

Argumentative Uses of ‘Otherness’ and ‘Foreignness’ in Pre-Modern Political Debates in Central Europe

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Abstract. The article investigates political debates about royal succession and noble participation in fifteenth-century Hungary. The political language of that time was often marked by strong references to ‘own’ (seemingly ‘national’) identities and aspects of ‘foreignness’ that were regarded as (or at least argumentatively marked as) unwelcome. While references like this have been interpreted as supposed proof of a pre-modern form of xenophobia, this article suggests analysing the complexity of political structures, the various layers of communication with different legitimization strategies, and forms of conflict escalation. Drawing from recent sociological studies, medieval discourses and semantics of ‘foreignness’ can then be understood as means of shaping identities and legitimizing claims for societal participation.

Keywords: Medieval Hungary, political history, foreignness, political language, royal succession

Seen from today’s perspective, the topic of ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’ as a legitimization strategy in pre-modern Europe is of rather sad relevance: in many regions of the world, in different countries and different social contexts, politicians, publicists and populists use the argument of ‘foreignness’ in political debate. By marking certain people as ‘different’ they try to construct national, cultural or religious ‘identities’ that not only include certain people, but consequently also exclude certain groups for various reasons (among them ethnicity, race, religion, and physical disposition probably being the most frequently referred to parameters).¹ Besides these rather damaging references to ideas of ‘foreignness’ and ‘otherness’, narrations and reflections upon these terms also fruitfully enter political debates about inclusion and exclusion as components of cultural heritage.²

1 This phenomenon has attracted broad attention in sociological and historical research. For some examples of current debates, see Brylla and Lipiński, eds, *Im Clash der Identitäten*; Liebsch, *Europäische Ungastlichkeit*; Buchenhorst, ed., *Von Fremdheit lernen*.

2 Kowalski, Piekarska-Duraj, and Törnquist-Plewa, eds, *Narrating Otherness in Poland and Sweden*.

Just as today, 'otherness' and 'foreignness' were referred to and used as legitimizing tools in previous centuries. In pre-modern Europe, these terms were often applied as argumentative strategies in times of socio-political change, when discourses usually touched on the most fundamental social aspects: they revolved around the definition of a political community, claims of its members to specific rights and prerogatives, or around key categories that constitute forms of belonging.³ Features like kinship, status, religion, or common customs could shape identities in a constructive way.⁴ Other fashions of defining social groups were rather destructive, such as the classification of people as 'others' in order to deny them a significant role in public affairs.⁵

In history, art history, literary and theological studies, the topic of 'foreignness' and 'otherness' in the Middle Ages has been dealt with in great detail and from different perspectives. Previous studies were dedicated to perceptual⁶ or migration history,⁷ offered interdisciplinary⁸ and transcultural perspectives,⁹ focused on visual culture,¹⁰ on inclusive social mechanisms (under the premises of diversity studies),¹¹ analyzed the developments of medieval concepts of 'nation'¹² or discussed the existence of 'racism' and race/ethnicity in the Middle Ages.¹³ In contrast, the analysis of the relevant semantics in relation to their function in political discourse played a rather subordinate role.¹⁴

