

Storr, Katherine: *Excluded from the Record. Women, Refugees and Relief, 1914-1929*. Oxford: Peter Lang Ltd/Oxford 2010. ISBN: 978-3-039-11855-7; 318 S.

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Katherine Storr's „Excluded from the Record. Women, Refugees and Relief 1914-1929“ is an unconventional national history of Britain and the First World War. It is a study on (mostly) British women suffragists and Quakers who became „humanitarian activists“<sup>1</sup> – „invisible“ heroines, in Storr's telling – as a reaction to the sudden outbreak of the war. She bases herself primarily on as yet under-used documents such as the Religious Society of Friends' [Quaker's] War Victims Relief Committee Minutes and Correspondences as well as autobiographies and biographies of individuals, such as Edith Lyttelton, Hilda Clark, Helena Swanwick, Elsie Inglis, Ruth Fry, Kathleen Courtney and Francesca Wilson. These sources are supplemented by articles in contemporary specialized journals such as „Jus Suffragii“, „The Common Cause“ and „The Friend“. Storr also adds wonderful photographic records, including one which clearly discredits the idea (or myth) of separate tasks for men and women relief workers: We can see here women building huts.

Storr's motivations for undertaking such a project are boldly stated. In relating to civilians' actions of civil courage, Storr is able to „call into question the justifications given for going to war and indicate the comparative lack of anxiety by governments for the greater proportion of people who remain on the Home Front when compared with political or military objectives“ (p. 2). This lack of attention to refugees' needs has, until recently, resonated in historians' approaches to the war and its aftermath, where the main focus typically remains an array of battlefields and (male) soldiers' or officers' „brave“ experiences.<sup>2</sup> Rather than plan and prepare humanitarian aid to the arriving refugees – mostly children and women as well as elderly men – from Belgium, Austria-Hungary and Germany, Britain secured its borders and isolated groups of foreigners (now „aliens“)

already on its shores: On 5 August 1914 a revised Aliens Restriction Act was passed, „enable[ing] control of foreigners' entry into Britain, deportation or internment of those already here and limitation of the areas where friendly foreigners could live“ (p. 24). Such action is hardly illustrative of a civilization of politics. For that one might examine refugee-relief actors, who are motivated, according to Storr, by a culture of care: „Caring for others of their own sex created a process of gendered self-formation which made available new public identities for recipient and giver of care which helped to constitute women as social subjects and promoted female agency“ (p. 4).

The study comprises three main sections: The first is an examination of British women's voluntary refugee relief efforts in Great Britain dating from the Boer Wars. In this section Storr (a) unravels varying and complicated degrees of „refugee“ distinctions (based on class, nationality – Belgian refugees officially welcomed as „guests“ compared to others labeled „enemy aliens“, for example – and religion), which affected how and by whom refugees were cared for, (b) explores the unique difficulties nationality laws placed on married women and (c) investigates hitherto little known alliances between British suffragists and imperialists, women-only organizations and mixed-gender organizations. The second section provides examples of aid and assistance to Belgium, France and Serbia during the war, which includes marking connections between aid work and military work. The third section generally relates to the aftermath of the war, in terms of the women's response to famine, revolution and blockades,

<sup>1</sup> Sybil Oldfield, *Women humanitarians: a biographical dictionary of British women active between 1900 and 1950*, London 2001; Rebecca Gill, „The Rational Administration of Compassion“: The Origins of British Relief in War, in: *Le Mouvement Social* 227 (2009), pp. 9-26.

<sup>2</sup> In the last five years, however, there have been a number of histories on refugee situations which Storr does not cite. See for example, *Contemporary European History* 16/4 (2007), a special issue on population displacement; Bruna Bianchi (ed.), *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella grande guerra. Deportati, profughi, internati*, Milano 2006; Annette Becker, *Les Cicatrices Rouges 14-18. France et Belgique occupées*, Paris 2010; Stéfane Audoin Rouzeau / Annette Becker, 14-18. *Understanding the Great War*, New York 2003.

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especially in Russia and Poland. Storr also extends her study by following some of her activists' work at the new League of Nations.

The fact that Storr tackles so many issues indicates one of the study's strengths, yet also one of its serious weaknesses. The reading can be quite informative, complex and, however, confusing, as Storr interlaces numerous (often day-to-day) details alongside more fundamental issues, which are rarely appropriately fleshed out. The reader is often confronted, in other words, with a steady stream of less important details (for example lists of names, an abundance of acronyms, seemingly miscellaneous dates) and at times sweeping statements, which detract from a comprehensive understanding of the material. (Footnotes or endnotes would have helped enormously in sorting this out.)

My main criticism is that Storr's horizon is too broad and her monograph too short to adequately and reflectively address each of her chosen topics. Just as the book's title overstates its reach – in picking up the book I did not realize that it was restricted to British efforts – so too her sources provide limited insight into the subject of „women, refugees and relief“. They obviously contribute new knowledge on the work (and biases) of British Quakers and other activists, many of whom were honored by communities they served but not by the United Kingdom. Yet these women's perspectives – and at times their facts – simply from where they stood, were partisan, and Storr, as a start, does not do nearly enough to balance this information. The passages on (Russian-occupied!) Galicia and the Russian province Orenburg on this level are particularly weak (pp. 229–36). Moreover, although Storr well highlights women's deeds under male „figureheads“ or even at times potentially misogynist leadership, she minimizes the greater organized relief work in the area carried on by non-British actors – especially by the Commission for Relief in Belgium, headed by Herbert Hoover, fleetingly mentioned on pages 103 and 114–15<sup>3</sup>, and the American Red Cross, headed by Mabel T. Boardman. Storr summarizes the relief situation of Serbian refugees in Corsica, for example, thus: „Serbian relief committees, including various national Red Cross soci-

eties and American and French organizations worked in ignorance of what the others were doing, resulting in chaos. National rivalry between relief agencies inhibited co-operation [...]“ (p. 210). In-depth transnational investigations of women's refugee-related work (or alternatively, of interned civilian experiences) in the Great War, which would help balance Storr's study, still need to be written. All in all, Katherine Storr has retrieved valuable source material on key women actors of British war history, who appear not to have received as yet adequate national attention.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Little, the Commission for Relief in Belgium disbursed nearly 895 million dollars between November 1914 and August 1919 (John Branden Little, *Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarians, the Great War, and the Remaking of the World* (PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2009), p. 357).