

Mirjana Gross (1922–2012): In Memoriam

FILIP AND NIKOLINA ŠIMETIN ŠEGVIĆ

Im Gewitter der Rosen (1953)

*Wohin wir uns wenden im Gewitter der Rosen,
ist die Nacht von Dornen erhellt, und der Donnerstag des Laubs,
das so leise war in den Büschen,
folgt uns jetzt auf dem Fuß.*

—Ingeborg Bachmann

In the Storm of Roses

*Wherever we turn in the storm of roses,
thorns illuminate the night. And the thunder of a thousand leaves,
once so quite on the bushes,
is right at our heels.*

—[Translated by Mark Anderson]

MIRJANA GROSS, ONE OF CROATIA'S MOST EMINENT HISTORIANS, died on 23 July 2012. As a scholar of the “long nineteenth century” and the history of historiography, her work became widely recognized beyond the borders of Croatia. Only a few months ago, members of various generations of Croatian scholars assembled to honor Professor Mirjana Gross’ on her ninetieth birthday. The event was organized by the Department of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, Professor Gross’s students, and her colleagues. The excitement of young historians and students, hearing Professor Gross speak for the first time in public for years, was evident. Although she had not been at a public event for some years, Gross had still been an active writer, even at the age of ninety. After publishing and actively working to modernize Croatian historiography for over six decades, it is almost impossible to imagine an academic society without her guidance and her critical voice.

Mirjana (Miriam) Gross was born on 22 May 1922 in Zagreb, to Ella and Mavro Gross, a wealthy Jewish tradesman. She finished her high school education in her hometown but also had piano and German literature lessons at home. Often she would mention that all her teachers at the Zagreb Women’s Lyceum had obtained doctoral degrees, as part of the first generation of women to achieve this honor at the University of Zagreb. As a Jew she was

expelled from medical school in 1941, after the founding of the Ustasha-ruled, Nazi satellite Independent State of Croatia (NDH). As a result she was also forced to hide with her family during the war. At the beginning of 1942, her family, along with other Jewish families, moved to Drenje Brdovečko, near the Slovenian border, where the Topol family had been sheltering Jewish citizens and was helping the partisans. Their lives had been turned inside out—after disguising themselves as local farmers, the Gross family spent most of their time hidden in the basement. The Gestapo finally arrested Mirjana and her parents in 1944, more than a year after they had gone into hiding. After being imprisoned for some time in Zagreb, the family was deported to concentration camps. Her father was sent to the Buchenwald, while Ella and Mirjana were taken to the Ravensbrück women's camp, where they stayed until May 1945, working for twelve hours a day at the Siemens electric company. Her father was murdered, while her mother survived and died in 1963. Suffering from tuberculosis and obliged to stay in a sanatorium, Mirjana Gross still managed to complete her history studies at the University of Zagreb.

In 1952, a year after her graduation, she became an employee of the Historical Institute of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, working on archival funds. Six years later she obtained a doctoral degree in history and was appointed as an assistant to Professor Jaroslav Šidak in the Department of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Being Šidak's protégée, Gross was directed to study nineteenth-century Croatian history, especially the period between 1883 and 1914. Under Šidak she became involved in the publishing of *Historijski zbornik*, the most important Croatian historical journal of the time, where she published her first contributions. As a historian, Mirjana Gross focused her attention at first on the worker's movement and on social democracy in Croatia.

A further important step in her career came with her attendance at the Tenth International Congress of the Historical Sciences in Rome in September 1955. Here, for the first time, Gross was exposed to new theories in Western historiography, and she was especially influenced by the *Annales* movement. Later on, in 1971, she became a full professor of modern Croatian history but also offered courses in historiography ("Introduction to History," "Methodology of History"). Professor Gross spent the academic year 1969–70 at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, and in 1978–79 she was a visiting professor at the University of Virginia and lectured at various other American universities. In the next year, Gross was at the University of Klagenfurt. Readers of the *Austrian History Yearbook* will remember her contribution in 1979–80 entitled "Croatian National-Integrational Ideologies from the End of Illyrism to the Creation of Yugoslavia."

Gross long advocated institutional and individual cooperation between Croatian and foreign scholars, in particular those from Austria. As early as the 1960s, Gross gave lectures in Vienna on Croatian history (for example, in 1966 on Francis Ferdinand and the Croatian question at the *Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropainstitut*) and also took part in the International Symposium on Cultural History in Mogersdorf. In this way, Professor Gross nurtured, even in Cold War circumstances, a traditionally *Mittleuropa*-oriented historiography, always pointing to the importance of the Habsburg context in Croatian history, as well as to the place of Croatia in Central Europe.

