



Introduction to the topic

# The production of the vote: placing materiality at the heart of the analysis

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ISSUE TOPIC

## Voting Materiality

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INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

### THE PRODUCTION OF THE VOTE: PLACING MATERIALITY AT THE HEART OF THE ANALYSIS

Since the return to multiparty politics in the early 1990s, voting has become routine in many African countries. Yet not completely routine<sup>1</sup>. While the principles of universal suffrage and secret ballots have been formally introduced in the vast majority of cases, the vote in its material form is undergoing constant transformation. Nearly all elections have generated a new learning experience for voters, political parties, and election officials, extending some of the debates that have been going on since the late 1940s in some cases: should ballot papers bear names or symbols? Should there be a single ballot marked by the voter, or several? Should there be a single ballot paper and several ballot boxes? Should the ballot boxes be opaque or transparent? And how should voters be identified? Should their names simply be marked on the register after they have voted? Should they have voter cards? Should they be identified by their fingerprints? These changes may not be fundamental, but they represent a continual refinement of the process and betray an awareness that the process is not working quite as well as it should.

Since the 2000s, electoral processes have become even more complex, with the introduction of new technologies in the organisation of the ballot, its

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1. Thanks to all the members of *Politique africaine's* editorial board in addition to Richard Banégas, Hélène Combes, Lucie Bargel, Élise Massicard, Christophe Voilliot, Clément Desrumeaux and Marie Vannetzel for their comments on a preliminary version of this text.

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supervision, and the counting of votes<sup>2</sup>. Political transparency and modernity are now embodied by extremely sophisticated objects: biometric voter registration, a parallel SMS recount system, fingerprinting, voting machines, and the location of the polling station via mobile phone are all material devices meant to ensure the veracity of information about the voter and the election, and the reliability of the count or recount, if not the genuine expression of the voters' opinion. In Nigeria, despite some technical system failures that forced the outgoing president, Goodluck Jonathan, to vote with a simple paper accreditation after half an hour of unsuccessful attempts to validate his identity electronically<sup>3</sup>, the biometric vote of 2015 is associated with the first democratic power transfer in the history of the country. In neighbouring Cameroon, in June 2013, at a local branch of Elections Cameroon - the management body that organizes the registration of voters - a home-made poster displayed on the door of the person in charge proudly announced: "Biometrics is here! [...] Come and see for yourself, it's not the *kongossa!*"<sup>4</sup>. The appeal of this new registration technology increased participation in the census procedure and boosted the interest - hitherto very limited - of Cameroonian citizens in the electoral process, raising questions about the transformation of ordinary representations of voting credibility.

Election campaigns also feature many material innovations. Alongside the classic partisan T-shirts, cloth wrappers, caps and fabrics, vehicles painted in the party colours, audiovisual messages, SMS and automated voice messages have also been added. The proliferation of private vehicles, especially motorbikes, the relative drop in the cost of printing posters and leaflets, the development of mobile phone networks, and the expansion of internet access have all encouraged and made possible the deployment of new working techniques among the electorate as well as transforming the logistics of

2. By 2016 23 countries were using biometric voter registration, one using voting machines (Namibia), 20 transmitted results electronically, and 27 allowed voters to check the voters' list online. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: <<http://www.idea.int/elections/ict/index.cfm>>, accessed 22 September 2016.

3. M. Mark and D. Smith, 'Nigeria Election Stumbles into Action as President Struggles to Cast Vote', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/28/nigeria-election-stumbles-into-action-as-president-struggles-to-cast-vote>>, accessed 30 November 2016. On biometrics more generally, see the seminal work of K. Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; N. O. Nkume-Okorie and G. Chouin, "Electronic Voter Registration in Nigeria. A Biometric Device at the Service of Democracy?" *Contemporary Africa*, No. 239, 2011, pp. 75-87; M. Debos, 'Biometrics in Chad: New Technologies and Old Electoral Revenues', *The Conversation*, 27 April 2016, <<http://theconversation.com/biometrie-au-tchad-nouvelles-technologies-et-vieilles-recettes-electorales-58394>>, accessed 3 December 2016.

