

very-special-episode-public-humanities-public-jokes-with-dr-...

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SPEAKERS

J. Barton Scott, Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

What's up nerds? That's right. I'm stealing Megan's catchphrase, because she's not here to tell me I can't. In fact, that feels so good. I'm doing it again. What's up nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein. Fuerst half of keeping it 101. And I'm just here to give you a quick intro to this very special episode. On March 11 2021, we visited the University of Toronto, by which I mean, we sat in Maine and Vermont and Toronto and all logged into teams at the same time. The department for the study of religion and specifically the religion in the public sphere program welcomed us into conversation with the one and only Dr. J Barton Scott. Professor Scott is a rock star of a thinker. And definitely check out his work, which I'm linking to in the show notes kind of profusely, and we remained so honored that he reached out, set up this wonderful event in the midst of a pandemic and allowed us to record it. A quick note before we go ahead on the University of Toronto, as some of you may know, in late April of 2021, well after our virtual visit, the Canadian Association of University teachers issued its first censure since 2008, over the cancellation of international law expert Dr. Valentina Azarova. her previous scholarship and commentary on Palestine and Israel were cited his political motivation to cancel her position. faculty at the University of Toronto across Canada and in fact, in sibling unions in the US have supported the current boat boycott. We do too. We support that current boycott support the center, and we'll link to the both the story and resources in the show notes. Anyway, here it is, folks, it's our first live taping of the pod. As we do more of these talks and


presentations. We'll try to do more of these special episodes. We want to thank all the folks at the University of Toronto who made this happen, including, and perhaps especially Dr. Scott, but also Nicole, Birgit the graduate and undergraduate student fellows in the religion in the public sphere program. I'm sure I'm missing people, but those four who were listed in my email chain, y'all did a great job, and we learned so much from you all. So enjoy.



J. Barton Scott 02:47


It is 105 I think it is time to get started. I hope everyone enjoyed our weight room music which you know, I find to be measurably entertaining. And, you know, entertainment is perhaps the theme of the day or at least one of them. Welcome to public humanities public jokes and interview with the killjoys behind the hit podcast, giving it one on one I just to let everyone know this meeting is being recorded and by being here you're giving your consent to be recorded. But but it is, let me say that it is my sincere pleasure to welcome everyone here I am Barton Scott of the Department for the study of religion and the Department of historical Studies at the University of Toronto. Thanks to everybody for being here during a hectic time of a hectic season. Thanks to the Department for the study of religion and the religion in the public sphere initiative for supporting this event financially and for all the logistical support that went into making it especially from the colder go Michael family and our department chair Pamela Clawson. Before we get going, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered under the auspices of a university which operates on land that for 1000s of years has been the traditional Land of the Huron wendat, the Seneca and most recently, the nice thing about the Mississauga as of the credit, different version, she said, Hey, everyone could make sure that they are when not speaking. Otherwise, you know, at this end, this land remains home to many indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. I also want to acknowledge that today is the one year anniversary of the who declined in confinement for a full year. It's hard to believe you know, I'm measuring the days in beard Apparently, they tell me I look like an ancient sculpture. Anyway, play in a good way. Let's go. Here in our confinement, what better time is there to think about the things that connect us in our solitude? Things like our earbuds and the strangely intimate oral medium that is the podcast What better times that to talk to you Elise and Megan it feels foolhardy to in for me to introduce these two individuals who introduce themselves so well and so regularly on there, they got it down. But let me say let me briefly do so and then they can correct me where I have aired. I will just say that Elise Morgenstein Fuerst is Associate Professor of religion at the University of Vermont and the author of Indian Muslim minorities and the 1857 Rebellion, published with Ivy tourists in 2017. I can hear her personal byline and might the back of my head but I'll let her say that Meghan Goodwin Meanwhile, teaches religion at Northeastern University, where she is also program director of state of the sacred rights project that I'm

with upon WRI t as we in religion love nothing more than a good pun, or a bad pun is a professor good one is also the author of abusing religion, literary persecution, sex scandals and American minority religions published with Rutgers in 2020. I feel like we are still stuck in a long 2020. Yeah, yeah, I

 Megan Goodwin 06:07
can confirm.

 06:08

today. However, we're not here to talk about their teaching or the writing. Although of course, we're welcome to do that. We're rather here to talk about Megan and Elise's work as public intellectuals, we're thinking about how religion acts in the public sphere, and how we, as scholars of religion can talk to larger publics, their podcast, keeping it one on one does all of those things. So So? Well, I first heard about the podcast, like basically a year ago, sort of like early pandemic, through my colleague here at Toronto, netta Mumtaz, and I've since listened to hours and hours of it, although I confess not every hour that exists, because you guys are so busy. How do you do it all? I don't know.

 Megan Goodwin 06:48
unpaid calendars, calendars.

 06:52

I would hardly recommend the podcast as indeed I have to many different people, even where I disagree with things that the podcast does I find myself disagreeing in productive and interesting ways that helped me to think about what about the state of our field? So the pilot podcast is great. And it's great, I think for precisely the reasons that the title tells you, it will be great. It asks, What should so keeping up one on one, it asks, What should religion one on one look like in the 2020s? What is it to keep things one to one right now? I don't know the answer to that. But I think it's a question worth thinking about and talking about and talk Michelle, Megan and Elise are good at talking to us. So the format of today's events will be as follows. We'll start out with a conversational interview in which I pelt Elise and Meghan with questions large and small, get out your umbrellas, I expect that the interview portion will last for 45 minutes. So we will then shift to general conversation where I will moderate audience Q and A we have an extra treat lined up and the second part of the event. The recently assembled cohort of undergraduate fellows of

the elements experiment, or departments, religious studies emagazine recently rekindled they have crafted questions of their own, they too are thinking about what it means to do public humanities and to do that now in 2021. You know, the same questions that Elise and Megan are interested in. And so the elements fellows will introduce themselves and will also be introduced by their son. You know, lots of introductions will occur through our graduate student editor of the magazine, Edward escalon. editor, the elements experiment, so many E's I don't even know what to do. It's like a comic book. Okay, awesome. You can lean on the junior there to help you break up those knees. Kind of like he's like a long scream. He. Anyway, Elise, Meghan, do you guys have anything to add? Do you want to like say hello or singing a silly tune or anything before I begin pelting you with questions that whatever store



