



# BRISMES

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BRISMES 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Graduate Section Event

## **Pathways to Publishing:** Navigating Early Careers in Middle East Studies

*A Roundtable Discussion Report*

Newcastle University, 2025

### **Panellists**

Jen McCall (Lynne Rienner Publishers) • Sophie Rudland (Bloomsbury / I.B. Tauris)  
Humairaa Dudhwala (Manchester University Press) • Mattia Ravasi (Taylor & Francis)  
Dr Sharri Plonski (Academic Perspective)

## Introduction

At the 2025 BRISMES Annual Conference held at Newcastle University, the Graduate Section organised a roundtable event entitled “Pathways to Publishing: Navigating Early Careers in Middle East Studies.” The session brought together representatives from four leading publishers alongside an experienced academic scholar to offer doctoral students and early career researchers practical guidance on the publishing landscape in Middle East studies and related disciplines.

The panel comprised five speakers, each addressing a distinct dimension of the publishing process. The session was structured to move from the foundational question of transforming a thesis into a book, through the practicalities of writing proposals and navigating peer review, to the specifics of journal submission, and finally to a reflective academic perspective on the personal and professional dimensions of scholarly publishing. The event concluded with a lively question-and-answer session that addressed topics including the differences between university presses and commercial publishers, submitting to multiple publishers, the role of series editors, open access, and the use of artificial intelligence in academic writing.

This report synthesises the key insights from the roundtable discussion. It is organised by speaker, preserving the order and structure of the session, and concludes with a thematic summary of the questions and answers that followed.

## Speaker 1: Jen McCall — Lynne Rienner Publishers

*Topic: Transforming Your Thesis into a Book*

### About the Publisher

Jen McCall introduced Lynne Rienner Publishers as an independent commercial press founded in 1983, specialising in politics and international relations. She noted that, like many academic publishers, Lynne Rienner sells primarily to institutional libraries rather than aiming for mass-market sales. Nevertheless, she emphasised that even academic books need to reach a broader audience than the two or three scholars who might have examined a doctoral thesis.

### The Fundamental Difference: Thesis vs. Book

The core of McCall’s presentation was a detailed comparison between a doctoral thesis and a published monograph. She characterised the thesis as a document in which the author fills a unique gap, however narrow, and demonstrates exhaustive mastery of a specific topic. The book, by

contrast, positions the author's contribution within a broader field with confidence and authority, speaking to a wider scholarly audience.

McCall credited her colleague Emma Brennan at Manchester University Press with a memorable analogy: the thesis is like crunchy peanut butter, while the book is like smooth peanut butter. The "crunchy" thesis is characterised by exhaustive literature reviews, numbered subsections, small chapters, extensive referencing, and enormous bibliographies. The "smooth" book contextualises its contribution in a strong introduction, cites only relevant literature, builds an overall argumentative arc across fewer, more substantial chapters, and answers the fundamental question: "so what?"

## Practical Steps for Conversion

McCall offered several concrete recommendations for those beginning the transformation process:

- **Trim theoretical and methodological sections.** A monograph should not contain a standalone literature review or a separate methodology chapter. Methodological context can be covered within the introduction.
- **Restructure the argument.** A thesis may be organised chronologically or by research questions, but a book may benefit from a thematic reframing that presents a clearer argumentative trajectory.
- **Broaden the scope.** To appeal to a wider market, authors might consider introducing comparisons across countries, regions, or case studies, or extending the time period under analysis.
- **Bring the work up to date.** For a politics and IR publisher, it is important that books address current developments, at least in the conclusion, and perhaps offer pointers for the future.
- **Consider interdisciplinary applications.** Authors should reflect on whether their findings have relevance for scholars working in adjacent fields.
- **Step back and take time.** McCall encouraged authors to take a genuine step back from their thesis before beginning the conversion. A rushed revision is unlikely to produce a strong book; a fresh perspective is invaluable.