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- 3 Schnabel-Schüle, "Herrschaftswechsel"; Rock, *Herrscherwechsel*; Bartlett, *Blood Royal*, 397–428. Cp. also Seabra de Almeida Rodrigues, Santos Silva, and Spangler, eds, *Dynastic Change*.
 - 4 Gingrich and Lutter, "Kinship and gender relations"; Gingrich and Lutter, eds, *Visions of Community*.
 - 5 Coskun and Lutz, eds, *Fremd und rechtlos*, cp. especially the Editors' Introduction, 9–56.
 - 6 See the latest volumes: Vercamer and Pleszczyński, eds, *Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages*; Goetz and Wood, eds, *Otherness in the Middle Ages*. See also Aurast, *Fremde, Freunde, Feinde* and the contributions in: Classen, ed., *Meeting the Foreign*.
 - 7 For a sociological perspective, see Lang-Wjtasik, ed., *Vertrautheit und Fremdheit*.
 - 8 López Quiroga, Kazanski, and Ivanišević, eds, *Entangled Identities*.
 - 9 Gaupp and Pelillo-Hestermeyer, eds, *Diversity and Otherness*.
 - 10 Schober and Hipfl, eds, *Wir und die Anderen*; Saurma-Jeltsch, "Facets of Otherness"; Bradbury and Moseley-Christian, eds, *Gender, Otherness, and Culture*; Jaritz "Visual Image."
 - 11 Bernhardt, ed., *Inklusive Geschichte*; Rutz, ed., *Die Stadt und die Anderen*.
 - 12 See for example Šmahel, "Idea of nation"; Šmahel, "Divided Nation"; Szűcs, *Nation und Geschichte*, Graus, *Nationenbildung*; Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*.
 - 13 Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages*; Heng, *The Invention of Race*. Cp. also the critical remarks by Schiel, "Rezension."
 - 14 Cp. Münkler, "Sprache als konstitutives Element"; Strohschneider, "Fremde in der Vormoderne"; Koller, "Die Fremdherrschaft."

Of course, we cannot close this gap satisfactorily with our special issue of *Historical Studies on Central Europe*.¹⁵ Still, we would like to offer a new approach by discussing argumentative usages of ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’ as legitimization strategies in pre-modern Europe and encourage in-depth comparative studies. With case studies from Hungary, Bohemia¹⁶ and Poland-Lithuania¹⁷ between the fourteenth and sixteenth century, we offer a comparative approach to the topic that permits taking into account *longue-durée* continuities in addition to dynamics and changes. We are interested in the reasons why ‘foreignness’ became a political issue in times of upheaval or change. Analytically, this perspective includes both the groups that referred to it, and the semantical expressions of ‘foreignness’. Based on this, we seek to explore the connotations of ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’ in political debates and their meaning: In what way did the use of ‘foreignness’ meet argumentative purposes?

Dynastic changes in fifteenth-century Hungary

I would like to exemplify this approach with some remarks on debates about royal succession and noble participation in fifteenth-century Hungary, thus exposing the complexity of political structures and the various layers of communication in the discourses of that time. Drawing from recent sociological studies, medieval discourses and semantics of ‘foreignness’ will be interpreted as means of shaping forms of belongings and legitimizing claims for societal participation.

Such debates often took place in dynastic transformation phases, which included both the establishment of ‘new’ families as ruling dynasties and the subsequent process of coping with those changes discursively.¹⁸ Fundamental dynastic changes did not mean only the establishment of new ruling families. Rather, with every change of rule, disputes between the pretenders to the throne, the accompanying ‘new’ and the previous ‘old’ elite evolved, concerning claims to rule and political participation. In addition to internal constellations, external actors in the context of the European balance of power also had decisive influence on the respective

15 The articles published in this volume were presented in a session on *Making Foreigners in Pre-Modern Central Europe: Legitimization Strategies in Times of Socio-political Change (14th–16th c.)* organized by Julia Burkhardt for the for the Fourth Biennial MECERN Conference (University of Gdańsk, 7–9 April 2021). On the conference, see Stöckle, “Tagungsbericht”. My contribution summarizes key aspects I developed and present in different German language articles (currently being in print). See the forthcoming articles Burkhardt, “Fremde Herrscher”; Burkhardt, “Waffengewalt und Wortgefechte” and Burkhardt, “Communitas regni.”