4. 'Kongossa' means rumour. Observations by one of the authors, Yaoundé, June 2013.

material distribution or "citizen" supervision of the vote<sup>5</sup>. The profusion of gadgets feeds the enthusiasm of recipients and raises popular expectations at each 'election season'; that 'harvest time' when one reaps what the candidates, the party, or the state has to offer.

The material objects of the vote thus saturate the public sphere at each election. They generate as much enthusiasm as controversy and public debate about their cost, the awarding of contracts, or their reliability. Behind an apparent standardisation, however, they are introduced, and make sense, above all as part of specific electoral histories. Depending on the political stakes of the moment, the opposition parties, the government, and moral entrepreneurs (civic education NGOs, multilateral organisations, etc.) grasp these new forms of materiality in different ways<sup>6</sup>. The nature of political regimes, but also their own temporalities, shape the production (centralised or decentralised, or even individualised) and uses (limited to a greater or lesser extent) of these objects.

Based on this observation, an initial stage of this research project took place in October 2015 in Nairobi. Several academic events were organised around an exhibition on electoral objects at the National Museum in Nairobi. The objective was to collect and conserve ephemera, to survey the transformations of electoral cultures, and to normalise elections in a country, and region, where they generate recurrent acts of political violence<sup>7</sup>. This approach aimed to provide a space for meeting and dialogue between researchers and practitioners, freeing them from the usual polemics surrounding the integrity of the vote. It thus made it possible for researchers to gather and reflect on topics that had hitherto been peripheral to their work, and to collectively assess the value of focusing on these issues, but also to compare their analyses with the practical experience of election professionals.

This edited collection is an extension of this approach, which seeks to propose a methodological counterpoint to existing work. It offers an unconventional perspective on the multiple electoral events that punctuate the news on the continent, and it revisits, as closely as possible, the exercise of voting.

5. See in Uganda, for example, the experience of citizen vigilantism calling for the monitoring of the transport of ballot boxes (most often done at night after the voting has closed) and SMS transmission of the results of the vote from the counting stations to the headquarters of the main opposition party. See also the creation of websites to receive allegations of fraud and other alerts of embezzlement, etc. In Uganda, like in many other countries, most mobile phone networks, social media, and internet chat applications were blocked on election day in 2016. Field notes from the 2011 and 2016 election campaigns in Uganda.

6. In Kenya, for example, after criticising the technological failures of the 2013 election materials, the opposition is now rejecting the government's proposal to introduce a manual voter verification and counting system for the 2017 elections to address these potential failures.

7. Symposium and exhibition, "Voting Matters. Citizenship and Elections in Africa", coordinated by M.-E. Pommerolle with J. Willis, Nairobi National Museum, October 12- November 8 2015.

In doing so, this collective project has joined and naturally became part of the approach of two other research groups: one led by H  l  ne Combes, Lucie Bargel, and Sandrine Perrot on "the act of voting: comparative perspectives"<sup>8</sup>, and the other by Richard Ban  gas and S  verine Awenengo Dalberto on "the social and political life of identification papers in Sub-Saharan Africa"<sup>9</sup>, both of which place material devices at the heart of the analysis.

This heuristic wager of a resolutely empirical "detour through materiality"<sup>10</sup> makes it possible to depart from both the normative approaches that animate the broader debates on electoral laws and mechanisms (constitutional limitation of mandates, independence of electoral commissions, etc.) and those that consider the technologisation of elections as a depoliticisation of their procedure. Starting with the objects makes it possible to situate them within the social substratum that presides over their conception, production, distribution, and their naturalised uses. The point here is to question the way in which new materials and technologies are conceived, produced, manipulated in the primary sense of the term, used, and diverted. These processes shape the act of voting and its imaginary, and modify - or not - the relationship between state and citizen, the conceptions of electoral citizenship and the ordinary perceptions of voting on a continent where it is both trivialised and constantly contested.