## Additional Resources

McCall noted that she had prepared a reference slide with recommended readings on converting a thesis into a book, completing a publisher's proposal form, and her contact details. She invited anyone working on a project in politics and international relations that might suit Lynne Rienner to approach her directly.

## Speaker 2: Sophie Rudland — Bloomsbury (I.B. Tauris)

*Topic: What Publishers Look For, Writing a Proposal, and Choosing a Publisher*

### About the Publisher

Sophie Rudland introduced herself as the publisher for Middle East and Islamic studies at Bloomsbury, working under the I.B. Tauris imprint. She explained that the press was originally founded in 1983 by its namesake, I.B. Tauris, and was acquired by Bloomsbury in 2018. The imprint publishes approximately 70 books per year, spanning monographs, textbooks, and titles aimed at a more general readership.

### Five Things Publishers Look For

Rudland outlined five key criteria that Bloomsbury uses when evaluating a book proposal:

1. **Original research.** Libraries, scholars, and specialist institutions are purchasing the book because it offers a new contribution to the scholarship. Authors should clearly articulate what makes their research original and how it builds upon existing work.
2. **A clear argument.** The argument is what ties the book together and defines the author's scholarly identity. It is what the author will be known for.
3. **Relevance.** The book must demonstrate awareness of the latest research, trends, and approaches in the field. Reviewers will not be interested in work that feels outdated.
4. **Audience breadth.** Authors should think about which disciplines their book speaks to beyond their primary field—gender studies, media studies, and other adjacent fields can expand the potential readership.
5. **Fit with the publisher.** Choosing the right publisher is essential because specialist expertise ensures the content reaches the right audience. Authors should examine publisher catalogues and series to assess alignment.

### Top Tips for Writing a Strong Proposal

Rudland devoted significant attention to the art of writing a book proposal, which she described as fundamentally a sales pitch rather than an academic exercise. The proposal will be read by non-specialists—marketing teams, sales teams, editorial boards—as well as by peer reviewers. It must therefore communicate the book's contribution in accessible language while also demonstrating its academic rigour.

### Titles

Authors should aim for bold, descriptive titles that highlight key themes and maximise discoverability. A lengthy thesis title that unpacks every specific element of the research is not appropriate for a book. Publishers can help refine titles, but it is helpful for authors to have given this thought in advance.

## Descriptions

The book description should be concise—around 300 words—and accessible. Rudland cautioned against lifting dense passages from the thesis introduction and pasting them into the proposal form. The goal is to demonstrate the ability to summarise the project compellingly for a broad audience.

## Technical Details

Authors should provide realistic delivery timelines and note any previously published material requiring permissions. For Bloomsbury's I.B. Tauris imprint, monographs should typically fall between 60,000 and 110,000–115,000 words including notes.

## Common Weak Spots: Competition and Market Sections

Rudland identified the competition and market sections as frequently underdeveloped areas in proposals. For the competition section, she cautioned against claiming that no competing titles exist. Even if the book's specific contribution is unique, publishers need to see that there is a related body of literature—and that the author understands how their work fits within it. Listing two or three related titles and explaining what the new book does differently is far more effective.

For the market section, she advised against claiming the book is “for general readers” when it is in fact a monograph aimed at scholars and specialists. Accurately identifying the disciplinary markets helps the publisher's sales and marketing teams reach the right audiences.

## Key Selling Points and Showing Off

Rudland encouraged authors not to be shy about highlighting what makes their research distinctive: ethnographic fieldwork, archival research in remote or unusual locations, multilingual sources, and the author's own unique background and expertise are all important selling points. She emphasised that librarians and booksellers respond well to concrete, specific details about what is new and exciting in a book.

## Common Pitfalls

Rudland identified several common mistakes:

- Excessive jargon in the proposal, which can alienate non-specialist readers on the editorial board.
- Failing to check whether the preferred publisher accepts multiple submissions before sending the proposal to several presses simultaneously.

