

Dissertation Abstract

In my dissertation, *Feeding Fascism: Tabletop Politics in Italy and Italian East Africa, 1922- 1945*, I examine culinary objects, spaces, and ephemera to illustrate how individual women and the Italian state attempted to control food in its many manifestations - cooking, feeding, and eating - to assert and negotiate power. Food is an ideal medium for uncovering the mechanisms of national politics at work in everyday life because the Fascist government physically touched the populous through commercial goods and built environment. To that end, my thesis focuses on four topics: (1) the industrialization of maternal health care, (2) women's construction of social class, (3) the reproductive female body at work, and (4) the mechanics of imperial rule in the private sphere. My organizational trajectory carries the reader from the intimate to the foreign, in terms of both location (moving from the nursery to the marketplace) and geography (moving from Italy to Italian East Africa). It also traces a natural progression among four different Fascist obsessions: pronatalism, rationalism, autarchy, colonialism, and back to pronatalism, to reveal the intimate in the foreign. This structural arc reflects my argument that women continually created and expressed their political subjectivity in direct relation to the places where they lived and worked and the objects that they owned and borrowed. Against the dominant characterization of women's response to regime dictates as one of passive consent, I argue that female citizens and the state actively negotiated for sovereignty over women's labor in through material culture on a daily basis, ultimately demonstrating the ordinariness of power.

In the first chapter, "How to Build the Perfect *Mamma*: Taylorist Breastfeeding, Rationalist Clinics, and the Construction of Industrial Motherhood," I interweave evidence from propagandistic film, periodicals, and clinic architecture promoted by the National Bureau for the Protection of Maternity and Infancy (known by the Italian acronym ONMI) to compare recommended and actual use of clinics, ultimately arguing that the state tried to control breastfeeding by framing it as a public, medical practice. In my study of propagandistic film (*Alle Madri d'Italia* [*To the Mothers of Italy*]), I analyze how the film's dichotomization of the midwife/home and the doctor/clinic used gendered characterizations to denigrate female healthcare practitioners and practices as old-fashioned, dirty, and immoral. I contend that this move creates a professional lacuna to be filled by male state-affiliated medics. Next, I analyze ONMI periodicals (*Maternità e Infanzia* [*Motherhood and Childhood*]), and clinic financing, construction, layouts, and rules to compare the intended and actual use of these spaces. In propagandistic film and periodicals, clinics house organized rows of women breastfeeding at timed intervals overseen by a foreman-like doctor, a practice that I term "Taylorist breastfeeding." I demonstrate that the coerced shift in breastfeeding location from the home to government-run clinics illustrates the struggle for control over maternity and the future body politic.

My second chapter, "Electric Servants for the Modern Hostess: Frankfurt Kitchens, the Taylorist Work Triangle, and the Construction of Social Class," examines the Fascist kitchen in terms of its design, use, and contents to understand how women from different social classes negotiated used their work as cooks, writers, and designers to relate with other women. First, this chapter focuses on Lidia Morelli's ideal kitchens in her housekeeping guide, *Dalla Cucina al Salotto* (1925). Along with fellow writers Ada Boni, Amalia Moretti Foggia, Erminia Macerati, Morelli provided instructions for how to cook autarchically, and how to running a kitchen in times of austerity. Next, I move from the model kitchens explored by the top of the masthead to the actual kitchens investigated by architects and external freelancers: I analyze the kitchen-focused articles, plans, and photos from Gio Ponti, Ignazio Gardella, and André Hermant. Lidia Morelli, this time in her capacity as the guest editor of *Il libro de casa 1938*, a popular *Domus* almanac for working-class women, bookends this investigation. Finally, I compare the aesthetics and use of kitchen appliances and objects (toasters, tea and coffee

sets, bread plates) to show how women used Italian designs to inscribe foreign foodstuffs and rituals, like afternoon tea, within the acceptable definition of patriotic products and practices. In the context of this chapter, following a Galvani tea cup's trajectory from kiln to kitchen accomplishes two goals: it contextualizes the tea cup in relation with broader patterns of ceramic manufacturing and tea distribution, and it reveals how the tea cup's physical properties, like small size and light weight, encouraged different forms of packaging and handling at each step of their journey. Taken in sum, these arguments and agreements underscore the interconnected relationships between these influential kitchen thinkers and their respective publishing houses. And these writers shared more than a common topic, they also advocated for similar interventions: rationalist design and cooking aimed to change the layout and use of the kitchen as well as the foodways that it contained.