#### **VOTING AS A SOCIAL AND MATERIAL FACT**

More concerned with studies of ballot box exit and electoral mapping, the academic literature on elections in Africa, for the most part, ignores the actual conduct of the election and the way in which its materiality has shaped and constrained these models of change and innovation. Analyses of elections from the 1950s and 1960s were mainly a pretext for observing broader political and social changes but did not consider the vote as a political object

8. < <http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/content/l-acte-du-vote-perspectives-comparees>>, accessed 3 December 2016. See also the panel on the "materiality of the voter" organized by H. Combes and L. Bargel at the 2015 AFSP Congress, <<http://www.congres-afsp.fr/st/st3.html>>, accessed 3 December 2016.

9. See the blog on this project: < <https://piaf.hypotheses.org/>>, accessed on 3 December 2016. This reflection is notably drawn from a previous work on 'The paper state: materialisation and dematerialisation of citizenship', Fasopo, 2013.

10. The expression is from G. Lachenal, *Le m  dicament qui devait sauver l'Afrique : un scandale pharmaceutique aux colonies* (coll. "Les emp  cheurs de penser en rond"), Paris, La D  couverte, 2014.

in its own right<sup>11</sup>. Rather, it was the electoral textbooks written by these same academic experts that provide the most information about the materiality of these ballots<sup>12</sup>. The 'no-choice' elections of the 1970s and 1980s, undermined by a succession of coups d'état and the spread of one-party regimes, produced little literature, though the collective works led by Georges Lavroff, Guy Hermet, and then more than ten years later by Fred Hayward, are an exception<sup>13</sup>. Their arguments about the role of elections in the legitimisation of regimes, disciplinary projects of nation-building and the renewal of elites explored the hypothesis that elections produced state power. However, they also paid no attention to the material forms of campaigning.

The re-emergence of multiparty politics in Africa at the very end of the 1980s transformed electoral studies from an eccentric hobby into a real industry; one that is constantly expanding due to the availability of research and consultancy funding. Democratization replaced modernisation as the central concept of these studies. The old refrain of "free and fair" elections, considered too naïve, has given way to the idea of integrity - which seems in practice quite similar<sup>14</sup>. The dense network of international support for elections, which facilitates a revolving door between the academic world and electoral practice, has notably encouraged the emergence of large comparative quantitative studies. These data have proved seductive to academics, inducing them to ask research questions that they will be able to answer through statistics. This is the case with many studies on the importance of

11. See for example E. Shils, "Political Development in the New States", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 2, No. 3, 1960, pp. 265-292, especially p. 287. The same idea can be found in the concept of 'political socialization' in J. S. Coleman, 'The Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa', in G. Almond and J. S. Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1960, pp. 247-368.

12. See in particular W. J. M. Mackenzie, *Free Elections: An Elementary Textbook*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1958; W. J. M. Mackenzie and K. Robinson, *Five Elections in Africa*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960; and United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) CO 822/1427, "A Further Note on Constitutional Issues in Kenya", Mackenzie, 27 October 1959.

13. D. G. Lavroff (ed.), *Aux urnes l'Afrique. Élections et pouvoirs en Afrique noire*, Paris/Bordeaux, Pedone/IEP de Bordeaux, 1979; G. Hermet, R. Rose and A. Rouquié (ed.), *Elections Without Choice*, London, Macmillan, 1978; F. Hayward (ed.), *Elections in Independent Africa*, Boulder, Westview, 1987, pp. 1-23. See also D. Martin, "The hoe, the home, the ballot box and the schoolmaster. Elections in Tanzania 1965-1970", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 25, No. 4, 1975, pp. 677-716; D. Bourmaud, "Élections et autoritarisme. La crise de la régulation politique au Kenya", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1985, pp. 206-235.

14. See the series of works edited by L. Diamond, J. Linz and S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries. Volume Two: Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1988; L. Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1993; L. Diamond et M. F. Plattner (eds.), *Democratization in Africa*, Baltimore/Londres, Johns Hopkins Press, 1999; M. Bratton (ed.), *Voting and Democratic Citizenship in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2013.

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clientelism or ethnicity in the determinants of voting, as well as those on the compliance of African elections with democratic standards<sup>15</sup>.

A distinct stream of research has meanwhile revealed greater scepticism about the transformative potential of the vote and a sense of cynicism with regards to the electoral industry. For the most radical, elections are either a renewed modality of the extraversion of African powers, or a façade behind which the permanent features of an immutable political culture are reproduced<sup>16</sup>.