- Submitting a raw, unrevised thesis as a book proposal.
- Not placing an embargo on the thesis. If the thesis is freely available through a university library, it may compete with the published book and reduce sales.

### **Timeline: From Proposal to Publication**

Rudland explained that Bloomsbury operates a dual-stage review process. A contract is typically offered on the basis of a reviewed proposal, but the full manuscript also undergoes review. From receipt of a draft manuscript to publication, the minimum timeline is approximately 12 to 13 months if everything proceeds smoothly. The production process alone takes around eight months. Book cover design begins early in the process, and authors are invited to submit images and provide input.

### **Choosing a Publisher: Five Key Considerations**

Rudland concluded with five criteria for evaluating potential publishers:

- Scholarly reputation: Is the press known for rigorous peer review and publishing respected scholars?
- Global distribution: Does the publisher have a strong international presence, or do they rely on third-party distributors that may limit reach?
- Subject fit: Does the publisher have a strong track record and series in your specific field?
- Presentation and marketing: What do their covers look like? Are their editors present at conferences? What marketing support do they offer?
- Open access options: If you have funding for open access publication, does the publisher offer appropriate schemes? Open access can significantly expand readership, particularly for scholars in low-income countries.

### **Author Marketing**

Rudland stressed that authors themselves can do a great deal to market their books: sending copies to relevant contacts, attending conferences, discussing the work with peers, and asking their home libraries to purchase copies. While publishers have marketing teams, the author's own networks and efforts are invaluable.

## **Speaker 3: Humairaa Dudhwala — Manchester University Press**

## About the Publisher

Humairaa Dudhwala introduced herself as a commissioning editor for Middle Eastern studies at Manchester University Press (MUP), which focuses on publications in the humanities and social sciences. She noted that while she would speak from an MUP perspective, the general principles of peer review are broadly similar across publishers.

## What Is Peer Review and Why Does It Matter?

Dudhwala defined peer review as the process through which academic editors commission formal evaluations from expert scholars on work being considered for publication. These reviews serve two purposes: they help the press decide whether to pursue a project, and they provide the author with crucial feedback for developing and strengthening the work. She described peer review as essential to the university press mission of advancing and disseminating high-quality scholarship, and emphasised that the ideal process involves balanced feedback that is both stringent and fair.

## How the Process Works

The specifics of the peer review process depend on the stage of the project:

- If the project is submitted before the manuscript is complete, review is conducted on the basis of a proposal and sample chapters. At MUP, at least two sample chapters are required.
- If the full manuscript is ready, it is sent out for review in its entirety.

Before the formal review process begins, the commissioning editor will often work with the author to develop the proposal so that it is in the best possible shape. MUP typically uses two peer reviewers, though more may be engaged for interdisciplinary projects. Reviewers are chosen for their subject-matter expertise and are drawn from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

## Timelines

The review process generally takes between four and twelve weeks, depending on reviewer availability, the time of year, the nature of the topic, and other factors. At times, a book may undergo several rounds of peer review if the content of the initial reviews indicates that additional work is needed on the manuscript.

## Responding to Peer Review

Once reviews are returned, the author has an opportunity to address the feedback through a formal written response. Dudhwala offered several pieces of guidance:

- Treat the reviews as constructive and incorporate the comments as fully as possible. Demonstrating flexibility and openness to improvement is a key part of the process.
- If reviewers have misunderstood aspects of the project, consider whether the proposal and sample materials could have been clearer. The reviewers are the first external readers, so their reaction is a useful test of how the work communicates.
- It is acceptable to respectfully disagree with specific suggestions, provided the author offers a full explanation and justification.

## The Editorial Committee

At Manchester University Press, the editorial committee is composed entirely of academics from the University of Manchester. After the author responds to the reviews, the committee reviews the full dossier—including the proposal, peer review reports, the author’s response, and any updated materials—before deciding whether to offer a contract.