In difficult times, when the scientific foundations of Croatian historiography were endangered by ideology, Professor Gross managed to establish history as a sovereign social science focused on objectivity, with a critical approach and a modern methodology. She realized the importance of language in studying historical problems, she advocated a more open approach to Western historiography, and she encouraged younger generations to seek new directions. She retired in 1982 and devoted her time to research for her upcoming book projects. In 1998, she was given the honorary academic title of professor emeritus.

Almost every year during her professional career, Mirjana Gross spent at least one month in Vienna, researching in the archives and libraries, which facilitated her many important insights in modern historiography. Each of her important books on nineteenth-century Croatia is at least partially based on sources from the Viennese archives, achieving a careful analysis of the relationship between center and periphery in the Habsburg monarchy. Gross made first steps toward a complex, less event-centered, and more socially oriented history in her contribution to the book *Povijest hrvatskog naroda g. 1860–1914* [*A History of the Croatian People 1860–1914*] in collaboration with Jaroslav Šidak, Igor Karaman, and Dragovan Šepić. This work synthesized the last four decades of Croatian history in the Habsburg monarchy. Gross succeeded in achieving a balanced view of Croatia under the rule of Ban Khuen-Héderváry, a prominent figure of absolutism, by explicating this period according to political, economic, and social factors.

Mirjana Gross put important emphasis on Croatian national integration, identifying ideological patterns within certain phases of this process. She first directed her attention to the Party of (Croatian State) Right (Stranka prava), depicting different shades in the ideological system of Ante Starčević, Eugen Kvaternik, and others. Her book *Izvorno pravaštvo. Ideologija, agitacija, pokret* [*The Initial Party of Right. Ideology, Agitation, Movement*] (2001) presents a history oriented to the basic intellectual foundations of the liberal ideology of the Party of Right, proving not only the political implications of ideology, but also touching on elements in different fields: historiography, philosophy, and the social sciences. Later in her career, Gross directed more attention to the ideological counter-pole, the concept of Yugoslavism, especially as conceived by the historian and politician Franjo Rački. In this way Mirjana Gross managed to describe important elements of Croatian political history, which directly connected to general social transformations. This is also evident in her best-known books *Počeci moderne Hrvatske. Neoapsolutizam u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji 1850–1860* (1985) [*The Beginnings of Modern Croatia. Neoabsolutism in Civil Croatia and Slavonia 1850–1860*] and *Prema hrvatskome građanskom društvu. Društveni razvoj u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina 19. stoljeća* [*Toward a Croatian Middle-class Society. Social Development in Civil Croatia and Slavonia in the Sixties and Seventies of the Nineteenth Century*], (1992; in collaboration with Agneza Szabo), translated into German as *Die Anfänge des modernen Kroatien. Politik und Kultur in Zivil-Kroatien und Slawonien in den ersten dreissig Jahren nach 1848*. Considering her books as parts of one larger project, one cannot fail to recognize a tendency toward a total history of Croatian society, a complex vision of political, intellectual, economic, and cultural interdependencies.

An important part of Mirjana Gross' career was devoted to the study of historiography and methodology. By accepting modern theories fostered by Annaliste or West German historians (in particularly through *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*), she paved a new path for Croatian historiography, in her wish for a more distinctly structuralist vision of history. Her advocacy of the New History during the 1970s, at a time when history had been under pressure from both the Right and Left, eventually meant breaking with some traditionalist views, both those based on an event-driven approach, as well as those authored by rigid Marxists. In her understanding of Marxism, Gross accepted the importance of a socially oriented historical science, dissociated from ideology and mere data collecting. While she never entirely rejected Marxism, Gross offered a “best of both worlds” solution in historiography, trying to apply external influences to particular internal problems in Croatian historiography. Her first synthetic history of historiography appeared under the title *Historijska znanost. Razvoj, oblik, smjerovi* in 1976. Her book *Suvremena historiografija. Korijeni, postigunuća, traganja* [*Contemporary Historiography. Roots, Achievements, Prospects*] was published twenty years

later, presenting a more detailed manual of the history of historiography, mainly oriented toward prominent individuals, schools, and groups of historians from Germany and Austria, France, the United States, and Great Britain. A German version of the book was published in 1998 under the title *Von der Antike bis zur Postmoderne: die zeitgenössische Geschichtsschreibung und ihre Wurzeln*.

Modern Croatian historiography is deeply indebted to Mirjana Gross. Her understanding of history and her sensitivity to methodological innovation enabled the formation of a historical school. Disciples of Mirjana Gross are now extending the range of historical work in Croatia and filling out many of the so-called “white spots” (in her own words) in historiography concerned with the nineteenth century.

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