

**IRIS Award for Incoming Graduate Students**  
**Field Report for Summer 2023**

Thanks to the Institute for Regional and International Studies Award for Incoming Graduate Students, I was able to travel to Poland in the summer of 2023, where I spent two months conducting archival research for my dissertation. My project focuses on the idea of conscious motherhood (*świadome macierzyństwo*), which describes practices of birth control and family planning, as well as the accompanying movement to propagate contraceptive knowledge throughout Polish society. During this trip, I was particularly interested in any historical materials pertaining to the Polish Society for Conscious Motherhood, an organization which emerged during the communist Polish People's Republic (1947-1989) to promote reproductive health, sexual education, and family planning.

While abroad, I visited four archives and three libraries. My trip began in Kraków, where I ultimately spent three weeks. While I was there, I browsed the collections of the National Archive and the Jagiellonian Library. The National Archive houses documents from the Kraków chapter of the Polish Society for Conscious Motherhood, wherein I discovered a large volume of administrative records dating back to the Kraków chapter's early years (roughly 1959-1970). Though documents such as preliminary budgets, fiscal records, correspondence files, summary reports, and meeting minutes may not seem promising at first glance, when taken together, they can reveal a detailed record of an organization's challenges and accomplishments, as was the case with the records of the Kraków chapter. I also located several dossiers pertaining to the "specialist medical clinic" (*lekarska poradnia specjalistyczna*) in Kraków, which was established in 1959 and operated by the local chapter for several decades. I learned that this was one of two such clinics opened in the Polish People's Republic by the Society; at these clinics, patients would receive professional medical care and advice pertaining to contraception, family planning, infertility, and sexual disorders, as well as premarital counseling and sexual education.

At the Jagiellonian Library, I found a fascinating collection of the Society's earlier publications, including educational leaflets addressed to a broad section of Polish society—young women, soldiers, medical professionals, parents. Taken in tandem with the aforementioned archival materials, these sources provide a profound insight into the Society's postwar origins and operations, its mission and goals, as well as its earliest attempts to distribute knowledge on topics such as birth control, motherhood, and sex education.

Following this, I spent three weeks in Warsaw, during which I studied several archival and library collections housed at the Central Archives of Modern Records, the National Library, and the University of Warsaw. Thanks to the help of archivists at the Central Archives, I was able to analyze a variety of records pertaining to the Society, including press clippings and government dossiers. Additionally, I was delighted to come across ephemera related to the Society in both the National Library and the University of Warsaw Library—in particular, several pamphlets published by the Society in the late 1950s, which I had read about during my research in Kraków. These pamphlets exemplify some of the Society's earliest publications and outreach efforts.

My most exciting find occurred at the National Library, where I discovered a collection of the Society's multi-disciplinary journal, *Family Issues (Problemy Rodziny)*. Published bi-monthly from 1961 until 2001, the journal provides a fascinating insight into the concerns and activities of the Polish Society for

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Conscious Motherhood and constitutes an expansive record of the Society's historical development. I was able to closely examine the first decades' worth of the journal, and this proved to be the most generative activity of my research trip. I not only unearthed a comprehensive record of the Society's activities at both the local and national level, but I also discovered several details about the organization which caused me to rethink the direction of my project. For example, I was surprised to learn that the Society was heavily involved in the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), becoming its 25th member nation in 1959. Upon discovering that the Society would, *inter alia*, attend international IPPF conferences, host regional ones, and so maintain regular contact with its sister agencies around the world, I realized that I must incorporate a transnational dimension into my work. In order to truly appreciate the Society's efforts, I need to situate them in not only their immediate, state-socialist context, but also acknowledge conscious motherhood as part of a wider, postwar movement to promote the tenets of birth control and family planning on an international scale.

In addition to conducting research in these two cities, I also spent a week at the State Archives in Kielce and Katowice, respectively. While my findings there were not as prolific as in Warsaw and Kraków, I was nevertheless able to access a few records pertaining to the local chapters of the Society, which demonstrated the unique challenges faced by conscious motherhood activists seeking to promulgate birth control in smaller towns.

My time in Poland was incredibly fruitful and productive. Because I was given such a meaningful opportunity to visit so many archives, I am now conversant with the Polish archival system and have established working relationships with several archivists and librarians who will assist me going forward. In addition to conducting an initial survey of the materials that will constitute the foundation of my dissertation, I was also able to scan a multitude of records. This will allow me to start developing my tentative argument and draft the first chapter of my dissertation as soon as I complete my preliminary exams. More importantly, I was able to come up with several new lines of inquiry, which have compelled me to think about my subject matter in an exciting new light. I am now better positioned than ever to conduct further research for my dissertation, and this was all possible due to the generous support of the IRIS travel grant, for which I am incredibly thankful.