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**The Social History of Metropolitan Crime. Everyday Delinquency in fin de siècle
Budapest**

Doctoral Thesis

Crime and generally most types of deviant behaviour are present in every society. Criminality still doesn't constitute a kind of anthropological constant. Delinquency, just like any form of deviant behaviour is considered to be a socially constructed concept that is largely determined by specific social conditions. The most commonly accepted ideas about crime are usually defined and controlled by social groups in power, by the elites. These notions of crime dominate the functioning of jurisdiction, the penal system and finally the institutional mechanisms of law-enforcement. It follows that criminality as a social phenomenon has its own historicity.

The present thesis focuses on social discourses — or to be more precise, the middle-class notions — about crime in fin de siècle Budapest. We believe that — and this statement is now generally accepted within the discipline of the history of crime — historians of criminality cannot seek for the „reality” of delinquency in the past, because the sources available are by no means suitable for this. In some rare cases you can find sources, where offenders themselves testify about their deeds, and even rarer, if victims do so. The large number of written and archival sources, however, provides an opportunity to obtain insight into the social, political and scientific discourses about crime in 19-20th century Budapest.

The analysis focuses primarily on the so called ordinary or everyday crime. We classified all the offences with minor material damages or bodily injury — like theft, robbery, slander, assault and battery — as everyday crime. In these cases the chance to become a part was greater for an ordinary city dweller (as a victim, a witness, or even as an offender). Of course, this does not mean that we completely exclude famous criminal cases from our analysis. In some cases we can only illuminate some features of everyday crime by taking a highly publicized criminal case as an example because of the lack of sources.

The paper reflects the results of a complex research of urban and social history. The aim of our analysis is to show the social problems and tensions typical for turn of the century Budapest and the visions of the middle classes about these through the examination of a given social phenomenon, namely crime.

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first we examine the „official” discourses of crime within jurisdiction, law enforcement and the science of criminology which was

established at the end of 19th century in Hungary. In the second part we observed through the public channels of information exchange and through various forms of urban popular culture the images of crime and criminals living in the minds of everyday people. Both units of the paper are divided into three chapters each. In each chapter different methodological approaches were used. The first and fourth chapters are based on a discourse analysis of narrative sources, while in the second and fifth chapters we carried out an analysis of statistical data. We felt that it's not sufficient enough to adapt only these two approaches, therefore a third type of method was added, where both statistical and narrative sources were used. Here we focused on the connections between the spatial growth of the city and the characteristics of urban crime in Budapest. By placing crime in urban space and drawing up the mental maps of „criminal Budapest” we can get closer to understand how citizens perceived the social problems of their times.

The time limits of the investigation represent nearly two decades between 1869 and 1914. We start our investigations with the year 1896, which represents the start of a new era from the aspect of urban rather than political history. 1896 is regarded in works of urban history as a date that marks the end of the first period of urbanization after the unification of the cities Buda, Pest and Óbuda in 1873, but also the highlight of this period with the Millenium Exhibition. Moreover, the year 1896 also means the beginning of the era of modern metropolitan society — and also the outset of social tensions. However, 1896 is not only due to the Millenium Exhibition and the associated festivities which of course ment a major challenge for the authorities. Many other factors also justify our decision to select 1896 as a starting point. The main organizational units of the Budapest Metropolitan State Police (established by the Police Act in 1881) were formed at the beginning and middle of the 1890's. The criminal records department, the detective division all were organized in these years and the press bureau — which is particularly important for our analysis — was just established as an indepentend institution in 1896. Even the main framework of criminal law was developed in the 1890's. This framework defined the offences regarded as crime and constituted the fundamental institutions of penal jurisdiction. The social tensions (and the associated administrative and policing problems) connected to the rapidly growing suburban areas also became sharper in this period. Last but not least, many important sources were first published in these years. The annual reports of the chief constable, the statistical yearbooks of the Statistical Office of Budapest and also many newspapers with the characteristics of modern mass media were published the first time in the 1890s.

