

Edited by
Maureen Daly Goggin and Urša Marinšek

Additional Editing by
Erlis Laçeç and Frederick Reinprecht

Meditating and Mediating Change

State – Society – Religion

Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought 4

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Roberta Maierhofer

Identity Statement: Meditating and Mediating Change: State – Society – Religion

With the first three volumes of the series “Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought,” a material outcome of the *Graz International Summer School Seggau* was established, where students, teachers, and guest lecturers were invited to submit a contribution to the overall theme of the topic of that year. This volume is also the outcome of such an invitation and shows the breadth of scholarship of the *Graz International Summer School Seggau* that is not only present while the summer institute is taking place, but has a more long lasting effect in terms of continuing the discussions initiated in the Southern Styrian landscape, and presenting these ideas in a written text. This volume, therefore, is a voice of a wider collaboration within a strong research and teaching community that was initiated by the summer school, but is not confined to that moment in time. In addition, this publication can be seen as a manifestation of the core interests of the *Center for Inter-American Studies* (CIAS), a tangible and material expression, a mission statement in another form articulating intentions and goals of CIAS by presenting current research created within the context (and possibly because) of existing academic structures and institutionalized relationships. This book series is thus another way of re-defining academic cooperation by using existing structures to find new and challenging ways of producing and presenting scholarship in the humanities and social sciences.

The *Graz International Summer School Seggau* was originally established as an innovative way of thinking outside the box, and was set up as a cooperation between the University of Graz, the Diocese Graz-Seckau, and the COMECE, the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community in order to facilitate a shift in perspective by offering a platform of critical discussion and intellectual encounters, where in a comfortable setting of a castle in the South Eastern region of Austria, near the Slovene border in the Styrian wine-growing region more than 80 students from more than 30 countries and 10 faculty and staff leave their comfort zone to find ways of expressing the challenges of the world, to find understanding of global affairs and events through a text, through language, in order to reconsider the familiar and the known. The series *Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought* has the same intention of offering a platform of critical engagement and academic inquiry that allows us to address the challenges of our times through interdisciplinary engagement. This volume was developed by students and faculty and reflects some of the discussions, topics, and methods that have been developed through the coming together of a diverse group of people at the *Graz International Summer School Seggau* 2018, where the topic of academic research as a pursuit that takes time, focus, and dedication and its mediation in terms of the public are one of the challenges we as academics currently face.

The Center for Inter-American Studies at the University of Graz has provided a home for this summer school in European Studies, as the mission of the center is to offer platforms of interdisciplinary and international research. By defining not only the field of Inter-American Studies as a way of thinking, an approach, and a perspective in order to transcend boundaries on many different levels, it offers us the possibility of defining academia itself as a transformation process. Accepted boundaries of time and space but also of language and culture – both in Europe and the Americas – are put into question and open up the possibility of new structures of thought. Inter-American Studies has thus the potential to revolutionize not only how we think about the Americas (including their relationships with Europe and Africa and their pre-Columbian worlds), but also the way in which we think about the various disciplines. In addition, we as scholar-teachers have to place ourselves into this context with a conscious decision concerning our own role in the construction and maintenance of academic methods, approaches, as well as disciplines. Within the European context, there has been a tradition of approaching the field of “America” on individual levels – in connection with the tradition of colonial ties, such as Europe-Canada, Europe-US, and Europe-Latin America. Re-conceptualization of the Americas can take different forms, but have one aspect in common: a thinking in networks and connections, an interdisciplinary, interregional, and intercultural approach. This redefinition of research areas away from national connotations towards regional (hemispheric) denotations allows for unexpected discoveries of similarities and differences. Through comparative research, traditional notions of research transcend linguistic, political, and geographical borders that divide the Americas, and thus its main contribution to research is the development of a new (Central and South-East) European perspective. At the same time, an outside view of Europe has also provided a starting point for a discussion of a common European identity. This new interest in Inter-American relationships is caused by processes such as globalization and transnational migration – developments that transform cultural identities and challenge conceptions of “self” and “other” – and has led to a reconsideration of the framing of regional investigations in terms of Area Studies. Especially in Europe, which itself is in the midst of negotiating a “European identity” in addition to national and regional ones, the recognition of the “Americanness” of the continent America offers a new approach to – in the European context – uncharted territory: “America” as a whole. In addition to a more conventional understanding of scholarship in academia of presentations and publications, this has initiated a view of the whole in disparity. Research and teaching has thus gained a new narrative discourse, and an academic life well lived has contributed creatively to the field by questioning our assumptions.