In my third chapter, "Singing Truth to Power: Menstruation, Miscarriage, and Abortion in the Rice Fields," I use women's work songs to investigate how the *mondine* (female rice weeders) interacted with state demands for the labor of female bodies to feed and populate the nation. First, I analyze popular work songs as both collective expressions of culture and as social tools: culture, in that the songs' popularity, persistence, and pervasiveness suggests that they captured common and deeply felt aspects of the *mondine*'s work and life; tools, in that the *mondine* used them to accomplish a specific goal, to keep their spirits up even as their bodies lagged. I frame these tactics against state narratives that attempt to cast the *mondina* as a symbol of productive Fascist womanhood, regularly producing rice and infants in accordance with state policies of alimentary autarchy and pronatalism. The design process by which the graphic artists for the National Rice Board (Ente Nazionale Risi) constructed photocollages for propaganda reveals the regime's persistent challenges in posing the *mondina* as a figure of consent. Finally, I trace rice, the finished product, from its place of production, the Northern fields, to a state-contested zone of consumption, the Southern kitchen, to demonstrate how both the government and private companies used *ricettari* (propagandistic recipe pamphlets) to push Southern women to adopt Northern food ways. The visual and textual strategies used in this attempt at culinary nationalization and homogenization speak to a broader debate between citizens and the regime regarding who has the right to taste. In sum, these three analyses suggest that the state's call for increased domestic production of both consumers and consumables played out on and in the female body. But as the *mondine*'s songs and recollections attest, Fascism's fever dream of hyper-productive female bodies ultimately disintegrated in the face of biological and financial limitations. Ultimately, family planning proved more powerful than state ideology.

My fourth chapter, "Black Markets: Constructing Race through Commercial Space" uses original East African and Italian sources to examine breastfeeding in the colonial marketplace as a key plank in the social construction of race and racism. Specifically, I examine the Fascist regime's propagandistic newsreels and unpublished photographs of Ethiopian and Eritrean markets in Addis Ababa, Harrar, Quórum, and Asmara in relation with postcolonial oral histories and architectural studies of these spaces. While breastfeeding represented a significant arena of political struggle over the care and nourishment of future generations in the colonies, contemporary historical studies rarely examine this practice as a primary component of imperial foodways. This stance builds on Kyla Wazana Tompkins' assertion that food confuses physical borders between the self and racial others. This chapter contributes an intersectional approach to the discipline by using breastfeeding in the marketplace to investigate the Fascist regime's twinned seizure of food and women's bodies, a mode of cultural erasure that bell hooks refers to as "eating the other." Interweaving the voices of vendors, customers, architects, and government officials in this image-based study of Ethiopian marketplaces not only helps to untangle the filmic decisions and techniques that directors used to construct race and racism through mass media, but also offers a more cohesive portrait of women's lives in Italian East Africa under Fascism. Ultimately, I contend that breastfeeding simplifies and essentializes all

other foodways, and thus provided a powerful symbolic arena for forming, shaping, and perpetuating the racial thinking that defined food, markets, and people in terms of black and white.

Collectively, these four chapters contribute a new perspective to recent debates in the transnational history of gender and race, particularly those concerning food's role in reconstructing women's history. Most past discussions have posited two opposing approaches, suggesting either that the using food, cooking, and feeding to decipher women's daily political lives recreates patriarchal power structures by reducing women to domestic roles or that the culinary does not constitute a sufficiently serious topic for inclusion in transnational history. In contrast, I argue that the study of food and foodways is important precisely because the global underclass spent much of their daily lives engaged in food work. Ignoring this aspect of the history of everyday life reflects the denigration of practices, work, and spaces associated with women, the working class, and ethnic and racial minorities. My work uses food to address and build on the impasses that characterized critical discussions regarding the historical and geographic specificity of othered bodies and political power. Specifically, scholars have pointed to the need for concrete and detailed first-person evidence to incorporate diverse voices into the historical record and thus to move beyond binary understandings of human relationships. To contribute to these scholarly debates, my dissertation situates new examples of food culture within the broader context of power negotiations between different groups of women, ultimately adding an adaptive and resourceful approach to the scholarship of the modern history of gender and race.