The closing date of our investigation doesn't need to be explained in detail. With the outbreak of World War I the last phase of the so called „happy peacetimes” ended abruptly. Although most historians regard the end of World War I and the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the closing date of this period, from the angle of the history of crime we must close our analysis preferably with the beginning of the war. This decision can be justified most of all by crimino-sociological considerations. With the outbreak of World War I a significant part of male population left Budapest to serve on the frontlines. With that the social framework of urban criminality changed enormously. In addition, as the war progressed, the growing economic problems and tensions observed in everyday life caused the rise of new forms of delinquency which were to be sanctioned by state powers.

Based on these statements therefore, the period between 1896 and 1914 must be regarded as a homogeneous era from the standpoint of both criminal and urban history. During these almost twenty years between the two endpoints, however, a number of social problems emerged, which problems highly influenced official concepts of crime. As an effect of the development of social policy for example has arisen the question of juvenile offenders and the reintegration of former prisoners. This, in turn suggests that during this period fundamental changes have taken place in the social discourses around „modern” urban crime. The main goal of the dissertation is to show the main characteristics of these changes.

A major development of our period can be observed in the field of the scientific discourse of crime. The first criminal statistics were published in Hungary at the turn of 18th and 19th centuries but the contours of modern criminal statistics allowing long-term comparisons settled only at the end of the period examined in this paper. Nevertheless, some statisticians made their attempts to analyze the social indicators of crime based on the available fragmentary data (Chapter I.1.).

At the same time the impact of European criminological thoughts led to the institutionalisation of a new science investigating explicitly the social phenomenon of crime. The first representatives of Hungarian criminology were eager to acquire the newest knowledge of foreign criminology and adapt them to Hungarian conditions. At the beginning of the examined period primarily the theories of Italian physician Cesare Lombroso and his „positive school” had a dominant impact on Hungarian criminal sciences. At the beginning of 20th century however, parallel to the paradigm shift in European criminological thought the scientists interpreting up to this point the external features of the body started to stress the importance of social factors like poverty, alcoholism, marital status and housing (Chapter I.2.).

It is due to this change of attitude that criminal law was reformed at the end of the examined era. The first reform of the penal code in 1908 meant a fundamental change in the perception of crime. The old penal code developed in 1878 was nearly thirty years without any change in force. Compared to it, the reforms considered the phenomenon of crime more differentiated.

First, the reformed penal code took the causes and circumstances of a committed crime more into account. This had an important effect on the criminal prosecutions since various experts like physicians, weapon experts and psychologists had an increasingly important role in supporting the process. On the other hand, the reform made a distinction between individual offenders, particularly with regard to age and previous criminal records.

A significant innovation of penal reform was that juvenile offenders were treated separately. As a result the first juvenile courts were organized. From this time on juvenile offenders received a much more lenient treatment. But this special treatment also meant a criminalization of many behavioral patterns typical for juveniles. As the social control and discipline broadened — one sign of this process is the build-up of the system of detention centers — the social pressure on juveniles grew more and more.

The reform of criminal law in 1908 drew an important distinction in the case of adult offenders too. After the changes criminology separated criminals into a larger group of „casual” offenders and a smaller - but from the aspect of the social order – a far more dangerous stratum of professional criminals. As an effect of the reform judges practised more lenient punishments (including a wider use of suspended punishments) in the first group of offenders and recidivists on the other hand were disciplined with the maximum harshness of the law.

While statisticians of the era thought that professional criminals represent only a portion of the „reality” of crime, for the police the image of the criminal was clearly determined by the concept of „professional criminals”. One of the most important tasks for the professional police at the end of 19th century was recognizing and recording criminal identities. In order to do this, metropolitan police did its best to keep in step with western police organizations, so they urged to acquire the knowledge about the newest techniques of identification and to apply them in practice. However, as these methods of recording could be used effectively only in cases of recidivists and professional criminals, therefore the police perception of crime was both on the corporate and individual level clearly dominated by the concept of the „criminal classes” (Chapter I.3.). A good example for this statement is a

register from 1896 containing 14 000 names and personal data that served the purpose of making the identification of recidivists easier.