Megan Goodwin 09:00

at least will not sing in public, but I take requests.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:04

I don't think anywhere, not just in public, that is not one of my Forte's. I'll just start since you started with the land acknowledgement. And since we're not gathered together that I am coming to you from the traditional and unseeded territories of the abenaki people here in South Burlington, Vermont,



Megan Goodwin 09:18

and I'm coming to you from the unceded territory of the wabanaki and osisko peoples in Portland, Maine. And landed knowledge mints, obviously are not enough, but hopefully that the beginning of a conversation so



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:30

and if you check our website, you'll find places that we think you could take action on those items.



Megan Goodwin 09:34

We definitely do. Also shout out to Debbie Reese, who is an indigenous scholar herself who has helped us think about the work that land acknowledgments both do and don't do. So.



09:45

They're an interesting thing. I like Pamela's line on this which is like, it's clearly a ritual action. We in religious studies, like think about what rituals are and we should be able to think about, you know, ritual and what it does when we do these land acknowledgments. Well, good so I will do again. So again, I expect the interview to last till like circa two o'clock. Can I start with a goofy question or like kind of a goofy question. Imagine, imagine that I took the two of you and locked you both in separate rooms and demanded that each of you summarize the mission of your podcast in a single sentence. Do you come up with the same sentence?



Megan Goodwin 10:22

Is this the Match Game? Is that? Oh, no,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:26

I thought we already won the match game. I don't think we would I think that mine would look a lot more like really basic. Are we talking to my dad, public education, public humanities, and I think Megan's would sound like that, but probably a little bit more forceful, and 100%. More America. percent more about citizenship and a anti racist politics as they're located in the United States. What do you think I would say different than you Magnon? I probably messed that up. Tell me what, tell me what your Yeah,



Megan Goodwin 11:03

I don't know. I think I think that's accurate. I think Elise is a lot better about thinking through impact and how things are going to land. And I think I spent a lot more time I'm honestly thinking about, like, how is the most fun way for us to get it this? Like, how is this fun for us to do together? And then yeah, how does this help us help other folks who are trapped in their own rooms now? think more critically about religion in ways that like shape how they are out in the world? Does this inspire folks to take anti racist action, specifically, like not just in the big idea of the United States, but in their own communities? So yeah, I mean, but I also want to name out loud that my focus on like, the performance piece and the the activism piece, not that Elise doesn't care about these pieces, either. is shaped by my own location in the academy, right? Like, I am not tenured. I'm not tenure track, I don't have to measure impact in the same way that like a tenured professor at a land grant institution has to care about so. Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:19

Wait, Mark, you're muted. No, you're back.



Megan Goodwin 12:24

You're now on community. Okay, there we go. So it turns out if you push the



12:28

mute, you will in one set, leave one sentence then like, what is the mission of your podcast? What are y'all trying to do with this thing?



Megan Goodwin 12:36

I mean, you might be done with religion, but religion isn't done right here.



12:40

So I will this was like, Okay, I'm coming down to question number eight. I mean, I love, love, love, love that catchphrase. Right? You might be done with religion. But religion isn't done with you. It is so succinct and so evocative. Can you talk us through precisely what it means? I mean, well, what do you mean by that?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:00

Good minutes your line? So I'll take this one first.



Megan Goodwin 13:02

Okay. I think I mean, I think we both get to this at different ways. But the way that I'm understanding it is there is an impulse in what is now the United States to think about religion and these individual private how does this relate to me? How do I feel about religion? What is this like? Am I personally religious, and if I'm not personally religious, then religion just isn't important anymore. And I got a lot of students who come through, I get a lot of random folks at the airport who want to talk to me about what I'm reading that want to, yeah, say either religion is important, because it's important to me, or a lot more now that I live in the northeast. Religion isn't really that important. And what I'm hoping that we're doing with the podcast is showing that like, it's not that we don't value you as

individual human beings, but actually religion does not give a crap whether or not you think it's important. It is shaping your every day it is shaping the history of our country, it is shaping the history of international relations. And as I hope we have illustrated clearly, whether or not you opt in or opt out of religion matters very little, if you are religious, or religio racialized, say at an airport or at a border, on a hiring committee, the places where your individual convictions cease to matter in the indifferent but overwhelmingly shaped by religion, face of the state.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:25

Yeah, I'll just add, I think this religion isn't like you can be done with religion, but religion isn't done with you actually helps us do the work that public scholarship needs to do, which is to cut to the chase real fast and for every naysayer, so we all exist in university or AXA outside of university settings were in the university we are being told that the humanities are in crisis that departments like religion at UVM is not valuable or valued. And yeah, And yet, all of that, for me comes from my deep misunderstanding of religion as voluntary and religion is belief. And so this little sentence, I think does more work than, you know, the paragraphs that academics can bloviate, you know, on a resting day, about how important it is and why it matters. And then some line about critical thinking. And this line is really all about the material consequence. Yeah, like, it does not matter, right? Like, I'm gonna come back to my parents a lot because they are characters in our podcast and their characters and my pedagogy. But the way that my dad who is like ex military and listens to the pot, I'm like doing this because he listens on his phone. And I'm not sure that man has earbuds I really think he holds the phone and listens. But when Lloyd goes on his every morning, 4:30am, four mile walk, and now he goes on another one in the afternoon, because bro is bored in the pandemic. He listens to our podcast, and every time he gets to that religion isn't done with you episode, he calls. And he's like, I still can't believe that if you're brought in an ambulance to a hospital, and you're unconscious, and it's not your religion, they can impose their religion on you. Like that is horrifying. To my dad, who's like a community college grad ex military, former small business owner guy, like he's just your average white dude living in New Jersey, who's also really Jewish and really terrified. I mean, I have to say problematic ways. Like Megan, we might have to undo this. My dad is afraid of the Catholic hospitals now