## Full Manuscript Review

Regardless of the stage at which a contract is signed, it stipulates that the full draft will be reviewed again before publication. If the initial contract was based on sample chapters, the complete manuscript will be sent for a further round of review. Dudhwala described this as more of a clearance stage, offering a final opportunity for feedback before the book moves into production.

## What Peer Reviewers Look For

Dudhwala explained that presses typically provide reviewers with a structured set of questions, which may include:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the project.
- Quality of structure, organisation, and presentation.
- Originality and relationship to existing scholarship.
- Timeliness of the research and likely shelf life.
- Competing or comparable titles and the potential market.
- For textbooks, likely adoption on courses.

She concluded by noting that while strong peer reviews are necessary for moving forward, they are only one of several factors that inform the publisher’s decision.

## Speaker 4: Mattia Ravasi — Taylor & Francis

*Topic: Submitting Research to Academic Journals*

### Choosing the Right Journal

Mattia Ravasi began by addressing the critical question of where to submit a journal article. He offered the following advice:

- **Consult your peers and supervisors.** Developing an understanding of which journals carry the most prestige and relevance in your field is essential. Peers and supervisors are your first port of call.
- **Read the aims and scope carefully.** Every journal has a page expressing its mission, subject areas, and preferred theoretical approaches. The single most common reason for rejection across all Taylor & Francis journals is that articles are submitted to venues that are simply not the right fit, regardless of the quality of the research itself.
- **Look at recent issues.** Aims and scope statements can be aspirational. A journal might claim to welcome interdisciplinary research from the arts, humanities, and social sciences, but in practice may lack the editorial infrastructure to handle certain types of submissions. Examining what the journal has actually published in the last year or two provides a more reliable picture.

### Beware of Predatory Journals

Ravasi raised the growing problem of predatory publishers and journals. These are publications that seek to extract money from authors or to publish research without providing genuine visibility or value. He offered several practical tips for identifying them:

- Ask colleagues about any unfamiliar journal.
- Be wary of unsolicited emails inviting submissions to new journals.
- Check whether the journal has a clear complaints process and a reputable publisher behind it.
- In the humanities and social sciences, authors should generally not be paying fees to submit articles. Payment on submission is a major red flag.

### Following Submission Guidelines

Ravasi stressed the importance of following each journal's formatting instructions, reference style, and submission guidelines meticulously. While reformatting an article for each new journal is time-consuming, it is crucial for making a strong impression. Editors receive many submissions and will notice if an article appears hastily prepared.

## Ethical Considerations

- **Self-plagiarism:** Each article should be a genuinely original contribution. Authors who have already published on similar sources or topics should ask themselves whether a new article is truly adding something new.
- **Simultaneous submission:** Authors must not submit the same article to more than one journal at a time. Despite the slow pace of the review process, this is a firm rule.
- **Incomplete papers:** Do not send an incomplete draft just to gauge editorial interest. Only submit work in its best possible form.
- **Third-party content and permissions:** Any copyrighted material—figures, screenshots, images—requires permission from the rights holder. This is particularly important for poems and song lyrics, where even a line or two requires clearance. Prose quotations from novels are generally treated differently.
- **Artificial intelligence:** Authors must check the publisher's AI policy. Even if AI was used only to improve the quality of the English (for non-native speakers, for example), this must be declared upon submission. Failure to disclose AI use that is discovered after publication can cause serious problems.

## The Journal Review Process

Ravasi outlined the process that follows submission:

1. **Desk review:** The editor-in-chief reviews the manuscript and may reject it outright ("desk rejection") if it is unsuitable for the journal or not yet of sufficient quality. This is not a reflection on the author's abilities—it often means the article has been sent to the wrong venue.
2. **Peer review:** If the editor decides to proceed, the article is sent to at least two independent, anonymous reviewers with no relationship to each other or to the editor.
3. **Reviewer recommendations:** Reviewers may recommend acceptance (extremely rare), acceptance with minor revisions, acceptance with major revisions (the most common positive outcome), or rejection.