16 Birkel, “Vos autem estis advena”; Žurek, “Indigenous, or Foreign.”

17 Klymenko, “The Fasting of the Others.”

18 Cp. Hartmann, “Thronfolgen.”

outcome of such conflicts. Numerous contemporary sources document that the decisive events of dynastic transformation phases and the struggle over claims to power and political participation not only appear relevant from the retrospective perspective of historians, but also had a profound effect on the social and political structures of the countries in question. Chronicles, legal texts and polemics document how multifaceted the arguments about the legitimacy of the change of rule and political access rights were. Legal issues such as the dynastic right to vote and the noble election of kings were compared and weighed up and thus determined who decided on the assignment of the royal dignity, or who confirmed it.¹⁹

In regard to the considerable number of dynastic changes, but at the same time also the variety of the socio-political constellations underlying these changes, the late medieval kingdom of Hungary is a particularly fascinating case: between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth century Hungarian kings represented no less than five noble families, a variety that mirrored both the dynastic changes in that period as well as the number of competing families in that region (1. Angevin–Luxembourg 1382/95; 2. Luxembourg–Habsburg–Jagiellonian 1437/40; 3. Habsburg–Hunyadi 1458; 4. Hunyadi–Jagiellonian–Habsburg 1490/1526).²⁰ These transitions turned out to be formative processes that fundamentally shaped the political, material, economic and cultural structures of the kingdom. Dynastic transformation phases were complex and multiple competitive situations, with strong influence from both internal as well as external actors, including the competing pretenders to the throne, various noble parties and foreign stakeholders such as emperors, popes and neighboring princes. The fact that parties formed around the respective candidates resulted from the logic of dynastic upheavals and 'throne disputes'. However, these were no fundamental 'divisions', but rather temporary frictions. And although contemporaries reflected on these developments, sometimes perceiving them as instable or even programmatically complained about their disruptive character, we cannot determine that these situational conflict lines had any discernible effect beyond the actual disputes.

The political language of these debates was, however, continually marked by strong reference to 'own' (seemingly 'national') identities and aspects of 'foreignness' that were regarded as (or at least argumentatively marked as) unwelcome. This is

19 For an introduction, see Rock, "Depositions"; Dumolyn and Haemers, "A Bad Chicken"; Dumolyn and Haemers, "Political Poems."

20 Engel, Kristó, and Kubinyi, *Histoire de la Hongrie médiévale*; Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*; Süttő, "Der Dynastiewechsel"; Burkhardt, "Das Erbe der Frauen"; Mályusz, "Az első Habsburg"; Hödl, *Albrecht II*; Dybaś and Tringli, eds, *Das Wiener Fürstentreffen*. Of course, one should not forget the dynastic change from Árpád to Angevin in the early fourteenth century, see Burkhardt, "Regno Ungarie". Since arguments of 'foreignness' did play a role here as well, it would be interesting to compare possible argumentative continuities; this, however, is a task for further studies.

astonishing in various ways. Since the earliest times, the Hungarian Kingdom had been a multi-cultural entity:²¹ Hungarian kings had settled merchants, scholars and lawyers from other countries in the country or accepted them into their entourage, while well-developed trade routes connected the country with merchants and diplomats from other regions.²² Still, ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’ remained arguments that were continuously used in political debates, either to deny individuals or groups political participation (exclusive function) or to strengthen the position of one or another group (inclusive function).

In a remarkable way, these connections gained importance during and after the reign of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437).²³ Sigismund’s ascension to the Hungarian throne was based on his wife’s (Mary of Hungary’s) position, who had followed her father Louis I (also known as Louis the Great, Hungarian king 1342–82; Polish king 1370–82) to the Hungarian throne in 1382.²⁴ His path to the crown, however, had not been easy. After Mary’s succession, several magnate factions that tried to exert influence on the young queen competed for rule and fought against candidates for the throne and against each other with both weapons and words. Consequently, instead of Sigismund’s rise to power occurring automatically, it had to be carefully negotiated in 1387. When several influential nobles agreed upon his coronation, they made it dependent upon certain conditions. Among them were royal promises such as relying on the nobles’ and prelates’ advice, keeping the alliance with his electorate, and protecting the crown, the country and its inhabitants. One particular passage is dedicated to the question of ‘foreigners’: Sigismund promised not to appoint ‘foreign’ persons to royal offices.²⁵ Here, the idea of different identities—a ‘foreign’ identity and a ‘local’ Hungarian one—became relevant in an astonishingly clear way. Sigismund’s royal promise tied his policy to the nobles’ consent and thus equipped the nobles with means of exerting pressure. The following years would show that they knew how to make use of it: continuous debates about the ‘foreign’ counsellors of King Sigismund marked the years after his coronation in 1387. Although Sigismund tried to rearrange the court structure and office holders to his advantage, the noble elite continued to claim political influence when Queen Mary died in 1395 (without having given birth to an heir) and Sigismund was left to rule alone.