Such questioning was centered on the issue of how to understand and react to the multifaceted changes that we are confronted with in our lives. Although we are frequently told that in today’s world the only consistency is change, our daily lives seem to be governed by a surprising consistency and lack of flexibility. Institutions and their structures, rules and regulations, habits and routines do not appear to accommodate what we have come to think of as our “fluid identities” (Bauman). On the other hand,

we experience a lack of agency in reacting to the processes that not only have drastic future implications, but are increasingly seen as points of no return. Political uncertainties and climate change, demographic transformation, continual re-thinking of societal coherence in times of diversity, as well as new technologies that are redefining the notion of work, are often met with reactions ranging from resignation to ignorance. They sometimes erupt in aggression and violence against others, increasingly taking the place of critical reflection and civic engagement. In order to develop strategies and methods to meet the immense challenges of our time, this summer school suggests engaging in academic contemplation and interdisciplinary exchange. In times of a constant devaluing of science and scholarship, taking the time for vigorous intellectual investigation is a radical act of resistance to quick-fix solutions. Meditating change and at the same time mediating change offers us the opportunity of developing disruptive intellectual approaches and ideas, as we can gain insights into political, social, economic, and cultural forces that make us believe that the challenges we face are essential, natural, and inevitable. Such thorough analysis offers us the possibility of moving from a passive position to active involvement in transformation processes in order to become agents of change by an authentic reformulation of our identities.

In our interpretation, meditating and mediating change is the taking on of the responsibility of intellectuals to offer critical in-depth discussion in a world of babble. This is a radical commitment to academic pursuit not as abstract, but as concrete and necessary as an engagement with state, society, and religion, in order to understand the dynamics and structures that govern us as individuals, but also determine the structures we are all governed by. Such an effort makes us understand the facts and figures, the material realities, and how they are culturally represented. The summer school often provides more questions than answers, and has allowed us, as this fourth volume of the series “Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought” impressively documents, to investigate the different approaches to the definitions of state, society, and religion, and their interconnectedness. Focusing on the emphasis areas of the University of Graz – South Eastern Europe and North, Central and South America – this program has again offered a basis for discussing global and continental challenges as well as opportunities that change entails.

In terms of the proclaimed “Seggau School of Thought,” the hope is that this publication is not seen simply as a product to be consumed, but as an invitation to engage in this process of dialogue, discussion, and connection. Readers are encouraged to accept their own role as empowered agents by seeking expression of both political and personal expression of radical definitions of concepts that shape our lives in order to map out changes that are necessary to make the world a better place. Textual representations of the status quo are never abstract, they are radical transformation tools.

The Editors
Maureen Daly Goggin, Urša Marinšek

Meditating and Mediating Change for Tackling Narratives of Social, Political, and Cultural Life: Introduction

Maureen Daly Goggin

*No [wo]man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river
and [s]he's not the same [wo]man.*
--Heraclitus

*All that you touch/you Change./All that you Change/Changes you./The only lasting
truth/is Change.*
--Octavia E. Butler

Peace of mind is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it.
--Mahatma Gandhi

As the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed, the only constant in life is change. The unending flux of events, ideas, problems, and obstacles makes life extremely challenging and complicated. Change is real but, as Octavia Butler hints, stability is only illusory. Conflict is also unavoidable but our ability to deal with it is what will bring us peace of mind. What strategies are available to enhance our ability to deal with strife? How do we avoid resorting to quick-fix, temporary solutions to life's problems? What acts of radical resistance should we seek to address difficulties? What strategies can we use to engage in vigorous intellectual investigation of any of the myriad of conundrums? Both meditating and mediating change offers sets of strategies precisely for encouraging vigorous intellectual inquiry into social, cultural, economic, religious, and political enigmas.

In the summer of 2018, the University of Graz Summer Program at Seggau took up the theme of Meditating and Mediating Change: State-Society-Religion, a theme this book takes as its title and focus. The chapters within all deal to one degree or another with notions of meditating and/or mediating change. In this introduction, we discuss practices of meditation and mediation and then describe how both strategies taken together offer a firm basis for coping with challenging conundrums.