Megan Goodwin 16:36

I Nana, like Catholic hospitals, you should be afraid of the Catholic hospitals.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:42

No, I know. But I might have given us work in like, I think I had to call my dad lawyer and make sure that the deal like his medical papers, he wants to say no Catholic hospitals. I'm like, I don't know if we're allowed to do that. Cool. I gave us homework. Yeah, that sentence, I think that sentence makes more sense to my dad, who is a well meaning, not a college student, guy who wants to know more. And in the however long I've been doing this, this is the most he's ever understood what I do.



Megan Goodwin 17:11

Yeah. And I think that applies not just to our students, cuz like, we have been giggling about the fact that we now when we do guest lectures don't have any new material, because we've used it all on the pod. But outside the classroom, yeah, this, these are things that we say over and over and over again. But I feel like the pods given us a space to say them in ways where they invite people into the conversation, rather than intimidating them or boring the crap out of them so that they just don't want to engage. And I think at its heart, that's what good public scholarship does, right? We say over and over again, that it's not we're not losing the nuance, we're not dumbing it down. We're putting it really clearly. And that's honestly very hard work. But a sentence like religion is not done with you, you know, has 50 years of scholarship behind it and has 16 different ways that we could yell about it on Twitter, mostly me I do most of the yelling at least is more calm, just in life. But it's true. Um, but we can we can give folks an invitation into the conversation without making them feel like they shouldn't be part of the conversation of the conversation isn't relevant to their everyday lives. And



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:28

without, without listing this Yeah, like without being like, have you read religion, religious, religious, like,



Megan Goodwin 18:35

what about JC Smith, though? But



18:36

yeah, sorry.



18:38

No. So I love the clarity with which you're able to indicate how that undermines a sense of religion as voluntary, that it's structural. And it's a way of getting people to think about structure in ways that people often aren't inclined to. I want to come back to a piece of what you said, at least, which I mean, I think you both are saying in different ways that you guys see yourselves as naysayers. And I wonder if you could maybe just fill us in or reflect a little bit on the word killjoy in the title of your podcast, which I'm assuming you get from Sara Ahmed, but I wonder if you could just sort of spell that out for us.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:07

It is a straight up Omar's and citation of Sarah Othman, I think, I think it used to be on our homepage, but it's definitely in the about sec. It's somewhere on the website where we don't we don't we talk about the title more immediately like Sarah Othman said, politics being a killjoy. So it is absolutely about that. I think the way that avid uses killjoy and the way that we use killjoy is in this reclaimed space have at one point in time being called a killjoy was the worst thing you one of the worst things you could call a woman because you were ruining the fun. You were just being a nag and your silly little thoughts your histrionics were ruining. You know, men doing what they feel.



Megan Goodwin 19:50

Let me just interject and say that men don't feel they think we are the ones with the feelings and we need to calm down about it. I should have just died. Settle down, settle down. Apologize



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:59

for For my significant lack, but I think that for us being killjoys really meant it, we wanted to set the tone from the title on that this wasn't going to be a flowery world religions, like ecumenical interfaith space, this was really going to be a, the things you think, you know, might really be wrong. The things you think, you know, are absolutely imperialist, regardless of whether you've done the learning to know that. And we are really invested in the kind of religion thinking that calls attention to those things and asks folks to do better. So we really do feel like being killjoys is about killing your darlings. loving them, but but also being really hyper critical. Megan, how would you answer that? I'm sure you would do it better than me?



Megan Goodwin 20:53

I don't know that I would do better. But I would, I think I would add that it's also in the citational politics way, a gesture toward the methodological approach that we took to the study of religion and to the podcast itself. So there are no shade. There are a lot of really great religious studies, podcasts that do a ton of interview work, there is not to the best of my knowledge and other podcasts that does the kind of theoretical framework that we're trying to do. We're taking as you pointed out part a systemic approach to the study of religion. We want to pay attention to the operations of power through Empire through structural inequality. And that's precisely again what Sara Ahmed brings to theory in general right is this just like no bullshit Let's stop be hiding behind the jargon and call it what it is. And if calling it what it is isn't theory, then thank God I'm not doing theory but let's get into this. I yeah, that and I, I do think it's a reclaiming it is a having done an awful lot of women's studies and Gender Studies. classwork teaching, occupying those spaces. I think we do a lot of giggling about our own inner humorless feminists, but I think that can be I think killjoy sits in the same place as deconstruction, and that people assume that it's negative and that it's only ever tearing down but it is really constructive work. And it can be joyful. So like killjoy in my head sits in the same place as my, my feminist lightbulb joke. You know, this one. Okay. How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Elise?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:31

I don't know, man. Funny.



22:36

Good. One of the things that is so striking about the podcast is its humor. And it's tone, which I mean, it behooves me to say as the host of an event called public humanities, public jokes stands in some sense of like, you know, performative irony, perhaps with the word killjoy, that that podcast is so joyful and so hilarious. And I mean, I'm like, well, I'll be curious to hear you guys reflect on that. And I've got questions to get you to do so. But I mean, well, let me go and ask one more of the soft, small questions before I get to the larger harder questions. But so what I want, what's the origin story? Like? How did you guys decide to make this podcast? I'm imagining a drunken night at the bar with like a note and a promise written on a napkin? Yeah,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:19

I mean, that's not far off. But Megan, do we say out loud what we thought This podcast

was going to be?