21 For a short overview, see Romhányi, “Ethnische und religiöse Minderheiten.”

22 Fügedi, “Das mittelalterliche Ungarn”; for discussions on current approaches again Romhányi, “Ethnische und religiöse Minderheiten.” See also Bak, “A Kingdom of Many Languages”; Szende, “Alter alterius lingua loquatur”; Szende, “Iure Theutonico”; Kubinyi, “Deutsche und Nicht-Deutsche”; Belzyt, “Demographische Entwicklung”; Belzyt, “Die Deutschen um 1500”; Fedeles, “Ausländer.”

23 Cp. for the following also my previous study Burkhardt, “Frictions and Fictions.”

24 Hoensch, “Verlobungen und Ehen”; Mielke, *The Archaeology*, 225–62.

25 Document no. 5, in: Bak, *Königtum und Stände*, 132–33, here 133.

When after the disastrous defeat at Nicopolis (1396) a diet was held to discuss reforms in the country, the position of the king and his advisors was at stake again. The 1397 diet of Temesvár established that Sigismund should dismiss all foreigners (*alienigeni, advena*) and expulse them from the kingdom. As János Bak has convincingly argued, the term *alienigeni* ('these who are foreign born') was probably not meant as a national as much as a social distinction in order to protect the privileges of the aristocratic elite.²⁶ And indeed, Hungarian nobles almost constantly referred to their role as the decisive voice in relation to both Mary's acceptance as Hungarian queen and Sigismund's ascension to the throne. The election or approbation of the monarch served as the basis for their claims to political participation in relation to joint responsibility for the realm (in both its domestic and in foreign affairs) and to the representation of the realm itself. Continuous attempts by the nobility to secure a certain degree of participation in a *regnum* that was considered to be much more than just a 'king's realm' and the resulting tensions between the rule of an individual and the necessary consent of a *communitas* hence characterized the beginnings of Sigismund's reign.

This intertwined relation became relevant again when a small group of nobles revolted against the king in 1401.²⁷ The context and origin of this revolt are, however, not recorded in detail: as far as we know, a small group of nobles accused the king of neglecting his royal duties and of damaging the well-being of the realm; Sigismund was captured and imprisoned, while a council of nobles was established in order to deal with day-to-day governmental needs. According to an anonymous German chronicle from the fifteenth century, the conflict had its roots in Sigismund's refusal of the nobles' plea not to employ foreigners in official positions (just as he had promised in 1397).²⁸ As long as Sigismund acted according to their demands and consequently dismissed the foreigners in his employ (the nobles argued), they would consider him to be king. If he did not follow their wishes, he would be a prisoner. Although Sigismund unsurprisingly insisted on his sovereignty, he was taken captive by the armed nobles shortly afterwards.²⁹

26 Bak, *Königtum und Stände*, 29. Decree of October 1397, In: Bak, Engel and Sweeney, eds, *The Laws*, 21–28, here art. 48 at page 24: "Preterea eisdem regnicolis necnon ad eorundem instantiam annuimus, ut omnes et quoslibet homines nostros alienigenas et advenas de dicto regno nostro emittimus et emitti faciemus [...]. Nec amodo et deinceps plures homines advenas, seculares videlicet et ecclesiasticos ad honores seculares et beneficia ecclesiastica promovebimus nec predictis auctoritatem promovendi committimus [...]."

27 Burkhardt, "Ein Königreich im Wandel."

28 Cardauns, ed., "Chronik über Sigmund"; on the rebellion and following rule of the nobles, see Málýusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn*, 59–69.

29 On Sigismund's foreign councillors, see Prajda, "The Florentine Scolari Family"; Arany, "Florentine Families"; Beinhoff, *Die Italiener*; Dvořáková, *Rytier a jeho kral*; Sroka, *Polacy na Węgrzech*.