Meditation

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years throughout many cultures. But what exactly do we mean by meditation? Shapiro et al. define meditation as “a family of practices that train attention and awareness usually with the aim of foste-

ring psychological and spiritual well-being and maturity” (70). They go on to explain that

... meditation does this by training and bringing mental processes under greater voluntary control and directing them beneficial ways. This control is used to cultivate specific mental qualities such as concentration and calm, and emotions such as joy, love and compassion. Through greater awareness, a clearer understanding of oneself and one’s relationship to the world develops. Additionally, it is held that a deeper and more accurate knowledge of consciousness and reality manifests” (70–71)

Given our stressful, hectic, and all-consuming lifestyles, the slowing down, connecting with our inner qualities, and mindfulness through meditation are especially valuable. As Mahatma Gandhi taught us, “Peace of mind is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it.” Meditation can aid in coping as it helps to quiet our minds as well as cultivate wisdom and awareness. Such mindfulness is important in all sorts of activities and negotiations in which we engage whether social, cultural, economic, and/or political.

From personal to public arenas, there is no space in which to avoid change and conflict. And change and conflict raise a multitude of questions: How can this politician do such a thing? Why doesn’t the government offer such a thing? Why does my boss react in such a way? What do these people think when they do such a thing? Why does this religion hold such and such a position? The questions pile upon questions at times seeming to bury us. How do we dig our way out of the worldly chaos? Mindfulness seems to be the key.

What does mindfulness do for us? Science has shown that meditation has both psychological benefits and physiological benefits as well as interpersonal relationship benefits because meditation nurtures empathy, an emotion central to confronting conflict productively. (On physical and psychological effects, see Fraser.) Meditation, according to Murphy, Donovan, and Taylor, “promote[s] an empathy with created things that leads toward oneness with them” (82). This empathy is the first stage toward fruitful negotiation of any magnitude. Meditation also, according to Andy Fraser, “increases our well-being, mindfulness, empathy, resilience, and ability to handle our emotions. It decreases depression, anxiety, and neuroticism” (5). Thus, it aids us both within our mind and body. As such, it is a strategy that aids us in all personal and public arenas, answering questions for ourselves and promoting productive dialogue with others.

In one sector of the public, Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch draw attention to the power of meditation in *wissenschaft*: “We suggest that using a meditative/contemplative approach allows researchers to access another, often underutilized dimension of the research process ... This process of paying attention, of being mindful, of attending to the subtle, intuitive, not-so-obvious parts of research has the capacity to yield rich rewards” (84). This strategy helps us to resist the impulse to make “quick judgments: to sort, categorize, analyze, and evaluate immediately the research materials we encounter” (85). As it is true in research, as Royster and Kirsch note, it is true further afield. Meditation offers positive outcomes for the individual who practices it and for

society to the benefit of human communities. It is with this notion that this collection takes up mediation in the next section addressing the question: What is the benefit of meditation to society?

Mediation

Mediation is defined by Michael West as “one form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), [...] a process in which a third party helps others manage their conflict – a worthwhile activity in itself. ... Mediators help frame conflict into something workable, making peace possible” (1). Yet it is not just in the court or the community that we see mediation; it is also a philosophy for life. Thus, it operates on personal as well as public issues.

As Suzanne McCorkle and Melanie J. Reese note, “Mediation is grounded in the belief that conflict offers an opportunity to build stronger individuals, more satisfying relationships, and better communities.” (1). It is not a new practice. It dates back thousands of years in courts, political arenas, and social settings. It is important because “mediation offers disputants interest-based opportunities to play an active part in the resolution of conflict instead of *relying on* a third party to make a decision for them” (emphasis added 15). In other words, mediation is a strategy through which we become more resilient and sharper in our efforts toward resolution.

Mediation then names the premise that ideas can move beyond opposition and into new relations with the self, others, and whole communities. In other words, as William Duffy points out, “pragmatists including but not limited to Charles Pierce, William James, and John Dewey, all believed the most useful philosophies were those that could mediate competing claims while allowing individuals to arrive at contingent truths that facilitate action” (63). Agreement alone is not the goal but agreement with action is what is needed in times of conflict.

As Kenneth Cloke points out, “Meditation is a way of looking into the abyss of conflict and allowing it to enter us without overwhelming our equilibrium, but instead, pointing us in the direction we need to go -- not only to assist others in stopping, settling, resolving, and transforming their conflicts, but to finally and completely transcend them within themselves.” We need to do more than just think through conflict, we need to confront it and do the best we can to find the way forward. How do we do this? Cloke argues that we embrace both mediation and meditation, a practice described in the next section.

