

Sharp, Ingrid; Stibbe, Matthew (Hrsg.): *Aftermaths of War. Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2011. ISBN: 9789004191723; 384 S.

Rezensiert von: Laurie Cohen, Universität Innsbruck

Given how many recently planned (let alone already published) works on the outbreak and experience of the First World War there are, it is a pleasure to pick up a new title that both addresses the 'aftermaths' of this extreme cycle of violence and sets its specific sights on women's perspectives. As the editors point out, 'surprisingly little has been written to date about women's movements and female activists during this time' (p. 3).

Based on a conference in Leeds in 2008 – following up a 2007 publication co-edited by Ingrid Sharp and including several other authors in this volume¹ – this compilation of eighteen case studies (and an introductory essay by the editors) examines thirteen countries (mostly in western, central and eastern Europe), generally between 1918 and 1923. It is arranged around four themes that distinguish various endeavours by women's organizations or movements and/or individual women in 'rebuilding nations and communities or alternatively, in facilitating the rise of new forms of ethno-nationalism and racial intolerance' (p. 8): namely, commemoration and remobilization; renegotiation of gender roles; women's suffrage and political rights; and, reconstructing communities and visions of peace. This volume thus provides a platform for nineteen scholars (fifteen females, four males; some junior, some senior), coming from a variety of disciplines (predominantly from history, sociology, modern languages and gender studies) to take up themes advanced not least in John Horne's excellent comparative essay on (largely male-oriented) cultural demobilization and remobilization in interwar Europe.²

Several essays make new and relevant contributions to European women's and gender history in the immediate interwar years, and I will therefore focus on these.³ But first let me point out what I consider a basic weakness in this collection, not uncommon in con-

ference publications: The editors' failure to delineate a clearer analytical line of purpose. This is immediately apparent in the discretionary choice of dividing the case studies into the above-mentioned four sections, which the editors admit, if in an offhand way, to being in part arbitrary: 'in practice several of the essays could easily fit under more than one heading' (p. 9). Amongst the most striking is Emma Schiavone's essay entitled 'The Women's Suffrage Campaign in Italy in 1919', which is in the section on commemoration, not suffrage. Similarly vague is the selection of nation-states. Why for instance are Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and the United States included, but not Belgium, Denmark, Greece, The Netherlands, Romania, Serbia (except, in Jill Liddington's essay, through the eyes of the Scottish Women's Hospital Units) or Ukraine? Finally, only a brief reason is provided for the five-year timeframe: 'This fairly tight emphasis on the immediate post-war era is justified in view of the crucial importance of this period in shaping future developments' (p. 4). Historians of Germany may not need further clarification (and indeed, four of the essays focus on Germany). But what does this timeframe indicate about Ann Rea's essay on British women's fiction, etc.?

These quibbles notwithstanding, let me highlight a few of the contributions: First, Judith Szapor's well-researched and original

¹ Allison S. Fell / Ingrid Sharp (ed), *The Women's Movement in Wartime International Perspectives, 1914-1919*, Basingstoke 2007; cf. Nancy M. Wingfield / Maria Bucur (ed.), *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, Bloomington 2006, especially the essays by Alon Rachamimov, Maureen Healy, Eliza Ablovatski and Maria Bucur.

² John Horne, *Kulturelle Demobilisierung 1919-1939. Ein sinnvoller historischer Begriff?*, in: Wolfgang Hardtwig (ed.), *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit 1919-1939*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 129-150.