By using the argument of Sigismund's employment of foreigners, the nobles tried to defend their ancient privileges and, when that did not work, to impose them by force. Again, a council of nobles was established in order to decide upon political matters within the realm; it justified its engagement with references to the *corona regni*, thereby claiming to act on behalf of the realm even without the king.³⁰ This remained, however, only a temporary solution: after the king's release in October 1401, a 'mutual reconciliation' between Sigismund and the nobles was officially announced during a meeting in Pápa.³¹ In the following years, Sigismund applied effective long-term measures to secure his position and to integrate former opponents: in 1405, he married Barbara of Cilli—a queen who was born within the borders of the Hungarian realm. Agreeing to marry Barbara of Cilli thus not only meant that Sigismund could secure the loyalty and support of Barbara's family; it also meant that there would be fewer foreign courtiers in the queen's retinue. Furthermore, Sigismund gave offices and estates to loyal supporters in Hungary, and finally, the founding of the Dragon Order in 1408 (undertaken together with Barbara) can be interpreted as a means of integrating active or potential opponents.³²

Debates about the position of 'foreigners' in the king's service and entourage would, however, not calm down. When Sigismund died in 1437, his daughter Elisabeth of Luxembourg and her husband Duke Albert of Habsburg succeeded the king in Hungary. Elisabeth was the only child of Sigismund of Luxembourg and his wife Barbara of Cilli. When Sigismund and his wife realized that no other children were to be expected, they raised and treated Elisabeth as the heiress to their realms—publicly calling her the "rightful heir and successor in all of [Sigismund's] kingdoms, principalities and dominions".³³

As the last descendants of their respective families, heiresses were the key to dynastic continuity.³⁴ They were closely related to their territories, being regarded

30 See the contributions in Hellmann, ed., *Corona regni*; on later usages of the term, see Weinrich, "Natio Pannonica."

31 Document no. VIII, in: Fejér, ed., *Codex diplomaticus*, 75–77.

32 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 75–85; Lövei, "Drachenorden." On Barbara, see Dvořáková, *Barbara of Cilli*.

33 "...und wann die vorgenannte Elizabeth noch aller unserr kunigreich, furstentume und herscheffe rechte geerbe und nachfolgerynne ist..." Inheritance agreement 28 Sept 1421, no. 6, in: Elbel, Bárta, and Ziegler, "Die Heirat", here 145–147, quote at 146. Should Sigismund father further daughters, Elisabeth would either be allocated one of the kingdoms or should select herself. See also Heimann, "Herrscherfamilie und Herrschaftspraxis."

34 'Heir' (in the male form, Latin *haeres*) was the word that would be used by medieval contemporaries, while the term 'heiress' should be understood as a modern term (created in the seventeenth century) to describe female heirs. Cp. Bartlett, *Blood Royal*, 124–54. Parts of the following text are also presented in my forthcoming article Burkhardt, "Heiresses, Regents, and Patrons."

as the embodiment of political heritage and thus as the bearers of claims to the throne.³⁵ Obtaining the support of the local nobility was thus of utmost importance in order to have their rights—and, of course, those of their respective husbands—acknowledged and accepted.³⁶ Still, this also meant that their husbands could be regarded as 'alien' or 'foreigners' in the new territories. The political language of that time could thus be marked by strong references to 'own' (seemingly 'national') identities and aspects of 'foreignness' that were regarded as (or at least argumentatively marked as) unwelcome. In these times of political uncertainty, polemic recourses to different forms of identity seemed to be of crucial importance: cultural or linguistic characteristics were used to semantically form groups of belonging and, consequently, to exclude opponents as "foreigners".