Meditation and Mediation in Concert

Confronting the chaos of change and conflict requires us to find a middle path through these disruptive forces. There are at least two kinds of middle paths. The first is one that simply stays out of both change and conflict by burying our head in the sand. This way not only does not resolve the problem, it can exacerbate it. The second

way, according to Cloke, is to work with and out of the change and conflict—to come to a new way of doing, thinking, being. He observes:

This deeper, *transformational* middle way can be accessed through “skillful means,” which include not only *meditation* techniques that assist us in becoming more centered, compassionate, and aware of ourselves and others; but *mediation* techniques that enable us to engage in authentic and committed listening, openhearted communication, empathetic dialogue, creative problem solving, collaborative negotiation, genuine forgiveness, and reconciliation. These quintessential conflict resolution skills allow us to escape the ruts our conflicts draw us into, and reveal to us that it is the *mind*, and not just the flag or the wind that is waving. (emphasis added)

To put it another way, we need to call on both mediation and meditation strategies to explore fully the differences. We need to become both the change and the conflict, be both and to be and—both/and—a position that requires deeper thinking and doing. We can turn to Neil Bohr’s discussion of paradoxes of quantum theory which he described as “complementarity”—“the concept that two contrasted [opposing] theories, such as the wave and particle theories of light, may be able to explain a set of phenomena, although each separately only accounts for some aspects” (356). If we place ourselves in a position of accepting a counter truth along with our own truth, we come to a deeper understanding and resolution than if we go with one side. How do we do this? Through both meditation—which allows us to go into ourselves—and mediation—which allows us the compassion to listen to the other. In Cloke’s words, we travel a deep path that is “one that opens for each of us when we transform and transcend our conflicts by finding a middle path that includes *both* of our opposing truths, that integrates mediation and meditation into a single *koan*¹, and that practices both as a single, undifferentiated whole.”

Facing change and conflict that accompany it is an ongoing process with which we can learn how to come to grips. Taking the inner state of meditation and the outer state of mediation as a dual practice can help us to think deeply, walk the “talk,” and do what is best at the moment. It is more than just seeing an opponent’s position, it is taking it up and working to understand it rather than dismiss it. The chapters in this collection help us to see how some have done just that.

The Organization of the Book

Meditating and Mediating Change is organized into seven sections: Life Stories, Human Rights Stories, Governing Stories, Island Stories, Latin American Stories, Marking Stories, and Making Stories. What all hold in common is the action of stories—not as fiction—but as *koan*, the Zen concept of paradoxical anecdotes and riddles. Reading through these chapters will send you on a journey of meditating or mediating or both meditating and mediating at the same time. Enjoy.

¹ Koan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle, used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment.

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Information about Editors and Contributors

Editors

Maureen Daly Goggin is Professor of Rhetoric at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, Arizona, USA, where she teaches courses in women and material culture, history and theories of rhetoric, and research methods. Author and editor of eight scholarly books, a textbook, a pedagogical book, and numerous essays, her latest book is *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (Ashgate, 2013), a collection that examines the compelling and often poignant connection between women and the material culture of death by focusing on the objects made, the images they keep, the practices they use or are responsible for, and the places they inhabit and construct through ritual and custom. Receipt of numerous awards for teaching and scholarship, Professor Maureen Daily Goggin was the 2015-2016 recipient of a Fulbright Scholar award that brought her to the University of Graz in Austria to teach and do scholarship for summer term 2016.

Urša Marinšek holds BAs in English Language and Literature and Sociology, and an MA in English from the University of Maribor, Slovenia. During her studies, she worked as a nursing home assistant and as a tour guide in a karst cave. Now, she works as a coordinator for the Graz International Summer School Seggau at the University of Graz. Her research interests include Slovene translations of Shakespeare's plays, stylistics, drama, as well as aging studies.

Contributors

Marina Alonso Villota is a Spanish postgraduate student with a background in Social and Cultural Anthropology. She is now finishing a Joint International Master in Sustainable Development at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria, and is starting a Master in Cybersecurity at Next International Business School, Spain. She is particularly interested in the intersection of technology and organized crime, and is currently researching about the role of technology in human trafficking.

