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IRIS Summer Fieldwork 2022 Report

I spent June-August 2022 in Italy conducting exploratory research for my dissertation project on the medical-cultural histories of anorexia nervosa. The IRIS Graduate Student International Research Award helped fund my trip to four archives in Milan and Bologna, Italy. I had originally planned to also visit an archive in Venice, but they were re-organizing it this summer and could not be used; I will instead visit that archive on my next research trip. Still, during this time, I was able to determine the scope and focus of my project and the future research necessary to complete the dissertation. I was also able to make connections with key figures and improve my Italian speaking skills immensely, both of which will be crucial for conducting oral history interviews later in my research.

My dissertation is (tentatively) titled “Fantasies of Anorexia and Empire: Italian Medical-Cultural Imaginaries from il Risorgimento to deinstitutionalization.” It centers the neglected historical role of Italian scientific, cultural, and political imperatives in shaping the diagnostic and recovery logics for pathologized food restriction within and beyond Southern Europe. The phenomenon of self-starvation has a long recorded and debated history that tends to be siloed from broader cultural-political contexts and glosses over the importance of geographic specificity. This tendency has largely foreclosed interrogations into how the constitution of anorexia and its treatment are imbricated with coeval (re)articulations of eugenics and (proto- to post-WWII) fascisms from the 19th c. onward. Further, it elides possible connections between shifting geopolitics and economics of the post-WWII world and the development of anorexia-specific treatment, which was foremost developed in Milan, Italy.

In Milan, I was able to conduct archival research at one of the earliest centers for treating anorexia from the 1970s, now called La Scuola di Mara Selvini Palazzoli. In these archives I was

able to determine key inter- and intranational correspondences, influences, and approaches to understanding and treating anorexia. As this center still actively treats people with eating disorders, I was also able to make research connections with practicing psychotherapists who were either involved in the formation of anorexia treatment models and/or are contributing to this legacy through their contemporary work.

I also visited Milan's Fondazione Elvira Badaracco, which houses extensive Italian feminist organizational archives. There I was interested in feminist health activism especially concerned with questions of autonomy, the promise and limits of psychoanalysis, and psychiatric confinement. Reading clinical and activist archival literature together helped me identify the family as a structuring concern for questions of health more broadly at the time—and especially for both of these parties, despite their at times oppositional approaches to the institution of the family. That is, cybernetics-influenced family therapy models for anorexia highlighted the need to repair familial bonds for recovery, while feminist organizers often emphasized the need to radically transform or abolish the nuclear family. As a result of these archival observations, my dissertation will partly focus on this tension and different mobilizations of the nuclear family to orient treatment and recovery to different ideological ends.

After Milan, I headed to Bologna to turn my attention to a much older set of historical documents. Bologna, home to the oldest university in Europe, historically functioned as a site of European intellectual connection and scientific knowledge production. Accordingly, the university's extensive library system houses an immense collection of 18-20th century materials related to a multitude of medical and scientific endeavors. In these archives, I located a series of 19th and 20th c. letters and reports from Professore Giovanni Brugnoli, the Italian physician to conceptualize anorexia (or, *anoressia mentale*). I also engaged the work of those in his

intellectual milieu in an attempt to better understand if and how his work and the circulating discourses on anorexia and thinness functioned within the broader landscape of naturalist and anthropological thought, which were largely technologies for colonial expansion and internal differentiation and valuation of Italian citizens. In the archives, I made great progress in finding various connections and determined future actors and correspondences to explore in the rest of my dissertation research.

Overall, the IRIS International Summer Research Award helped make my preliminary dissertation research a success. I collected various forms of useful archival data, made important professional connections, improved my language skills, and determined what next steps are needed to continue successful research. Finally, the IRIS-funded trip allowed me to collect enough data and further develop my ideas such that I am also well-prepared to apply for more competitive and national grants and fellowships.