In 1437, this exact case arose when Sigismund died: Albert and Elisabeth were accepted as king and queen by Hungarian nobles and crowned in January 1438. The couple had to fight hard for the approval of the local nobility in Hungary and thus had to consent to certain conditions of their kingship.³⁷ In a charter dating from December 1437, Albert and Elisabeth promised to respect and maintain the laws and privileges of the kingdom and the nobility. Among the promises was the assurance they would only appoint Hungarian-born individuals to office—a passage similar to that in earlier royal decrees such as Sigismund's.³⁸ Two years later, King Albert was forced to repeat these coronation promises: his continuous absence from the country and a riot in Budapest that culminated in the king's imprisonment had caused severe discontent among the nobles.³⁹ On 29 May 1439, Albert gave his consent to a bundle of provisions that linked his kingship in the lands of the crown of St Stephen to various conditions.⁴⁰ Among several promises regarding matters of defence and dynastic affairs that resembled earlier ones, Albert also consented that

35 Holt, "Feudal Society."

36 Margue, "Die Erbtöchter"; Margue, "L'épouse."

37 On the protests against the couple, see Dvořáková, "Smrt Žigmunda Luxemburského."

38 Document from 17/31 December 1437, no. 8a, in: M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*, 136–38, quote at 137: "Item alienigenis et forensibus hominibus cuiuscumque nationis et lingue official in ipso regno non commitemus, ne castra, fortalitia, metas possessiones, honores, prelaturas, baronias absque consilio consiliariorum nostrorum Hungarie conferemus, [...] Item supra maritacione filiarum nostrarum agemus secundum consilia nostrorum consanguineorum [sic], nostrorum consiliariorum et aliarum terrigenarum nostrarum."

39 Cp. Burkhardt, "Albert's II Composite Monarchy"; on Albert, see also (though with a focus on Germany) Hödl, *Albrecht II*.

40 The following passage focuses on Albert's promises regarding his position as king. It needs to be mentioned, though, that he also tried to resolve the conflict between different 'burgher' groups in Buda by decreeing in relation to a new parity arrangement between the Germans and Hungarians in the governance of Buda. See on this Rady, "Government."

no offices would be given to strangers.⁴¹ Additionally, another passage specifically referred to Queen Elizabeth, obliging her, as the heiress, to also do without foreigners in her court.⁴²

Explicitly, the law differentiated between “foreigners” (*alienigenae, forenses, extranei*) as defined by origin and language on the one hand and nobles or inhabitants of the Hungarian realm (*incolae regni, terrigenae*) on the other.⁴³ Again, neither the content of the law nor the semantics applied here were new. Rather, the renewed royal promise marked the growing influence of the nobles in the kingdom and (in the concrete situation of the urban riots) exploitation of Albert’s precarious situation in the castle by the nobles in order to transform their interests into legal form.⁴⁴

The argument of ‘foreignness’ was by no means unusual—neither for Albert’s situation nor for periods of dynastic change in medieval Central Europe.⁴⁵ Accusing a ruler of being foreign or employing foreign councillors provided the opposition with the opportunity to shape their own position: while dynastic arguments remained pivotal in the debates of the time, the participation of the political community also grew in importance—and forms of belonging (such as belonging to a certain political community) were among the mightiest arguments.⁴⁶

In the following decades, the different groups ‘foreigners’ vs. ‘residents’ were specified and redefined using qualitative categories: In addition to linguistic and national criteria, suitability characteristics were used in order to make the Hungarians appear ‘capable people’ and the ‘foreigners’ a threat to the realm. In 1495, this development was expressed in quite a drastic form in a decree on church law (issued not

41 See Bak, ed., *Online Decreta*, Law of King Albert 29 May 1439, 497–517, esp. art. 5 at page 499. On the political background, cp. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*, 39–41; see also Liktor, “Az első Habsburg-Magyarország”, esp. 230–39.

42 Cp., See Bak, ed., *Online Decreta*, Law of King Albert 29 May 1439, 497–517, here art. 12 at page 500: “Item quod dispositio pro serenissima principe domina Elizabeth regina et eius status honoris conservatione ex quo est heres huius regni, fiat ubicunque vult in regno, sic tamen, quod ipsa domina regina honores et officiolatus suos non extraneis et alienigenis, sed incolis huius regni, quibuscunque maluerit, conferendi et collatos, dum sibi placuerit, ab eis secundum suum arbitrium habeat facultatem auferendi.”