Deborah Biging is a master student at the University of Graz, where she also obtained a bachelor's degree in philosophy, in 2017. She is enrolled in the master program *Political, Economic and Legal Philosophy* (PELP). Since October 2016, she has been working as a student assistant in research, teaching and administration in the Department of Practical Philosophy at the University of Graz under Prof. Lukas Meyer, head of the Institute of Philosophy.

Daniel Blanche is a PhD candidate in Information and Knowledge Society at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), research assistant at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3-UOC), and affiliated student of “Ageing + Communication + Technologies: Experiencing a digital world in later life” funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Eva Čivrná is a student of gender studies and social anthropology on a Faculty of Social Sciences at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. As a Women Deliver Young Leader and member of many other initiatives like Amnesty International, local NGOs, and movements, Eva is dedicating her academic and free time to gender and social equality. Topics of their interest are sexual and reproductive rights, an intersectional attitude, queer studies and mental health. As a feminist and activist, Eva believes in bottom-up initiatives and dedicates their effort to empower voices of marginalized groups.

Arwa Elabd was born and raised in Vienna, Austria. When she is not teaching German and Spanish in a middle school or high school classroom, she is busy traveling and exploring the world, including living in other countries like Spain and the United States. In 2017/2018 she received a Fulbright scholarship and lived in Ohio, where she had the opportunity to explore the differences between what it means to be a Muslim in Austria and the United States.

Bence Fiser is a second-year student at the University of Pécs (Hungary) as a teacher degree student with History and English majors. He is interested in Russian History and the European History of Jews during the Modern Ages. He is searching questions more than answers, so every questions and comments are welcomed connected to these topics above and his writings.

Nicole Haring holds a master’s degree in English and Geography in the teaching program and a bachelor’s degree in English and American Studies from the University of Graz. Besides her profession as a teacher, she is currently finishing her Master in English and American Studies. Her research focus lies on feminist criticism in cultural and literary studies in the North American context as well as on Inter-American Studies.

Stephen Katz is Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology, Distinguished Research Award winner, and founding member of the Trent Centre for Aging & Society, at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada. He is author of several books, journal articles, book chapters, and media interviews on ageing bodies, critical gerontology, biopolitics, cognitive impairment, and health technologies. His current research involves partnerships and collaborations on funded projects related to quantified aging and digital technologies, as well as a new book project on Self, Mind and Body in Later Life.

Roberta Maierhofer is Professor of American Studies and Director of the *Center for Inter-American Studies* at the University of Graz, Austria. From 1999 to 2011, she held a series of Vice-Rector positions for International Relations (1999–2003), International Relations and Affirmative Action for Women (2003–2007), and International Relations and Interdisciplinary Cooperation (2007–2011). In 2000, she initiated and established the focus area South-Eastern Europe at the University of Graz. This expertise of regional and inter-regional collaboration was fundamental for her leadership role at the *Center for Inter-American Studies*, which she has been directing since February 2007, and determined how the University of Graz established a second regional focus area in terms of North-, Central- and South America in 2012. She is a founding member of the *European Network in Aging Studies* (ENAS), supported the establishment of the *North American Network in Aging Studies* (NANAS), and has been a member of the Humanities and Arts Committee of the *Gerontological Society of America*. Her research focuses on American Literature and Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Transatlantic Cooperation in Education, and Age/Aging Studies. Since 2011, she has been representing Austrian universities as a member of the Board of the Austrian Fulbright Commission and is a member of the University Council of the University of Bamberg, Germany. Since 2011, she has been directing a Master Program on Interdisciplinary Gerontology. As a member of doctoral schools, such as of the University of Graz one on Gender and another on Migration, and of the University of Malaga and UNED, Spain, she also advises and supports early career researchers. She also acts as a co-advisor in terms of the Joint Degree in English and American Studies. Since 2004, she has been directing the *Graz International Summer School Seggau*, which was established as an interdisciplinary and intercultural platform in the fields of European and Inter-American Studies.

Simon Maierhofer is a student of Philosophy and English and American Studies at the University of Graz, and a participant of the Graz International Summer School 2018. His interests are, besides philosophy and literature, film, art, and politics. He also publishes on a regular basis articles on human rights for a project for aspiring journalists.

Hana Morávková is a Czech student currently studying a Master's degree in Sociology and Cultural Management at Masaryk University in Brno. She is passionate about languages and how they influence and are influenced by society and its phenomena. She pursues creative writing and her dream is to become an accomplished polyglot.

