Danish Inter-Church Council and Fritz is a project manager at Oracle.

Strengths of the RRE programme were inherent in its interdisciplinary and hybrid learning approach. Alice pointed out how this also posed a challenge. It can be often difficult to position oneself in a clear area of specialisation. She advised that being able to creatively highlight relevant aspects of the programme when applying for positions was crucial for success in the careers world.

"Graduates don't have control over the industries they can get into" flagged Fritz while Clement gave an example. A pastor who goes through seminary training has a clear career trajectory. An RRE student on the other hand has no such clear path thereby risking not being able to use the RRE for anything.



“In the careers world, RRE graduates would have to ‘stress’ different and yet relevant aspects of the ‘flexible, blended learning approach’ of the course which while isolating also offers skills in interdisciplinary projects and tasks.”

Alice van den Bosch, PhD Candidate, Late Antiquity, University of Exeter

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES & VACANCIES

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

FT 36-month project "African Voices in the Islamic Manuscripts from Mali..."
[Link for further details.](#)

– Deadline: 15 May 2021

PHD SCHOLARSHIP UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

"Apocalypticism: Manuscripts, Rewriting, and Authority Management"
[Link for further details.](#)

– Deadline: 15 April 2021

CALLS FOR PAPERS

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS JOURNAL OF DIALOGUE STUDIES

Volume 9 "Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities"

[Link for further details.](#)

– Deadline: 15 May 2021

WORKSHOP ON NARRATING HOLY LIVES

RRE Alumna Alice van den Bosch is co-organising a workshop at the University of Exeter titled: 'Narrating Relationships in Holy Lives from the First Millennium AD'.

"Communities wrote about holy figures for many reasons. Our speakers consider the characterisation of various holy figures or 'the very special dead' in texts from multiple religious (Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Manichaeen) and linguistic (Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew) communities. The workshop will explore the construction of holy and unholy characters, their relationships, and the role of narrative order in texts about holy figures."

Please send one-page poster submissions in PowerPoint or PDF format to narratingholylives@gmail.com by 1st July 2021, along with affiliation, year of study and synopsis if applicable. Submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis. [Link for more details.](#)



INTRODUCING OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

THE CREATIVE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS PUBLICATION



YAHYA BARRY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



**PENELOPE
DIAMANTOPOULOU**
EDITOR



DANIEL EASTMAN
EDITOR

Yahya is a Senior Visiting Researcher at the University of Copenhagen's Centre of African Studies where he is pursuing a project studying Black African Muslims in history and the contemporary.

Yahya has recently been appointed by the Scottish Government Ministers to serve the Board of Creative Scotland - the public body for the Arts and Culture sector.

Penelope is a multilingual writer, translator and editor. She has lived, studied and worked in Athens, Paris, Rome and now Copenhagen. She obtained degrees in Theology and Social Sciences from different universities.

As an RRE student, she was the Youth Goodwill Ambassador for the University of Copenhagen, representing Theology School.

Danny is a PhD candidate at Yale University where he is researching ancient Christianity.

An alumnus from the MA RRE in the University of Helsinki, Danny graduated in 2013.

He taught English in South Korea for a year before returning to the US in 2014.



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Academia is not the career route one embarks on for 'stability' necessarily. It is important to enjoy what you are researching... Follow the 'bits' that grab your attention in the RRE course, stay in touch with your course mates and make connections.

ALICE VAN DEN BOSCH

PhD Candidate, Late Antiquity, University of Exeter

**RRE
Alumni**



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Research Consultant, Danish InterChurch

**RRE
Alumni**



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FRITZ SULLIVAN

Project Manager, Oracle

**RRE
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