4. **Editorial decision:** Regardless of what reviewers recommend, the final decision rests with the editor. An editor can reject an article even after reviewers have recommended minor revisions. Minor revisions are not a guarantee of publication.

## Engaging with Reviewer Feedback

Ravasi's advice on responding to reviews largely echoed the guidance offered by his colleagues in the book publishing context: read the feedback carefully, engage with it line by line, be professional and respectful, and remember that reviewers have volunteered their time. If you disagree with a comment, explain why clearly in your response letter. But also remember that the reviewers' feedback is intended to help the article reach its best possible form.

## Speaker 5: Dr Sharri Plonski — Academic Perspective

*Topic: A Personal Reflection on the Publishing Journey*

### Context and Approach

Dr Sharri Plonski, the final speaker, took a different approach from the publisher representatives. Rather than offering procedural guidance, she shared a candid personal reflection on her own publishing journey, with the explicit aim of normalising the stress and difficulty that many early career researchers experience. She began by acknowledging the dual pressure of publishing: the desire to contribute meaningfully to scholarship, and the professional necessity of building a publication record in order to secure employment.

### Her Own Journey

Dr Plonski described herself as having come to her PhD later than many. As a result, she did not think about publishing until after completing her doctorate. Her first article was written in three weeks from a conference paper, submitted to her favourite journal, and received a “revise and resubmit” (R&R)—the most common positive outcome.

She was open about the fact that it took her two years to complete her revisions, during which she sent regular apologetic emails to the patient journal editor. She described herself as a “terrible reviser” who rewrites rather than revises, a process that extended to rewriting her book six times, including after copy edits—a practice the publisher understandably found difficult. She shared this not as a model to follow, but as reassurance that there is no single correct way to work.

### Key Advice

### Choosing Journals: Follow Your Instincts

Dr Plonski encouraged authors to choose journals based on genuine intellectual connection rather than abstract prestige. She advised submitting to journals where the published articles resonate with the author's own work and values. Prestige, she argued, is not always a reliable guide: some allegedly prestigious journals do not consistently produce strong work, and hiring committees are increasingly aware of this.

### Disciplinary vs. Area Studies Journals

She made an important point about the strategic value of publishing in disciplinary journals (geography, international relations, political science) as well as area studies journals. Scholars of the Middle East, she argued, have a great deal to offer disciplinary fields that may lack deep knowledge of the regions they study. She noted that all of her own articles have been published in geography and IR journals, even though her book was published in a Middle East studies series. Publishing across disciplines also broadens the potential job market, since there are relatively few posts in Middle East studies specifically.

### Developing Resilience and Thick Skin

Dr Plonski spoke candidly about the emotional difficulty of peer review, particularly when reviewers are unkind or politically motivated in their criticism. She encouraged authors to push back when reviews are unfair, noting that she has had editorial allies who have explicitly advised her to disregard reviews that were politically hostile rather than academically constructive. She emphasised that negative reviews are often a reflection of the reviewer, not of the work.

### Quality Over Quantity

She strongly advocated for publishing selectively: writing when you have something to say, rather than producing a high volume of publications. She reported that her institution's recent guidance has explicitly moved away from demanding large numbers of publications, instead valuing authenticity and quality. She encouraged early career researchers to resist the pressure to bulk out their CVs at the expense of the depth and care of their work.

### Beyond Academic Publishing

Dr Plonski reminded the audience that academic publishing is not the only way to communicate research. Podcasts, creative projects, collaborative exhibitions, and other forms of public engagement are increasingly valued both institutionally and in hiring processes, particularly in the UK. She encouraged researchers to explore these avenues as genuine scholarly outputs, not merely as supplementary activities.

### Collaboration

She concluded with a strong endorsement of collaborative work. Co-authorship with peers, with scholars from the regions studied, and with artists and practitioners enriches the quality of the work and makes the author a better writer. She also encouraged sharing drafts with peers before submission and volunteering to review others' work, describing these as mutually beneficial practices that strengthen scholarly communities.