Megan Goodwin 23:24

I'll do it. I'll take it. I'm not tenured. We are. Our works. That's fine. I'm fine. Whatever. Come at me. Um, yeah, no, originally, we really we wanted to have a public conversation about our scholarly and our political commitments, which obviously are not separate. And so we really imagined the podcast being a contribution to anti racist work. But that was also snarky, because that is who we are. That is our truth. So we originally imagined a show called tea and crackers, where we told the truth about white people. And I'd like to think that there is still a lot of that work in this podcast. But Elise, again, pragmatically pointed out, that would be harder for our colleagues to assign the show for us to think about applying for grant work, or grant funding with a show called tea and crackers, even if the merchandising would be upstanding



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:23

what merchandising what words do we



Megan Goodwin 24:25

Well, I would much differently if it was called tea and crackers. I would I would have my own tea cups. At this point. I would have a tea line. We had we had so many tea jokes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:34

It was it was really like I was in the depths of finishing my book and it was a lot of like the East India Tea Company. Let's talk about him here. It was bad. But it was that you know, both of us have won awards been nominated for awards for our pedagogy. We both in our own ways, our failed performers and successful performers, right like I say all the time, then It shows a week. Sure. But I said I said all the time that I chose academia because I was too chickenshit to like, actually try comedy writing for real. And so I'm like, I thought this was easier which like, right? Like, I could have just gone to Hollywood hung out with the guys that knew from camp and like, probably gotten a job faster than I got a job in the academy. But that being said, I think when I don't know that it was drunken Megan, but it might have been in like a post partum moment for me of like, I only want to do work that makes me happy. And I'm sick of doing the tenure track, grad school grind of I need to make sure my CV is in order, I need to make sure I'm highly professionalized, I need to overperform and these sit out, sit at white spaces, white Christian spaces, so that I am a

good little citizen, and I can maintain my health insurance. And all of that's really important. But I really think it was after my my youngest was born, that I was like, we have fun. We have hours of conversations and text threads that are basically the podcast. And we are egotistical enough and willing to put in the work enough to say, Well, what if we tried that, and I don't think I'm making I won't speak for you, but I truly thought we would get through five episodes decide it was too much work, like call it a day?

M

Megan Goodwin 26:29

Well, in my ADHD way, a lot of this was Oh, I'm gonna learn a new thing. I'm gonna try anything and see how it goes. And like maybe foodie will listen or other work wife, who does not want to be on the radio ever. And that'll be cute. And like Lloyd will listen, maybe and then it'll just, you know, it'd be a cute thing that we tried. And then I will have gotten to like brushing up on my audible or my audacity skills. And I'll know a little bit more about podcasting because I know this is the space where public scholarship is happening. So like, okay, I can bring this back and have it be a thing that I do in sacred rights training. And instead, it was, I mean, I want to say, again, out loud, how very much work that it is. The reason, in part that the podcast is formatted the way that it is because we are really good teachers, and that is a space where we can fall back on comfortably. And well. So being able to do the podcast in a way that hold on those strengths made it sustainable and fun, I think in a way that some of the other formats that we tossed around, wouldn't have been a truly sustainable just because they would have required too much work on our parts. Whereas now we're pulling on our own teaching archives. And just again, getting to kind of play with what works and what doesn't. So that has been wonderful.

o

27:45

I want to come back to the teaching because it is one of the things that so great about the show, but first I want to ask sort of a meta question that takes a little bit of setup, but I think gets to the heart of what I see this podcast is doing. So last fall, I taught the first semester of our departments a year long PhD seminar on theory and method and the study of religion, such a sexy title, the students and I had, we had tons of great discussions about the history of the field and what public scholarship in religion could or should look like. And I was I was particularly interested in the question of whether the constructivist turn or the GPL logical turn or what some people have called the Copernican turn. So like all of our scholarly obsession with the arbitrariness of this category, cat of the category of religion, can that stuff ever really make it to a larger public, one of the students in the seminar that x Shaw sagely suggested that probably the constructivist turn can't make it to a larger public because as he said, the public that reads about religion is hungry for two things, two things, count them one devotional or theological texts about Christianity

or Buddhism or Islam or whatever. So like stuff by the Dalai Lama, or Deepak Chopra, or new atheists like Daniel Dennett or Alain paypals, writing spiritual memoirs or whatever those things and then to, like, sort of world religions tax marketed to an educated liberal bourgeois readership. So like Diana, Eric on Hinduism, or raiza, aasmaan on Islam, those things right. So like religion, readers want those two categories or categories of things, they have no hunger for the deconstructions of the category of religion associated a socio historical account of how the category of religion works. And how it functions as a vehicle of power is like basically an impossible cell says the back and I think that's kind of right in many ways. But you guys do such a good job of selling constructivism you like pick the most vivid and concrete and compelling examples? Like I mean, I'm curious, do you think that you that you're like, we all live in the house that Assad built and keeping 101 or like Assad massala Lots of people have built the house that we live in, but like I think this is the house that is the state of the field. It's just a hard house to take public. I think you guys do one of the most compelling jobs I've seen of taking this house public And I'm curious to know what your sense of that is. Do you think that this sort of constructivist stuff in the podcast is landing with audiences? and What tips do you have for the rest of us? How do we do this publicly and do it right?