³ I exclude three fine contributions, however, because more extensive versions have appeared elsewhere: Erika Kuhlman on 'the Rhineland' (see her monograph *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War*, Basingstoke 2008); Christine Bard on 'feminisms in France' (see her monograph *Les Filles de Marianne*, Paris 1995); and Olga Shnyrova on women's suffrage in (Soviet) Russia (see recent monographs by Irina Yukina, *Russkii' feminizm kak vyzov sovremenosti*, Sankt-Peterburg 2007; and Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, *Equality & Revolution. Women's Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905-1917*, Pittsburgh 2010).

essay, 'Who Represents Hungarian Women?' examines Hungarian society (1918-1920) from the perspective of the polarization between the conservative and liberal bourgeois women's movements. Whereas Hungarian women liberals (members of the Association of Feminists/FE) had made significant strides prior to the outbreak of war in promoting the so-called first wave feminist agenda (e.g. suffrage rights, equal access to education and jobs), by 1919 they found themselves 'in disarray' (p. 247). Conservative and anti-Semitic women's organizations, connected to the right-wing Christian National Unity Party, had gained the upper political hand, both in persuasion and in financing. Szapor admirably contextualizes the Hungarian socio-political circumstances and situates these competing women in international women's movements as well. This essay is furthermore well complemented by sociologist Judit Acsády's thoughtful comparative review of the different gender norms represented by FE and the conservative Catholic Hungarian Women's National Federation (MANSZ).

Gabriella Hauch's essay 'Sisters and Comrades' underlines an initial and unusually strong postwar solidarity between liberal and Catholic Austrian women activists and Austria's little understood – especially from a gender perspective – left revolutionary 'Räte' ('workers' councils') movement (1918-1920). The latter, Hauch points out, remarkably did not take up the issue of sex/gender equality: 'While the Soviets in Bolshevik Russia installed women's sections, it seemed that the Austrian Räte could neither accommodate the (political) skills of women nor represent their interests' (p. 229). (A comparison with the quite different role of women activists in the Bavarian Räte might have extended Hauch's gender analysis.)

Fatmira Musaj and Beryl Nicholson ably explore women activists in Albania and present new archival material to explain the particularities of this little-known multiethnic, multilingual and largely patriarchal part of Europe. Local women activists focused on the doable: promoting education, literacy and family rights. Yet they also reached out to women's groups abroad, including various

church groups in the United States.

Last but not least, Matthew Stibbe, co-editor, revisits the life of Elsa Brändström, often portrayed favourably as 'the Angel of Siberia' for her work – 'archetypal „maternal“ activities' (p. 348) – for the Swedish Red Cross in rescuing German and Austrian POWs in Siberia. Stibbe presents a more nuanced reading of this activist, living in postwar Germany but unattached to German women's organizations and political parties. He admirably uncovers a speech of 1922 that reveals Brändström's view of gendered social cohesion. That is, Brändström counsels returning POWs to 'respect their wives', reminds families to 'show consideration and understanding for their [the POWs'] experiences' and advocates a postwar German society that recaptures 'the feeling of belonging that was felt by every comrade out there in enemy captivity, simply because he was a German' (p. 342). Yet Stibbe clearly errs in claiming that Brändström in 1923 was the second woman Nobel Peace Prize nominee after Bertha von Suttner (p. 347). Indeed, four percent of the nominees between 1901 and 1925 were women, including non-laureates Belva Lockwood (1901), Priscilla Hanna Peckover (1903), and three women mentioned in this volume: Rosika Schwimmer (1917) and – with Brändström in 1922 (!) – Eglantyne Jebb and Séverine (French journalist Caroline Rémy de Guebhard). Significantly, Brändström was in the running through 1929.⁴ A comparison of Brändström with Austrian Yella Hertzka, criticized by her feminist pacifist colleagues for her 1919-1920 fundraising efforts in the USA (like Brändström's) on behalf of Austrian POWs in Siberia, might yield further insight.

HistLit 2012-2-183 / Laurie Cohen über Sharp, Ingrid; Stibbe, Matthew (Hrsg.): *Aftermaths of War. Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923*. Leiden 2011, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.06.2012.

⁴ Frøydis Eleonora Veseth, Women and the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and Nominees from 1901 to 1951 (unpublished manuscript, Hovedoppgave Vår 2000).