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Bio-Bibliography: Eva J. Ross – Catholic Sociologist

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BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY

Eva J. Ross (1903-1969): Catholic Sociologist

Michael R. Hill, EDITOR

THE MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS of Eva Jeany Ross' productive but largely unknown sociological career present opportunities for sociobiographers to examine several contending institutional forces on the professional lives of academic sociologists. Ross' career unfolded at the intersection of five major institutional arenas: religion, education, the nation-state, family, and patriarchy. Each made a profound impact on the shape of Ross' sociological work.

BIOGRAPHY

Ross was born in 1903 in Northern Ireland, took a commercial degree at Bedford College, London (1930), and emigrated to the United States in 1930—where her hope to become a novelist went unfulfilled.¹ She became a U.S. citizen in 1950. Ross travelled widely and an international persona is reflected in her research and writings. Her *Social Origins* (1936), for example, comprises lectures she gave during a visit to Britain. In 1956, Ross represented the American Catholic Sociological Society at the third World Congress of Sociology in The Netherlands. In her mature years, she taught in Colombia and travelled to remote villages to conduct research (see below). During a fateful trip to Ireland in 1969, Ross became unexpectedly ill and died shortly thereafter while visiting Sicily.

Upon her arrival in the U.S., Ross accepted an academic position as instructor in economics and sociology at Nazareth College in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1930 to 1932. She continued instructing in economics and sociology at St. Louis University (in the Maryville and Fontbonne Colleges) while completing her master's degree at St. Louis University, 1932 to 1933. She completed her M.A. thesis in 1934. Moving east, Ross taught at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven from 1935 to 1936 and at the College of St. Elizabeth in nearby New Jersey, 1936-1939, while completing her doctorate at Yale University (Ross 1937). At Yale, Ross was a classmate of Elizabeth Briant

¹ I am indebted to Chet Bunnell, Andrew Greeley, Danelle Moon, Dorothy Krall Newman, and the late Jessie Bernard and Elizabeth Briant Lee for responding to my inquiries about Eva J. Ross.

Lee¹ and Dorothy Krall Newman.² Ross found a permanent academic home at Trinity College, a Catholic women's school in Washington, D.C., where she was professor of sociology and head of the department from 1940 to 1969. In Washington, Ross became friends with Jessie Bernard³ and the two later travelled together in Europe.

Ross' sociological career developed outside the mainstream of American sociology, although she earned a Ph.D. at a powerful school; was a member of the ASA; and was a prolific author. Her doctoral dissertation topic, the cooperative movement, remained her lifelong academic specialty and is the subject of her major substantive book, *Belgian Rural Cooperation: A Study in Social Adjustment* (1940). Unfortunately, her research during the 1960s on rural cooperatives in Colombia apparently remained unpublished. Working as a lay Catholic professional for whom religion was a defining perspective, Ross' work bears an indelible Catholic stamp. Her many articles and textbooks energetically present sociology as an opportunity for the unswerving application of Christian principles and Catholic social action.

Ross made her way in a difficult—and, from the standpoint of mainstream American sociology—a largely invisible alternative sociological network. Her kudos included an honorary Doctor of Letters bestowed by Saint Bonaventure University in 1956. Ross seized a Fulbright opportunity to work in Colombia during 1961-62. She blossomed in that predominantly Catholic nation. Her letters from Colombia (below) reveal a re-energized academic who avidly took to the field and pursued a more active social life. Although she never married—and taught in Catholic women's schools much of her adult life—Ross did not embrace the traditional Catholic sisterhood. As a lay woman, Ross became a recognized sociologist within the strongly patriarchal Catholic educational system.

Ross' scholarly legacy includes co-founding the *American Catholic Sociological Review (ACSR)* and serving as the journal's book review editor for many years. Her *ACSR* contributions include a series of thoughtful (albeit

¹ For biography, see Jan M. Fritz, "Elizabeth Briant Lee," *Women in Sociology*, edited by Mary Jo Deegan (New York: Greenwood, 1991: 249-55).

² Dorothy Krall Newman earned the Ph.D. at Yale in 1937. Her sociological career includes teaching positions in Antioch College, Bermuda College, and the University of Maryland. Her research and administrative assignments include work for the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Carnegie Project on Race and Social Policy, the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, and the National Urban League.

³ For biography, see Mary Jo Deegan, "Jessie Bernard," *Women in Sociology*, edited by M.J. Deegan (New York: Greenwood, 1991: 71-9).

vigorously partisan) attempts to fashion sociological theory in the mold of Catholic orthodoxy. In 1943, her predominantly male colleagues elected her to the presidency of the American Catholic Sociological Society. That Eva Jeany Ross is not remembered today within mainstream sociology speaks not only to the patriarchal structure of sociology combined with Ross' exclusion from the upper reaches of the Catholic university system, but also to a discipline divided by a variety of fragmenting and isolating professional networks.

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