

Politics beyond words: The curious relationship of the Holy Crown of Hungary and the Hungarian Parliament

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As any etymology dictionary attests, the word ‘parliament’ comes from the Old French ‘parlement’, itself a derivative of ‘parler’, which suggests that in the Western imaginary parliamentary politics has primarily been associated with speeches or discrete acts of talking. One way of problematising this image of the parliament as a neutral arena in which different arguments may press against each other would be to make visible all that invisible work that allows arguments to exist in the first place. Following the tradition of laboratory studies, this could, for example, include the analysis of diverse inscription devices inside and outside the parliament that help to stabilise the objects of politics (issues) or establish particular connections amongst them (political programmes). This paper suggests another way of problematising parliamentary politics as ‘just talk’. By focusing on the Holy Crown of Hungary, put on permanent display in the Cupola Hall of the Hungarian Parliament, it aims to draw attention to three components of what could be called ‘politics beyond words’. The first is concerned with the dis/continuity between the past and the present in a parliamentary democracy; the second is related to conflicting ways of conceptualising ‘the people’ in a modern state; while the third is about different strategies to deal with such conflicting conceptualisations. The main purpose of the paper is to show how the placing of the Holy Crown in the Hungarian Parliament has resolved this conflict by turning the conceptualisation of ‘the people’ in to a non-issue, or an issue that has become impossible to talk about.