## Question and Answer Session

Following the five presentations, the chair opened the floor for questions. The discussion covered several important topics, summarised thematically below.

### Common Mistakes and Hidden Pitfalls

When the chair asked each panellist to identify common mistakes or misconceptions that delay the publishing process, several themes emerged:

- **Humairaa Dudhwala (MUP):** The most common problem is authors not properly committing to the process. Many arrive believing their thesis is ready for publication because it received excellent examiners' reports, but they still need to engage seriously with the proposal development, peer review, and revision stages. Rushing the process only introduces delays.
- **Dr Plonski:** The most widespread issue in journal submissions is the absence of a clear argument and a roadmap explaining what the article is doing and why. She also noted that many authors try to do too much in a single article—making seven arguments across three contexts in 6,000–8,000 words. A single, focused thread is far more effective.
- **Sophie Rudland (Bloomsbury):** Long, unfocused emails with thesis abstracts are far less effective than a completed proposal form. She also highlighted the problem of authors who agree to implement peer review changes but then submit a manuscript that does not reflect those changes, frustrating reviewers and slowing the process.
- **Jen McCall (Lynne Rienner):** Authors should fill out the publisher's proposal form carefully and thoroughly, making the commissioning editor's job as easy as possible. She also flagged the embarrassing but common mistake of submitting a proposal that still contains the name of a different publisher from a previous submission attempt.
- **Mattia Ravasi (Taylor & Francis):** The undisclosed use of AI is an increasingly common issue. Even when AI is used only for language polishing, it must be declared. He also cautioned against submitting large numbers of book reviews or short pieces to multiple

journals in a short period, as publishers can detect this pattern internally and it raises red flags.

## University Presses vs. Commercial Publishers

An audience member asked about the differences between university presses and commercial publishers for first-time book authors. Jen McCall, who works freelance for both types of press, offered a nuanced response. Large commercial presses such as Palgrave and Routledge offer excellent reach and efficient processing but may provide a less personalised experience for first-time authors. University presses, particularly the most prestigious ones, may take longer to process proposals and manuscripts because their detailed peer review procedures allow them to do so. However, the perceived prestige of university presses should not lead authors to overlook the value of finding the right series, regardless of the type of publisher.

Humairaa Dudhwala added that the USP of university presses is that they are typically not-for-profit and mission-oriented, existing to advance scholarship. MUP's editorial committee, composed entirely of University of Manchester academics, adds rigour to the process. Rudland noted that commercial presses have a direct financial incentive to market books effectively because they need to sell copies, which can benefit authors. She also mentioned that some American universities require early career scholars to publish their first book with a university press, a factor worth considering for those seeking positions in the US.

## Submitting to Multiple Publishers

Dr Plonski raised the question of whether book proposals can be sent to multiple publishers simultaneously. The consensus among the publishers was that exploratory conversations at conferences are perfectly appropriate and even encouraged. However, once a publisher commits to sending a proposal out for peer review, authors should not submit elsewhere. The cost of commissioning reviews is significant for academic publishers, and having a reviewer discover that the same book is being reviewed for another press creates a very poor impression. McCall added that she prefers authors to be upfront if they are approaching more than one publisher.

## The Role of Series and Series Editors

Several speakers emphasised the value of publishing within an established series. A good series editor provides an additional layer of editorial engagement and curation, and the series' reputation can enhance the visibility and credibility of the book. However, if no existing series feels like a perfect fit, authors should look at the publisher's broader list to assess whether their book aligns with the types of work the press publishes. Dr Plonski added that speaking to other authors about their experiences with specific presses and editors can be extremely informative, as the quality of editorial support varies considerably even within prestigious publishers.