M

Megan Goodwin 30:15

I think it starts with not assuming that you know who your audience is, and giving you really have to care that your audience gives a shit about what you're talking about. So one, yeah, no, if I were going to try to sell something to like my mom's church group. I'm gonna leave that one alone. Liz's mom's church group? Oh, yes, I could see a Reza offline, I could see an Elaine pagels and no disrespect. But I don't think either of us ever assumed that who we were talking to were like Deepak Chopra, consumers, I think we saw ourselves talking to truly anybody who was maybe curious about some of the issues that we were talking about, and not so much like, Hey, buddy, come on. I'll tell you how the court of religion has been constructed through imperialism, because that is indeed a hard sell. But you know, what, it's not a hard sell is, Hey, did you know or truly that you're wrong about framework, which is funny, because I I certainly didn't know about the you're wrong about podcast when we started. I don't even know if it was running when we were started. And now Sarah and I are Mutual's on Twitter, which is fun, because she's also working on the satanic panic. But yeah, no, it's when when folks ask us about like pure podcasts, I don't think either of us go, Oh, yeah, we're trying to do like even the work that Simran Jeet Singh is doing. And I mean, again, if you've listened to that pod, you know that we adore Simran. But his audience is not our audience. Our audience is snarky and curious about the world. And I think willing to be surprised by how that world works. Also, we did not plan for a pandemic. But it turns out that releasing a fun non text resource when everyone has to pivot to online slash distance options, seems to have accelerated the interest both in

classrooms and outside classrooms around this conversation. What do you think?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:14

Yeah, I think that I am, again, you're making it sound like we knew what our audience was. And



Megan Goodwin 32:23

we're like, these are the people that we're going to talk to. We're gonna throw this out here and see what happened.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:27

I really think that we thought, What would we use in our own classrooms? Like That is a question we ask all the time. What would it be nice for our students to hear about what are? and Megan does more. So both of us have a background in public scholarship. Mine is a lot of talks, like a ton of church talks, a ton of like, campus talks, a ton of panels, like I like to chat. Megan does a lot more op ed writing, I mean, your list of publicly posted like religion dispatches or revealer, your list of that is pages long on your CV. And I think together we have this sense of what can the more teaching tone look like when you write it down? And when you say it out loud? And what would we hope for? What are our strengths together and apart? And so I think you're exactly right. We live in the house of masala and Assad and all other sorts of folks. And so I don't know that it was a conscious choice for us. I think it really was, this is how we think this should be done. I mean, crazy prescriptive. Like, I'm tired of looking at the bestseller books on Islam, and 10 out of 10 are by islamophobes. And the number 11 is by Reza Aslan, I have serious concerns about not me, not Megan, who started a flame war with him. And



Megan Goodwin 33:52

I did start nothing he lost but I did not start it listen anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:57

But I think like I think that I've been in that position my whole career as an Islamic assist where I'm so exhausted by looking at that genre of writing. And that way that we the way that we assume. We just spoke with Anthea Butler on the podcast, and she kept using the phrase unwashed masses, which both like made me giggle and made me really

uncomfortable. Because like, I don't think my dad is unwashed masses. I think he has a four year community college degree and go to the public library once a week. And he lives in a tiny town in New Jersey and that public library only can afford the top two books on the New York Times bestseller about Islam. And I'm not going to be that writer. I'm not I there's a lot of people that can do that kind of writing. And that's not my strong suit. So I'm not going to get my dad at the rivervale Public Library. But I'm probably going to get him on his phone. Yeah. And so I really think both of us saw podcasting And the way we think about religion probably as a hard sell as Zack, is that correct? said in book form, but it didn't feel hard. It didn't feel labor. It's labor intensive, but it didn't feel insurmountable. Like a book project feels sometimes it didn't feel costly, right? You just you just need like a good mic and, and a computer. And so I think we really saw it as, at least I thought I saw it as there is a market for this. I don't know exactly what that market is yet. But I really wish that this book was sellable in a way that could get to my dad's hands, sailing that I can probably put it in his ear buds.

M

Megan Goodwin 35:46

Yeah. Hmm. which I love. Yeah, I think I hadn't thought of it as prescriptive. But I don't often think of myself as prescriptive even though I am. No, I think you're right. I think first and foremost, the pod comes from like, this is how we think you should talk about religion, like this is how you do it. Y'all are doing it wrong, let us help you. And also, I think both of us have been really rooted in the work of like, intro class level, here's why religion is actually way more important and way cooler, and just way more than you, you've been given the opportunity to imagine, right? Like, it's not the American public's fault that they don't care about religion, they don't get taught about religion and in schools in ways that make them want to engage it, which again, comes out of histories, imperialism in Protestantism in the way that we imagined public education and public spaces, etc, etc. It's not their fault. And if they're not interested, that's, frankly, on us as educators, if we're not sharing our work with the public in ways that make make them want to engage it, then yeah, man, like that's, that's on us. So I have like a very Almost Famous moment where you've got, what's his face, banky. Talking about, like, I look for the guy in the audience who's not getting off, and I make sure he gets off. That's what I want. Like, that's truly how I want to do this at the like, you think you're not interested. But that's only because you haven't been given enough information, you haven't been given the right Avenue and people didn't put it in your earbuds or on your phone.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:12

And I'll say, Bart, you asked how we could help others do it. And for me, it's storytelling.

And a lot of that is socio cultural. For me, like I come from a long line of yarn spinners. Like we New Jersey, Jews have legacies of stories, but a lot of it is it's that it's fine. The story that got you hooked, right? Everyone who studies religion has that story, because no one but no one goes to college to do Assad, no one, like that's not a thing. And so every single person in this room right now, or these rooms, right now has a story as to what hooked you. And that is always an interesting thing to tell someone, because it's always in congruence with what the expectations are. And that's storytelling and comedy writing one on one, when someone expects x, but you deliver y. That's a good story. And learning how to hone that story and tell it so that it's compelling, has been the work of Megan and I in our pedagogy, because I work at a university where I do not have graduate students. I mostly do service teaching, which is like entry level, Vermont, there's zero hundreds, so like zero level, and they're one in Dunn's. We're gonna take this one comparing religion classroom, this one Hinduism classroom, the this one Islam class, and I'm never gonna see you again. Yeah. And so I could do those classes with like, the world religions model. But I don't get to teach the PhD class on theory and method because it does not exist at UVM. And so how do I make sure that students are being exposed to Moscow? Well, you have to teach it for the first time first year student in the most allegedly irreligious state in the Union, is not going to wade through matsuzawa. And think it's important, so it's on me to perform it. And it really is about this storytelling and I credit having had, you know, at this point, like, what, 12 years of teaching only at the intro level. So yeah, that makes our we've had a lot of practice. We've had a lot of practice at that translation, you translate a sad into manageable bites. And good stories probably remember a story you don't remember a fact.