43 For instructive methodological suggestions on the use of language in times of political conflict, see Dumolyn and Haemers, “Bad Chicken.”

44 This is at least suggested in a contemporary song entitled “Of King Albert and the Hungarians” (“Von König Albrecht und den Ungarn”), written by a certain Chippenwerger, probably a servant to the king. Printed in von Liliencron, ed., *Die historischen Volkslieder*, no. 75, 366–71. On the sources, see Lhotsky, *Quellenkunde zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte*, 340–44.

45 See my forthcoming article Burkhardt, “Fremde Herrscher.”

46 Burkhardt, “Frictions and Fictions.” On foreignness as an argument in times of political change, see Bartlett, *Blood Royal*, 397–428; Sobiesiak, “Czechs and Germans”; Aurast, *Fremde, Freunde, Feinde*.

unanimously, but against the veto of the prelates and barons): according to the law, it was even possible to throw 'strangers' in the water (=drown them) as "public disturbers of the liberty of the realm" if they had "obtained for themselves some ecclesiastical benefices from other than the royal majesty or those who have the right of patronage".⁴⁷

Another example of a much-discussed source in regard to 'foreignness' dates from the time of King Vladislaus II (1490–1516 Hungarian king; 1471–1516 Bohemian king): the so-called Rákos resolution of 1505.⁴⁸ After Hungarian nobles had communicated the need to meet and discuss current political issues at a diet, King Vladislaus finally convened the diet in the fall of 1505. The resolution, agreed upon during the assembly "by the nobles and lords of the Hungarian Kingdom", stated that when the throne was vacant, no foreigner could be elected Hungarian king. Instead, the diet could only nominate an "appropriate and suitable Hungarian" ("Hungarus aptus et idoneus"); foreign candidates, on the other hand, should be denied access to the throne because they would only bring "harm and danger" to the realm.⁴⁹ Although the law of 1505 never came into force, the text was circulated and thus found its way into contemporary political polemics. Since the early sixteenth century, political pamphlets were published in Hungary together with the resolutions of the diet, so that the discourse reflected in these laws was diversified and widely spread.⁵⁰

In order to understand the—from today's perspective somewhat misleading—words of the resolution, it is necessary to interpret the decree against the background of the political and dynastic history of late medieval Hungary. In 1490, when Vladislaus II, who until then had been king of Bohemia, succeeded the famous Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), it was mainly due to the nobility's support. The resolution focuses on securing the noble right to elect and approve the king—in a situation when the ruling king did not yet have a successor (the longed-for male heir Louis II was born in 1506), the insistence on noble participation rights appears

47 Decree by King Vladislaus II (1495), in: Bak, ed., *Online Decreta*, 889–918, here art. 31 at page 897 (English quote at pages 910–11): "Quod si aliqui forenses homines ab aliis, quam a regia maiestate vel illis, qui in hoc regno super quocunque beneficio ecclesiastico ius patronatus, quo hactenus usi fuissent, habent, aliqua beneficia ecclesiastica pro se procurarent et huiusmodi procuracione ius sibi in eisdem contra antiquam libertatem regni vendicantes in eisdem beneficiis residere auderent aut attemptarent, quod tales omnes et singuli, si deprehendi poterunt, ad aquam proiciantur, tanquam publici libertatis regni turbatores." On the political context, see Rady, "Rethinking Jagiello Hungary" and Mályusz, *Das Konstanzer Konzil*.

48 On Vladislaus and his "foreign" entourage, see the latest findings by Kozák, "Courtiers, Diplomats, Servants". See also Neumann, "Dienstleister der Dynastie."

