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A nyomor felfedezése Bécsben és Budapesten: Szociális riportok a 19–20. század fordulóján [The discovery of poverty in Vienna and Budapest: Social reports at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries]. By Roland Perényi. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó – BTM Kiscelli Múzeum, 2018. 169 pp.

Roland Perényi's book is a novel endeavor to study various forms of social reports that were written by reporters with diverse social and political backgrounds in Vienna and Budapest at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perényi plausibly argues that these written and visual sources offered unique insights into the largely unknown social problems (poverty, want, famine, homelessness, etc.) of metropolises and put these “social evils” on the mental map of middle-class people, thus drawing considerably more attention to them. However, these sources are important not simply because they mediate social realities, but also because they often provide informed plans and suggestions on how to solve the social questions addressed, which are occasionally investigated in due compliance with “social scientific” methods (statistics, systematic analyses of case studies, etc.). Perényi succeeds in showing his reader the “dark side” of the two capitals, which were known in the period mostly for their dynamic development, rich culture, and splendor.

The social reports chosen as major sources are examined with the help of an impressive range of methods, from urban and media history, combined analyses of textual and visual representations, and comparative perspectives. Furthermore, Perényi's work also scoops into the rich reservoir of contemporary documentaries and films featuring social reports in order to explore how social questions permeated the public imagination and enhanced communal interest in Vienna and Budapest in the prewar and postwar eras.

First, Perényi draws on the Anglo-Saxon origins of some of the social reports (Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth, John Thomson, Adolphe Smith, Jacob Riis, and Nelly Bly), as well as German representatives of the genre (Eduard Deutsch, Paul Göhre, and Hans Oswald), to show that when the genre reached the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, it had already subsumed an exuberant plethora of methodological and intellectual endeavors, from urban ethnography and anthropology to urban sociology and sociography. Nevertheless, as Perényi points out almost innumerable times, social reports always retained a belletrist vein; they mostly reached out to the reader with a picturesque literary tone

in order to foster empathy. Thus, social reports used scholarly methods but remained within the generic boundaries of reporting (pp.19–27).

Secondly, the book concisely surveys the most important aspects of the turn-of-the-century urban history of Vienna and Budapest. By taking a comparative look at the astonishing economic development of the two capitals, Perényi is able to contrast this development effectively with a simultaneous comparative tableau of growing social “evils” in both cities, which ultimately provoked a turn in social policy (child care, criminal policy, the decriminalization of poverty, housing, etc.).

However, the Austrian and Hungarian social reports suggest that there were considerably more differences between the two cities. The political movement of social democracy and other leftish intellectual groups had more extensive and stable positions with more influential newspapers (*Gleichheit*, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*) in Vienna than in Budapest. Thus, social reporters had greater opportunities to report on “social evils” in the imperial capital, which were primarily want and poverty. Their basic aim was to form the identity of workers (Victor Adler, Emil Bader) and mock the middle classes (Hans Maria Truxa). Moreover, alongside the often picturesque depiction of poor districts and slums, reporters also focused on the combined application of textual descriptions (report, statistics) and visual representations (photos and later films) in order better to catch the imagination of middle-class people and offer a more lucid, effective, and concise documentation of the topic (Emil Kläger and Hermann Drawe *Durch die Wiener Quartiere des Elends und Verbrechens*). Nonetheless, the “father” of Central European social report, Max Winter, united these efforts in his oeuvre. Winter was not only a social reporter but also an activist in various associations dedicated to helping the poor (Pfleger). Winter’s importance lies not only in the fact that he produced more than 1,500 reports in 38 years (p.50), but his work inspired several important social political measures (e.g. housing acts and child care reform in Vienna).

In line with their Austrian counterparts, Hungarian social reports clearly depicted the critical social aspects of an emerging metropolis. Social criticism in Budapest was less radical and did not have an explicit leftish lean (Gyula Révész and Márton Molnár), which, as Perényi lucidly explains, was due to the fact that political debates were preoccupied with the reform of franchise in Hungary and a general criticism of the conservative political system. Hungarian social reporters included women in their ranks (Lydia Kovács, Mrs. Antal Géza, and Margit Fried), who for the most part drew on romantic

images of poverty. With the emergence of mass media and newspapers with high circulation numbers, the first major figure of social reports also appeared. Kornél Tábori was a man of many talents (lawyer, organizer, publicist, entrepreneur) who, with his colleague Vladimir Székely, the head of the media department of criminal investigations, was engaged in producing criminal reports, including numerous passages on the Budapest poor (in 1908, he began to produce a series entitled *A bűnös Budapest* [Sinful Budapest]). Tábori also successfully united traditional methods of a publicist (humorous conversation pieces, genre-descriptions) with that of the new media (photos, slides, and, later, films). Nonetheless, Tábori's visions were less critical than Winter's dirge, which might be explained by Hungarian society's persisting "semi-feudal" social perceptions. Perényi argues that both Winter's and Tábori's reports show that these works raised the issue of empowerment: reports were intended to show the "colonial world of the poor," which had to be "colonized" by the Enlightened middle class, and they also facilitated seeking out new ways of controlling the terra incognita of turn-of-the-century urban life (pp.76–78). Furthermore, both Winter and Tábori excelled in writing scripts and preparing materials for early documentaries on urban poverty (pp.121–26).

One of the most valuable contributions of Perényi's work to interpretations of the social realities of the period in question is how he manages to show how this combination of new sources (social reports in articles, on photos, and in films) redrew the mental maps of urban classes, especially the middle classes, pertaining to the realm of the poor, and how these textual and visual representations can be interpreted as projections of existing social and political hierarchies of the empowered classes. This is particularly apparent in the examination of the so-called Urania Movement, both in Vienna and Budapest, which aimed to provide general education for the working classes by offering inexpensive tickets, large rooms, and readymade social messages. And therein stands the greatest merit of the book: it greatly contributes to the re-interpretation of various social groups' mutual understandings of each other's complex social realities through the examination of social reports.

Perényi's work is richly illustrated with photos, pictures, maps, and drawings, and this makes the reading experience livelier. He succeeds in exploiting the scholarly potential inherent in the analysis of social reports, which was part of his earlier research on the social history of crime in fin-de-siècle Budapest. Perhaps the only shortcoming is that more quotations could have been added to the text, especially in the discussions of the various functions of the social

reports (the length of the book would certainly have allowed for this). All in all, the book is a must read for social or media historians and practically any reader who is interested in the cultural and social realities of the imperial capitals at the turn of the century.

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