M

Megan Goodwin 39:35

Right? Well, and I think to it, it definitely comes out of like our own scholarly locations. We both went to University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Elisa is still at a public university in Vermont. And I think we both took really seriously you know, we don't have jobs just because people go to school like we owe something to the folks who funded our education and who make the what we do possible. So again, if we can Can't if we can't make that interesting and important to them, then we really just need to hang up our spurs and call it a day.

o

40:06

I'm curious, other than Elise's Dad, do you have a concrete sense for who may or may not be listening? I truly do not know what data might be provided to you as persons who disseminate a podcast. I'm so



Megan Goodwin 40:17

we definitely don't disseminate anything but we just didn't germinate. Maybe.



40:22

My apologies for the verb choice. Yes, please, please.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:25

So I am our scoreboard Tellier as the former jock among us. And we've gotten, it's really about self recording. So we would love to know if you hear it on the street or your friends are teaching it. But mostly it's self reporting, and it did a lot of classrooms. And it's a lot of humanities councils. So I am seeing particularly in New England humanities councils like the Vermont humanities councils, Maine, New Hampshire and Connecticut humanities councils have promoted the work as part of what they see public humanities being, we're listed on a couple websites like that of like, Oh, you want to learn about this, here are the state resources. And we get listed in Maine and Vermont for those things, because we're based in Maine and Vermont, Megan, and for a while Massachusetts had us there because you teach at Northeastern. And so we're hooked into, I would say locally, folks, like local to our location, physical locations, folks, our broader publics are listening. But for the most part, our audience are college professors using us in classrooms. And they're using it a lot. We have something like I meant to check the scoreboard before I logged in, but as of last week, we had 38,000 downloads on 27 episodes, which is bananas. We really thought we would do five and my dad would listen. Yeah. And that was it. Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 41:48

I have to say too, though, like I haven't focused on the the big picture of where we're getting folks coming in from, although at least is right. It's overwhelmingly folks using us in educational settings. I do know that we are being downloaded on five continents, which is exciting. There's like four guys, for people in Australia and New Zealand that are downloading us like maybe this year it's the anarchic market, we'll see. But the ones that I am always surprised and delighted by are the folks who just reach out unprompted and say like, Hey, I'm a screenwriter, and I'm struggling with my colleagues who really love Joseph Campbell. And can you give me some like really easy resources to read on why that's a problem. Or like, I have had an ongoing correspondence now with a PR director for the Church of Christ scientist in Boston, which is where the Mother Church lives, because she listens to the pod and she had some questions just wanted to chat. So the surprising corners of the world that got excited about this not because they got excited

assigned it in class, but because I don't know they just like Sophia talked about us on the BBC. So that was cool. We picked up some people there. But yeah, they're just regular folks who are curious and I get really excited that they listen at all but also a lot of them will reach out to us and just say like, I appreciate this, I work in healthcare and this may be think about this in these ways. Yeah, it's, it's it's really dope. We've also giggled because I, if anybody follows me on Twitter, they know I do a fair amount of yelling on about cults, for example, and it's been funny to watch my colleagues and their colleagues shifts their language in their classroom behaviors around things like the language of cults because of the podcast. I said to at least I don't get it. I have been yelling about this on the internet for a solid decade, what the hell? And she said in the way that she does, is it possible I'm curious if your teaching voice is perhaps more effective on these difficult topics, then like yelling on the internet, and I think she might be onto something there. Which is rude but fair.



44:01

I love that Joseph Campbell example that's such an earlier moment of public scholarship about religion has had a strangely long afterlife. Yeah, we're voices have as deep resonance. I've got actually a number of questions about the kind of voice that you guys have in the podcast, because that's one of the things that's so distinctive about it. And as a person with a BA in English, I remain, like enduring Lee concerned with questions of genre and litter and aesthetic form. And the aesthetic form of this of this podcast. Like is notable, it's shaped by the scholarly conversation on one hand, on the other hand, it is very much a podcast and in some ways, I think it's, I mean, it is a scholarly podcast, but I would slot it more in the sub genre that my podcast industry insider friend calls the Hangout podcast, you know, so like, things like still processing with Wesley Morris and Jenna wertham, where you're there for the you know, the insights, but you're there like also just to hang with these smart people and feel like you're on the coolest coffee date and the world or something. I mean, so I mean, I wonder well, I mean, I wonder, you know, so I mean, the hang up podcast tend to be slightly shaggy or Instructure, etc, etc. So like, I guess my first question is just Does that sound right to you? And then my second quiet the follow up would be like, What? What's it like to do a performative hangout of this kind? You guys are friends in real life, right? And the answer that truthfully or not, you know, how do you feel like you perform your friendship differently on the podcast than you do in person? Do you feel like the public version of your friendship that you perform has shaped the actual friendship? As are such good questions I



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:38

want to say out loud, Meghan is one of my closest friends, I consider her family. My kids call her Auntie Megan. And if you listen after, so the secret of the pod is that after the closing credit song, Megan always stashes secret audio, so that you are rewarded for not fast forwarding to the next thing. And a few of them have been my son being like, Hi, Andy magan, because Megan just made her



Megan Goodwin 46:03

lunch I was listening to to it like four or five times a day anyway, so I just put it on the podcast.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:10

I think that I here's how I think the podcast works differently. And here's how I think our real life friendship works. We have, um, when we started the pod, we wrote these elaborate. Okay, let me rephrase. When we first sat down to record, we had all of the things mapped out. We knew what we wanted to say, we had an idea. We were like, We do this shit every day, sometimes twice a day, we'll just chat. And it was the sloppiest.