49 Resolution as document no. 16 in Bak, *Königtum und Stände*, 158–59.

50 Rady, "Rethinking Jagiello Hungary", esp. 14–15.

to be rather a pragmatic instrument for handling possible dynastic contingencies. Against this backdrop, the 1505 resolution seems to illustrate the rise in power of the Hungarian nobility rather than represent a document of contemporary xenophobia. Instead, the resolution explicitly referenced the responsibility of the noble community (*natio*) for the common good of the country and hence defined and codified the political influence of the noble estates.⁵¹

'Otherness' and 'foreignness' as social constructs

Still, sources like the quoted royal promises or noble statements have repeatedly been interpreted as supposed proof of an early and purportedly xenophobic Hungarian national consciousness. In contrast to simplifying interpretations such as these, I would like to argue that we should investigate the complexity of political structures, the various layers of communication with different legitimation strategies, and forms of conflict escalation: while dynastic tradition and respective arguments such as continuity, suitability, and family ties obviously were pivotal aspects in the debates of the time, the participation of the political community became more and more important. The examples I have examined so far offer no reason to believe that an ethnically, linguistically, or culturally determinable nation was meant. Rather, the term “foreigners” or “foreigners” was usually applied in a general, unspecific way, which points to the question of contemporary linguistic usage and the functional logic of this reasoning.⁵²

In Hungary, among the most frequently used terms were the words *externus*, *extraneus* and *forensis* as well as *advena* and *alienigena*. The first three can be translated as ‘outsiders’. The terms *externus*, *extraneus* and *forensis* were usually used in the Middle Ages to make it clear that someone stood ‘outside’ a social community—for example, that they did not legally and territorially belong to an urban community. The words *alienigena* and *advena*, on the other hand, had a different nuance: they denoted people who were “foreign-born” (*alienigena*) or who had “immigrated” from another area (*advena*); i.e., those who could be distinguished on the basis of their origin. Despite semantic differences, all of these terms had one thing in common: They fundamentally marked a difference between the ‘other’ or ‘foreign’ and one’s ‘own’.

Against this backdrop, ‘foreignness’ should not be understood as a xenophobic category *strictu sensu*. Drawing from recent sociological work, we should rather understand medieval discourses and semantics of ‘foreignness’ as means of shaping

51 Szűcs, *Nation und Geschichte*. See also Kubinyi, “Az 1505. évi rákosi országgyűlés” on contemporary perceptions and interpretations of the decree.

52 Guerra, “Being Foreigner”; Kortüm, “Advena sum.”

forms of belonging: Distancing oneself from 'foreigners' and their specific customs allowed for defining and legitimizing one's claim to societal participation. This intertwined relation was most prominently described by the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) in his essay "The Stranger" (1908):

"Being-strange [...] is of course an entirely positive relation, a specific form of reciprocal interaction; the inhabitants of Sirius are not actually strange to us [...] rather they entirely do not exist for us, they stand beyond near and far. The stranger is an element of the group itself, not unlike the poor and the manifold «inner enemies»—an element whose immanent position as member simultaneously encloses something external and juxtaposed." As Elizabeth Goodstein put it, "«Being-strange» [was] thus not a role but a relationship of reciprocal interaction, a form of social life that implicates both subject and other."⁵³

Building on sociological approaches to 'foreignness' as a social construct and argumentative tool in times of socio-political change, the argumentative use of 'otherness' and 'foreignness' in times of socio-political transition periods appears in a new light: not only was it discussed *that* new rulers came to power, but that they 'had come to stay' and had therefore, together with their entourage, claimed a prominent position in the kingdom. The classification of rulers and their entourage as 'foreign' consequently not only referred to the relationship between the 'new king' and the 'old elite'; it also put the power balance of local elites in a tense position between trust and mistrust. In contrast to 'the strangers' and the characteristics attributed to them, one's own identity could be more clearly contoured and thus one's own claim to power better legitimized. If we understand 'otherness' and 'foreignness' as attributions or constructs in social relations, pre-modern recourses to these terms can also be understood more adequately as argumentation strategies deployed to cope with certain political and societal developments.⁵⁴

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53 Quote after Goodstein, "Simmel's Stranger", quote at page 248; Simmel, "Exkurs." Cp. also Stichweh, "Der Fremde"; McLemore, "Simmel's 'Stranger'"; Marotta, "Georg Simmel."

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