## Approaching Publishers at Conferences

The speakers agreed that approaching publishers at conferences is both welcome and strategically useful. Rudland noted that she often prioritises proposals from people she has met at conferences, and that personal introductions from existing authors can also prompt faster engagement. For early career researchers, conferences represent an important opportunity to build relationships with commissioning editors and to learn informally about what publishers are looking for.

## Thesis Embargoes

In response to a question about whether it is too late to embargo a thesis that is already available in open access, McCall advised that it is always worth asking the university librarian. In her experience, librarians are generally willing to place or reinstate an embargo. While it is not catastrophic if the thesis remains accessible, an embargo helps ensure that the published book does not compete with a freely available thesis.

## AI Disclosure

Ravasi responded to a question about whether declaring AI use for language improvement would negatively affect the chances of publication. He said he did not believe it would, noting that many published articles include disclosure statements about the use of tools such as Quillbot or ChatGPT for language improvement. He advised being as clear as possible about exactly which tool was used and for what purpose, as this makes it straightforward for editors to verify that the AI was used appropriately.

## Publishing from a Master's Dissertation

A participant asked about the prospects for turning a master's dissertation into a journal article. Ravasi advised that it is entirely possible if the dissertation makes an original contribution, can be condensed to approximately 8,000–10,000 words, and the argument can be articulated in an abstract. He recommended looking at journals that publish the kind of work the author admires and assessing whether the dissertation fits that format. If it does not fit the standard research article format, it might work as a different type of contribution—a forum piece, a creative intervention, or a piece for an online publication.

## Desk Rejection Feedback

An audience member asked whether editors typically explain their reasons for desk rejections. Ravasi acknowledged that practice varies. While editors are expected to indicate whether the rejection was due to unsuitability or insufficient quality, some provide more detailed and encouraging feedback than others. He noted, with some sympathy, that editors who have tried to provide detailed feedback

have sometimes received defensive responses from authors, which has led some to offer shorter, less detailed explanations.

## Citing Regional Sources and Disciplinary Conventions

Dr Plonski reminded the audience that when submitting to disciplinary journals, authors must demonstrate familiarity with the journal's core disciplinary literature. An article sent to an IR journal needs IR sources; one sent to a geography journal needs geography sources. At the same time, she encouraged authors writing about the Middle East to include sources from the region and in other languages where relevant, arguing that this is both an intellectual and a political contribution to broadening the citation practices of academic disciplines. She also cautioned against using overly strong claims of being “the first person ever” to address a topic, noting that similar ideas have often been explored in other disciplinary or regional contexts.

## Conclusion and Key Takeaways

The roundtable provided a remarkably comprehensive and practical overview of the publishing landscape for early career researchers in Middle East studies and related fields. Several cross-cutting themes emerged from the discussion:

- **A thesis is not a book.** Successful conversion requires genuine restructuring, not cosmetic editing. Authors should allow themselves time and distance before beginning the process.
- **The proposal is a sales document.** It must communicate the book's contribution in accessible language and demonstrate awareness of the market, the competition, and the audience.
- **Peer review is a collaborative process.** Treat feedback as an opportunity to strengthen the work. Engage with it carefully, respectfully, and thoroughly—but know that it is acceptable to disagree when you can justify doing so.
- **Choose your venue wisely.** Whether for a book or a journal article, the most important decision is finding the right fit. Prestige alone is an insufficient guide; genuine alignment with the journal's or publisher's list is far more valuable.
- **Quality over quantity.** Focused, authentic, carefully crafted work is more valued than a long list of hastily produced publications.
- **Build relationships.** Attend conferences, talk to publishers and editors, share your work with peers, and consider collaborative projects. Academic publishing is a human enterprise, and relationships matter.

- **Explore diverse outputs.** Academic articles and monographs are not the only valid forms of scholarly contribution. Creative projects, podcasts, and public engagement are increasingly recognised and valued.

The Graduate Section expressed its gratitude to all five speakers and encouraged attendees to reach out directly with follow-up questions. The section also announced plans to organise future events on related topics, including grant applications.