Megan Goodwin 46:35

Yeah, it was.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:36

It was about putting you have ever heard in like, these two hours that we thought we were doing our unusable we have to start from scratch. So at first we started doing outlines. And then because a big piece of how we want our podcast to function is to also have these show notes that are robust, and annotated. Then it was kind of like, you know what, I need more than this, this, this outline thing is not working, because I don't remember what we said. Yeah. And so now we actually unlike we've taken turns this season, but before this season, I almost exclusively did a lot of the writing, and Megan would come in and either punch up my jokes, or edit or add in the sections that were more American stuff that I don't have. And that's where our scripting of jokes is actually this. are no vegan feels this way, but I feel like it is this beautiful moment where I get to show off to Megan, how well I know her, because I either stash jokes that I know she will think is funny. And it'll it'll trip her up. Like I really take pleasure in writing a joke because I know she's not going to read the script before we get on the call, and then monitor to get I wanted to get to the joke and like break, I want to break. And it works almost every time. Because I put in jokes that

I can't stand like I loathe Star Wars, like Lord of the Rings. But I'll throw in those jokes for her. Just because like I know she loves them.



Megan Goodwin 48:04

Honestly, I think my favorite ever was the deep runner of the Fast and Furious jokes on sparkles, bummer. It made me so happy.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 48:12

It's so good. It was like I know the things that Meghan loves. And it's fun and joyful that even as we're reading a script, and we're doing it in this performative way, I know the things that she would actually joke about, like I actually know that she'd love to make a Vin Diesel joke. And it's always a Vin Diesel joke that we need to say it's all about family and I. And I have to put on my silly Vin Diesel voice because it makes her giggle. And something that way I actually think I think it's more scripted than a Hangout podcast, but it is absolutely friends who do this anyway. Right. Letting you in?



Megan Goodwin 48:47

Yeah. Yeah, I was honestly a little reluctant to start scripting to the extent that we do now because I was worried that we were going to lose the spontaneity. And as always, I should have trusted Elise stick to keep it real. Because it is I am surprised by things in the scripts all the time. I did do more scripting this season. Just because I yeah, there's more firmly in my wheelhouse. But yeah, it's it is a delight to be surprised. And honestly, this. God COVID has made me so soft. It feels like love, right, like to have somebody know you that well. But like, I'm gonna say this, and I know it's gonna mess you up. And it's great. And it brings us you know, and it also, I think, because we're so comfortable with each other. And because we're so familiar with each other, there is still this space of trust that lets us be spontaneous in places. So I broke the lease with Jesus as a cookie because I was just thinking out loud and my brains do this sometimes. But there's still space for that even though we have a more clear lesson plan. And we have more of the structure of the pod itself written out which is really great, but nobody, I think You're right, I don't I certainly don't think that we're particularly formal podcasts. And I think if we think about like pod piers, like we aspire to a code switch, but we are definitely not that polished. Like we are far closer to something like a How did this get made, which both of us love. Shout out to Jason manzi because in particular, former Religious Studies major himself in spaces where Yeah, these these folks are being thoughtful, and they're being really close readers of of media, but also they just enjoy each other's company. And there, there is this space for joy

and improvisation even as there's kind of a set format that they work their way through. I wonder though, I mean, I love all of that. And I'm, I will say, and I'm sorry, but I just one thing, and I just performed it right there. The only thing that's really different I think about the way that we interact on the pod, as opposed to in real life is that there is less of what I have just learned to call a cooperative overlapping, because we talk over each other all the time, because we are both from the northeast, and the way that you demonstrate that you are excited and love someone is you're talking at the same time that they are, and you're hearing them and talking and it's just all happening at once, which does not work great for an audio medium. So we have gotten a little bit better about that.



51:15

Audio is hard. So I was I was gonna ask, I look, while I love the sort of fun friend vibe of the podcast, I wonder if you guys ever worried that. And sometimes it might feel too insular. Or if you guys I'm particular, I wonder how you guys think about what it means to be thinking about race and colonialism and so on and so forth. When you know, your two white people on the podcast, I mean, how do you foreground your positionality? How do you make room for other kinds of voices?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:45

Yeah, I think we are pretty upfront. I mean, I think it's the first episode where I'm like, hey, identifies this Jewish lady. And I talk about that all the time. And I talk about my whiteness all the time. And I think we name our limits in in really meaningful ways. I don't think we aim to let me rephrase that I do not think the work of anti racist scholarship is only the work of folks of color. And in fact, I think white folks have more to do in that genre than others. That doesn't mean like claiming that entire space as our own. But it does mean that as white people, we both need to show up and show out and name those as commitments and also as driving forces of both our scholarship and the podcast. I think if you pay attention, most of our most of our citations, and most of the folks we reference are folks of color usually have the like of the traditions we're talking about that day, when we've had guests on the podcast, only one has been a white woman, everyone else has been a person of color on purpose. And because their work is good, and we want to talk to them. Like that's first. And then second is if we're talking about race in America. Well then, of course, we're talking to Judith wise and Feld and Anthea Butler and someone saying,



Megan Goodwin 53:13

because they're kind enough to talk to us and share their years, their smarts and their work and their time. And



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:19

yeah, like that's, that's such a gift. And I will say, though, that that we think about this question all the time, but like for real, it's is our voice too loud. And our voice has to be this loud. Because this is a podcast we do for free, in addition to our other very many jobs. And we have a small grant right now that pays for transcription services, and essentially web hosting. But it doesn't pay for things like honoraria. So this season, where we've had four guests last season where we had one the season before where we had one or two, all of those folks are doing it because they trust us to do well by them. And they are volunteering their time. And so as we look to apply for more grants, one of the major asks we're making is for more honorarium money because as much as there's an ethical concern with two white ladies talking about anti racism, there's also an ethical concern with asking brown and black folk to show up on a white ladies podcast for free, right. And so where that is an ongoing struggle, because for real, this is the first the first year of this pun, the first we got our first grant in June for a why 2021. So the first six months the first season and summer of this podcast, we paid for out of pocket. And like some of that was our personal money. Some of that was like leftover money, I had enough fun from UVM but this stuff isn't and then forget and then time, right so to provide a transcription for an hour long thing, even with AI software with all of the corrections you need to do because AI is also gendered and racist. So it doesn't always pick up on our speech patterns. It 100% never gets any of the names right that we use. So that was taking me between three and four hours episode. And so uh, but if we want to be an accessible podcast, you need to have transcription, because of like hard of hearing and other kinds of audio processing disorders that we want to be able to account for and accommodate and English language learners and all sorts of other things.