Paula Morgan is a Professor of West Indian Literature and Culture, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine. Her primary focus of over three decades of teaching, research and publication has been gender issues in Caribbean Literature and Culture. Dr. Morgan has published numerous books and scholarly articles on the domestic violence, the interface of ethnic and gender relations, the construction of Caribbean masculinities, and pedagogical approaches to literary and popular discourses. Professor Morgan has served in numerous senior administrative position at the UWI and is the holder of awards for teaching, publication and graduate mentorship.

Alfrena Jamie Pierre is a PhD student in Literatures in English at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad and Tobago and an MA graduate in Samuel Selvon studies from the UWI. In April 2018, Ms. Pierre was one of the presenters at Bridging Wor(l)ds Conference in Trinidad where she presented her research in progress on Caribbean writer George Lamming. Ms. Pierre's research interests include, representations of Christianity in Caribbean literature, Caribbean poetics, critical theory, ontologies and Caribbean identity.

Allison O. Ramsay, Ph.D. (Cultural Studies) is a Lecturer in Cultural/Heritage Studies in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Her research interests include fraternal organizations, museums, landships in Barbados, Caribbean festivals, Cultural and Heritage Studies, Caribbean and Pacific Island heritage and Caribbean history. She teaches courses in Caribbean history and heritage studies. Her recent publications include "All Hands on Deck: the Sailing Landships as Unique Cultural Icons of Barbados," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* Vol. 11 (2016) and "Crafting a 'Secret' Space: Masonry and the Military in the Anglophone Caribbean." *Geheime Netzwerke im Militär 1700–1945* Eds. Gundula Gahlen, Daniel Marc Segesser, Carmen Winkel (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016).

Peter Rosegger was born in Graz in 1980. He studied theology in Graz and belongs to the New Circle of Students of Pope Benedict XVI. He graduated the postgraduate studies on economics in Krems, which he completed with a thesis on symbolic leadership based on the role model of Pope Francis. Stays abroad in Rome and Jerusalem. 2003–2014 he worked at the episcopal secretary of the diocese in Graz-Seckau, since 2010 he has been working as the head and secretary of bishop Dr. Egon Kapellari. 2014–2017 he was the educational consultant of the catholic student group in Graz, editor-in-chief of "Denken+Glauben" and diocesan advisor for sciences, international affairs and culture. Since 2018, Peter Rosegger has been the head of the operating field "lernen&leben" and assistant of the management of the Elisabethinen Graz Verwaltungs GmbH.

Lorraine Rumson is a Canadian student in the Freie Universität Berlin's Master of English Studies program. Her primary research interests are narrative appropriation, cross-cultural and cross-historical literature, and literatures of silence and marginalization. She is particularly interested in the works of writers who have been dismissed by the world at large as minor, popular, non-literary, debilitatingly bizarre, stiflingly derivative, or otherwise generally bad.

Selleana Sankar, a History Specialist and International Relations student, is an actively engaged Revisionist historian and international traveler in academic research whose passions include; epistemology and pedagogy in education, Pan Africanism, oriental historiography, anti-Semitism and racism in the Americas and Atlantic World,

and government philosophies. This passion is resonated in her position as elected President of the UWI Kemetec Association and a captivated linguistics learner, attaining varying degrees of competences in English, Spanish, French and soon German. When in retreat from academic scholarship, if not found shopping, or on hikes, she is volunteering at animal rescue shelters, Human Rights or National Heritage Preservation efforts.

Kim Sawchuk is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University in Montreal and the Director of “Ageing + Communication + Technologies: Experiencing a digital world in later life” funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Sarah Wagner is a doctoral researcher in the Communication Networks and Social Change research group at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, Barcelona. Using collaborative methods, her research explores the intersections of indigenous communicative ecologies and ICT service systems.

Chenglong Zhou is currently an MA student in the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His research interest lies in the broad fields of American studies, including 20th century international relations, American history, political science, cultural theories, as well as media studies. Most of his published and due-for-publication papers are in Chinese, and he also has been attending international conferences in Europe in recent years.

Matthew Zuccaro is a M.A. Candidate and Graduate Assistant at Montclair State University in the Law and Governance Program, where he focuses on scholarship examining the intersection between urban history and contemporary public policy. Matthew holds a B.A. from Montclair State University in History and Political Science. In addition to his academic pursuits, Matthew serves as Managing Member of Digital Strategy Associates, where he advises government and educational institutions on information technology matters.