In the next part of our paper we tried to examine the main characteristics of crime based on police records from the turn of the century. The analysis showed that although there are some signals suggesting the process of „modernization” of crime — a sign for this is the increase of delinquency related to the capitalistic economic system — but the reorganization of the structures of crime doesn't mean a „civilizing process” within crime; during the period the overall number of violent crimes didn't decrease, moreover there appeared new forms of violence which can be attributed to the characteristics of metropolitan life (Chapter II.1.).

The characteristic process of urbanization in Budapest highly influenced the position of crime within urban space. In the eyes of police officials and the press most of all the dynamically developing suburbs indicated „criminal areas”. However, street politics of police was not determined by the expansion of control over districts inhabited by workers and lower existences, but by weaving the net of surveillance in middle-class areas thicker (Chapter III.1.). Nevertheless, the Budapest Metropolitan Police increased its attention to the suburbs of the city. A sign of this process is the extension of the official police authority first in 1890 to the suburbs Újpest and Rákospalota, then in 1912 to Kispest, Erzsébetfalva and Pestszentlőrinc. The extension of police powers is not only interesting from the aspect of public safety and urban crime; it can be regarded as a first step of the annexation of suburban areas into Budapest and with that of the concept of Greater Budapest (Chapter III.2.).

Fin de siècle Budapest created its own urban culture where broader and broader classes took part both on the producer's and consumer's side. Although producers of popular culture came mainly from the middle-classes and petit bourgeoisie, we can state that the broader audience also took part in shaping this mass culture: the conscious behavior of the consumers determined the success or failure of a cultural enterprise. Thus, until the First World War a specific mass culture was born in Budapest mainly determined by the market and consumed by all social groups without any exception.

The issue of crime played an important role both in modern mass media and in many forms of popular urban entertainment. While various newspapers tried to report different forms of crime in a more or less balanced way, by contrast popular literature like detective novels or wax-works cabinets — which evolved from fair spectacles to a popular form of urban entertainment — were mostly thematised by bloody murders. We can observe at the same time that the new forms of popular entertainment based on pictorial information like

slideshows combining photos with shorter movies and lectured texts or motion pictures put great emphasis on crime from the beginning (Chapter IV.1.).

Of course, various types of newspapers show significant differences in their reports about crime. The so called gutter press appearing at the turn of the century in Budapest reported about sensational criminal cases much more intensively and detailed and often supplemented by visual information. „Serious” political newspapers on the other hand were characterized by short, seemingly objective reportages but also by a larger quantity of criminal news. Our analysis showed at the same time that the political newspaper of the labour movement, *Népszava* was the only newspaper that used criminal reports to transmit political ideas (Chapter V.2.).

Besides the modern, business-based media new ways of journalism appeared. Both popular criminal literature and the so-called social report — a genre using at least partially methods of the social sciences to illuminate the dark side of urban life — are closely related to the genre of reportage. In the creation of both of these literary genres many reporters, novellists and police officials took part, who — apart from the fact that they realized the financial opportunities inherent in the processing of new issues — tried to call the attention of their audiences on the social problems of the city. In the case of popular criminal literature this was rather a secondary goal, and that’s why the image of the criminal mediated by these works was rather shematic, naive and romantic. On the other hand, social reporters (often accompanied by the police) visiting city slums have shown a much greater social sensitivity in their works. An important link between these two, seemingly distinct genres represents the police reporter Kornél Tábori who introduced the genre of social report, widespread in western journalism, at the end of the 1900s in Budapest (Chapter VI.1.).

To sum up, we can state that official and popular concepts of crime in fin de siècle Budapest show a number of elements already observed by social historians in other European and American cities of the 19th century. But we must add that while in many western cities the ever-increasing threat advertised by political and press propaganda caused a moral panic, we can observe only minor traces of this process in the case of Budapest. Our analysis has shown that the statement made by historians Thomas Lindenberger and Andrew Lees for Berlin also applies for fin de siècle Budapest: although there was some increase in inner political and social tensions and contemporary observers also took note of some disturbing phenomena, the fear of a crime wave overthrowing the existing order of society didn’t imbue society.