Megan Goodwin 55:19

So it also makes it more assignable for other teachers. I frankly, don't assign a podcast unless it has a transcript, both for these accessibility issues, but also like I can skim a podcast transcript and go, Oh, this does what I needed to, or No, it doesn't. If I don't know that ahead of time, I don't want to put it on my syllabus.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:35

Yeah, but we think about that a lot. And as we're planning seasons four and five, we are

thinking about ways to add other voices. As one example, we are toying with the idea and a lot of this depends on funding, so like, Don't quote me on it, and then hold us to it a year later friends, but like one of the things we're toying with, and Bart, I'm going to use you as an example is okay, so we're going to do alright, we hate world religions as a model, but everyone has to teach it. And so how can we do this ethically and responsibly and with Assad in mind? So for the South Asian religions episode or for the Hinduism episode, can I get you Bart to give me four minutes of audio? I'll ask you a few questions you recorded in your own time you shoot me that audio, and we mix it into the episode. But you're not the only person we asked. We asked three and four other scholars of Hinduism, or South Asian religions. And so it's our voices complemented by 10 to 15 minutes of other scholars in the field. And so that's one of the things we're thinking of, and in an ideal universe for that five minutes of labor, maybe we could pay you for it.

M

Megan Goodwin 56:41

We would love that. The other thing I will say too, is that I don't think either of us imagine ourselves to be the the soul voices on this topic. But even in the podcast. To me, it really feels conversational, like yeah, so Lisa and I are speaking with one another. But we are lucky enough to have a really robust social media network. So episodes come out. People ask questions, truly from the very first episode, Jorge got in and was like, Jorge Rodriguez, who is finishing up his dissertation at Union and is a brilliant, brilliant scholar, said, Okay, well, I don't see myself represented in this definition of theology, whereas my family whereas my work in this, and it led to this beautiful conversation across days and days, or even thinking about the kind of topics that we bring in the reason there's a cult episode is not actually because I wanted to do one I actually really didn't want to do one. Judas was involved specifically asked us to do that, so that she could teach it which a Oh, my everything. Judith wasn't Feld wants to teach with our work? What Yes, please. Like, how can I be of service to this brilliant scholar whose own thinking has, like, shaped so much of our work. But also, that's it is a space where I'm seeing the pod be shaped and respond to what our colleagues of color in the academy are telling us is labor that they need white folks to do, right? Like if we're going to be collaborators and collaborators, if we're going to be comrades, what is the work of this pot? And so for us this fall that looks like really responding to what Dr. Butler asked us to do for scholar strike where Elise ran the entire social media campaign for that, and we use the keeping up one on one a handle to also do like a teach strike back against racism. He is, again, not because we are the single authority, but because we have some expertise, and we were asked to do that labor by scholars that we respect, who are being murdered by the police. So it is a space where no, we would never be everything and I don't think either of us are imagining that like this is gonna get monetized. We would never want this to be like a Robyn D'Angelo white fragility moment where like, we are the people who call you call to do the anti racist work.

But if we can get funding to pay our colleagues, who are my mentors in the academy, to share their expertise with us, like, again, what a gift and what an amazing opportunity.



59:09

That's great. I've got one very quick sort of cooldown question, then I want to open us up to q&a. So just very, very quickly, what's the one moment when you most regretted the decision to make this podcast and the one moment when you were most elated about the decision to admit this podcast very, very quickly?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 59:29

I think the whole pandemic, I was both elated and horrified that we made this,



M

Megan Goodwin 59:35

which is most of the podcast. Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 59:37

Just we had two episodes come out before lockdown. And after that everything has been produced and made and so on the one hand, it was exhausting. I have two young kids. They were home until September from March till September with no additional humans in the house. Well, my husband but and so it was both an amazing respite of like everyone goes outside to talk to you Megan. were recording. And it was I don't know when I'm going to write these episodes because there is no time. And there are three year old two year old at the time just climbing on me. So I think I think all of that Megan, you probably got a different and quick answer.



M

Megan Goodwin 1:00:15

My quick answer. October was my bad time, like October into November where, and honestly, I'm really proud of the fact that as someone who is chronologically challenged, we got every single thing out on time like ahead of time, largely because Elisa is a really good Wrangler of me and also everything but October and November were just really bad in terms of what I was trying to do teaching wise and what I was trying to do a Sacred Rites and then having the podcast on top of that, which is a joy to do but like even as wonky as I am, like our four of audacity is not not a joy, the moment where I felt like it all had been worth it honestly was I'm gonna cry even talking about this Christian Peterson

put together a like course evaluations episode, we didn't know that he was doing it. And he talked to a number of our colleagues who took time out of their schedules at the end of the semester that had just been held for all of us to talk about how they were using the pod and why they appreciated the work that we've been doing. And it's like four months later, and I still can't not cry about it. So that that was my like, Well, okay, this was this was something that we did and I'm glad that we did.



1:01:28

That is the perfect note on which to end the formal part of our conversation you guys have brought us together during a dark dark ear and created kinds of scholarly and teaching community that we often don't have.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:01:43

Well, everybody that wraps up our first episode, that was a live taping of the keeping it one on one podcast. Big thanks again to everyone who made this happen, especially Dr. Bart Scott, and our colleagues at Toronto. New episodes are coming your way But till then, peace out nerds.