

Statement of Research

Scholars of the Italian Fascist period have tended to focus on the monumental, the national, and the abstract at the expense of the small, the regional, and the concrete. I argue that the latter realms are important precisely because they constitute the point at which the state touches the individual through the spaces, objects, and activities of daily life. In my dissertation, *Feeding Fascism: Tabletop Politics in Italy and Italian East Africa, 1922-1945*, I draw on tangible evidence (cookbooks, dishware, advertising) that incarnates abstract and theoretical ideas (community, independence, authorship, rebellion) to suggest that women worked through material culture to control specific moments in the private and public spheres. In doing so, I make a larger disciplinary argument for the use of Food Studies as a means to reveal Feminist history through the tabletop politics everyday life. By grounding my study of power negotiations in the material culture surrounding food, I reveal how power worked from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

To do so, I study the traces left by people, places, and things. As such, my work is primarily archival in nature. To prepare this manuscript, I have conducted extensive research in over 30 Italian museums, libraries, and archives. Because many of these sites are small, isolated, and difficult to find, they have received few visits from scholars and little academic notice of their holdings. This out-of-the-way element constitutes a methodological thesis: non-traditional sites have proven more likely to hold the everyday ephemera of women's lives. Barilla's Gastronomic Library and company archives exemplify my preferred type of research site. Their holdings contain a historic menu collection, culinary magazines like *La Cucina Italiana*, colonial and wartime cookbooks, as well as numerous almanacs and household manuals of contested authorship: Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali cooks invented these recipes but their Italian employers published them. Similarly, the Picture Card Museum in Modena provides a vibrant collection of illustrated food packaging and labels in addition to unusual varieties of promotional ephemera like *calendari*, scented pocket calendars, and *fiammiferi*, illustrated matchbook covers. To contextualize these cultural productions with their use, I have relied on a constellation of regional historical foundations, like the Pieve Santo Stefano Diary Archive. This archive not only contains first-hand accounts of everyday life written by formerly illiterate female agricultural and urban workers from Italy and the colonies, but also includes their artistic creations from the Fascist period, such as drawings, paintings, poems, and primary school workbooks. Many women mixed two or more media, producing scrapbooks with photos, picture cards, and art. These first-hand written and visual accounts intertwine with my audio materials: thanks to a collection of workers' archives spread across Northern Italy, I have found a trove of women's work songs and interviews with former migrant laborers. Ultimately, I use this evidence to understand how material conditions both exhibit and alter larger questions of gender, politics, and power. In taking this distinctive approach to the archive, I anchor my work in the power of the small.

To analyze how individual women and the state work through material culture to negotiate power, I investigate four Fascist projects focused on the female body and gendered labor: pronatalism (the bearing of numerous children), autarchy (economic self-sufficiency), rationalism (increasing productivity through design) and imperialism. I draw on the work of a wide range of scholars: Jana Sawicki, Antonio Negri, bell hooks, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, and Michel De Certeau, to name just a few. For example, I draw on Sawicki's depiction of the clinic as a space of control to argue that the promotion of obstetric clinics constitutes an attempt to control the early development of new Italians. While breastfeeding represents a significant arena of political struggle over the care and nourishment of future generations, sociological studies rarely examine this practice in the context of national foodways. Translating works from Antonio Negri turned my attention to food's power to intervene in citizen's lives on a microscopic scale, at the level of the cell. I contend that, through digestion,

governments manipulated nutrition to shape the national body from the inside out. This argument builds on Kyla Wazana Tompkins' assertion that food confuses physical borders between the self and racial others. I suggest that the Fascist regime used the eugenic properties of food to control colonial populations by seizing ownership of East African foodways, a mode of cultural erasure that bell hooks refers to as "eating the other." Studying culinary culture as it changes over time demonstrates how particular food habits develop as a result of constant negotiations between different social groups. This theoretical approach allows me to reconstruct the micro-interactions between the male creators and female (re)creators of spaces like family apartments and communal kitchens in urban public housing projects, rural dormitories for migrant workers, obstetric clinics, and colonial marketplaces. In line with Michel De Certeau's assertion that consumers actively make use of culture, my research helps to reconstruct women's lived experiences of politics by first dismantling the idea that we can speak of Italian women as one cohesive population, and then matching specific demographic groups to examples of power in the home and the town square.

Building on this distinctive method and approach, I plan to extend this work in the future to focus on transnational foodways spanning Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Italy. My next project, *Black Milk: Colonial Foodways and Intimate Imperialism*, will argue that Italy's manipulation of colonial food and foodways in sub-Saharan Africa drew power from scripted ways of cooking and eating. Here I pay special attention to intimate feeding work, such as interracial wetnursing and the preparation of African foods for Italian children. Ultimately, I suggest that domestic workers both past and present have subverted these scripts through culinary translation, rewriting Italian recipes with Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somali ingredients. In doing so, they mobilize literary, bodily, and culinary production to address the political and cultural connections that span contemporary East Africa and Italy. The materials for this project address all five senses: I will analyze recipes, maps, songs, photographs, and oral histories to connect Fascist-period depictions of East African women's domestic labor in Italian homesteads in relation with the postcolonial and decolonial narratives that confront these representations. In terms of my approach, I plan to apply Ann Stoler's focus on the intimate expressions of colonial power to the context of Italian East Africa, thereby elaborating on Anne McClintock's understanding of imperialism as a gendered project. Thanks to the CLIR Mellon Fellowship, I have already begun my research for this project. I spent Fall 2015 in Italy interviewing Italo-Ethiopian, -Eritrean, and -Somali authors and poets, including Igiaba Scego, Cristina Uba Ali Farah, Gabriella Ghermandi, and Ribka Sibhatu about the culinary legacies of colonialism and the political significance of African food and foodways in contemporary Europe. Another possible project, *The Power of Pasta: The Impact of Food on Family Life*, will study advertising, company policy, and consumer opinion to analyze how iconic pasta brands have historically responded to shifting social norms regarding lesbian families, gender roles, and domestic work, and to determine how these companies impacted Italian family life.

We currently lack a study of power negotiations that balances analysis of the regime's cultural productions with a counter consideration of how individual women actually used these built environments, objects, and ephemera. I plan to address this lacuna by publishing my dissertation as a book and by publishing this work in journals across a range of fields, including Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (*differences, Signs*), Food Studies (*Food, Culture, and Society, Food and Foodways*), and History (*The American Historical Review, The Journal of Modern History*). I contend that social inquiry benefits from this work because the domestic work of cooking, serving, and feeding has historically been assigned to women. Rather than focusing on the history of the few women who formally engaged with politics, I use food to investigate the history of women from all social classes. This approach not only allows me to critically examine state narratives using a broad body of evidence, but also highlights the cultural history of the masses, not just the elite. Food

Diana Garvin

demonstrates how power works through narratives of design. It complicates the idea of an all-powerful government monolith by revealing the local variations of manufacturing, construction, and financing for state enterprises. Food further demonstrates the unexpectedly significant extent of women's involvement in public projects. By consulting a variety of hitherto underutilized sources from regional archives, I work to reconstruct the social history of those who did not write it.