

"Ambiguous Neutrality: The Roman Catholic Church and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia"

by Michelle Garvey
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With the assistance of a Research and Travel Grant from the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, I traveled to Rome and Bologna, Italy to conduct research for my Senior Honors thesis in History this summer. I visited the State Archives of Italy in Rome and studied official state documents and personal correspondence pertaining to Fascist activity in Ethiopia from 1930 to 1940. I was required to discuss my project with the director of the State Archives before receiving access to its holdings. Explaining my thesis work in Italian a mere three days after arriving in Italy served as a jump-start to my research work and led me to dive into the archives. I worked side-by-side with Italian professors and found myself the sole foreign student and one of the few women at work.

After several days of research, I stumbled upon records of an American woman who traveled extensively throughout the Horn of Africa to observe conditions in Ethiopia following the Italian acquisition of 1935. Ruth Ricci, a New Yorker married to an Italian-American, hoped to spread Fascist propaganda in the United States in order to obtain support for Mussolini and the Fascist movement. The final version of my thesis will include a chapter on Ruth Ricci's proposal in order to illustrate the Italian-American understanding of Fascism in the context of the Ethiopian War.

At the University of Bologna, I focused on Fascist propaganda designed to promote the Ethiopian campaign to Italians living in Italy and abroad. My research in Bologna allowed me to analyze Ruth Ricci's work in light of extensive state efforts to attract support for the occupation. At the university's history library, I met Italian students and experienced university life from the perspective of a foreign student. I followed the rhythms of Italian life and found myself engaged in European affairs, diligently reading Italian newspapers each morning. I spent afternoons at the Piazza di San Stefano, a bustling square near the university's history library, and absorbed Italian culture as a student traveling "da sola."

Financial support from the Kellogg Institute allowed me to combine my language and research skills to explore the Italian-American view of Fascism through an instance of twentieth century European expansionism. Had it not been for the Kellogg Research and Travel Grant, I would not have learned of Ruth Ricci's contribution to the Fascist campaign. Ruth Ricci's story was hidden

in the archives, waiting for a storyteller. I hope to become that storyteller and to use this woman's story as the vehicle by which to explore a complex transnational history.

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