Each of these approaches produces its own limitations: the routinisation and ritualisation of elections are read as part of the process of consolidating democracy<sup>17</sup>; voting procedures and mechanisms have been considered mostly from the perspective of manipulation by the ruling regime or the opportunity they offer in terms of fraud<sup>18</sup>; local reappropriation of these objects or mechanisms, for their part, have often been analysed as forms of resistance to electoral 'modernity' or as African political modes of expression (*'an African way of doing things'*<sup>19</sup>).

This collection aims to move away from disembodied globalising analyses and equally from singularising culturalist readings of African terrain. It aims to question more generally how elections work, the tools and approaches to analyse them, in order to examine what they produce beyond democratic legitimisation, or even authoritarian relegitimation, or the (non-)renewal of elites. It seeks to free itself from conjunctural analyses in order to re-establish the act of voting within a processual continuum and in the context of social practices. This effort is part of a broader reflection on

15. See for example S. Lindberg, "It's Our Time to 'Chop'": Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo-Patrimonialism Rather than Counter-Act It? ", *Democratization*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2003, pp. 121-140 et S. I. Lindberg et M. K. C. Morrison, "Are African Voters Really Ethnic or Clientelistic? Survey Evidence from Ghana", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 123, no. 1, 2008, pp. 95-122; M. Basedau, G. Erdmann and A. Mehler (eds.), *Votes, Money and Violence. Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrika Institutet/Sweden University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2007.

16. J.-F. Bayart, 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion', *African Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 395, 2000, pp. 217-267, especially pp. 225-226; P. Chabal and J.-P. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford/Bloomington, James Currey (coll. 'African Issues'), 1999.

17. S. I. Lindberg, "The Surprising Significance of African Elections", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2006, pp. 139-151.

18. J. Willis and A. el Battahani, "'We Changed the Laws': Electoral Practice and Malpractice in Sudan since 1953", *African Affairs*, vol. 109, no. 435, 2010, pp. 191-212.

19. T. Young, "Elections and Electoral Politics in Africa", *Africa*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1993, p. 299.

the blind spots of classical electoral sociology initiated in the early 2000s<sup>20</sup>. Recently, in fact, several works, often focusing on countries in the Global South, have updated the literature. Some of them question the types of political work that elections accomplish, rather than the results; their meaning and uses<sup>21</sup>, particularly in semi-authoritarian or hybrid contexts<sup>22</sup>; the local conduct of campaigns and voting<sup>23</sup>; the reappropriation of new technologies and its impact on electoral mobilisations<sup>24</sup>. Based on comparative and trans-disciplinary approaches, these local, even micro, and above all material voting approaches offer, through their ethnographic incursions<sup>25</sup>, stimulating perspectives in a saturated field of research. By focusing our attention here on the object of the election, we see voting no longer as an event but as a social and material fact. The electoral object is apprehended as a tangible trace, or palimpsest, as Marie-Aude Fouéré says in this issue, of the borrowings and conflicts of interest that punctuate its course, as well as of the power relations and social practices associated with its uses.

The materiality approach is not new. The history of medicine, the sociology of work, and the sociology of the state are familiar with it or have revisited

20. On the more general renewal of French electoral sociology, see C. Braconnier, *Une autre sociologie du vote. Les électeurs dans leurs contextes: bilan critique et perspectives*, Cergy-Pontoise, LGDJ, 2010. For calls to develop a comparative and more detailed sociology of African elections, which have long remained unanswered: P. Quantin, 'Pour une analyse comparative des élections africaines', *Politique africaine*, no. 69, 1998, pp. 12-28; R. Otayek, 'Les élections en Afrique sont-ils un objet scientifique pertinent?' *Politique africaine*, no. 69, 1998, pp. 3-11 and also M. Cowen and L. Laakso, "Elections and Election Studies in Africa", in M. Cowen and L. Laakso (eds.), *Multi-Party Elections in Africa*, Oxford, James Currey, 2002, pp. 1-26.

21. P. Quantin (ed.), *Voting in Africa: Comparisons and Differentiations*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

22. S. Perrot, "A NRM Recapture of Teso in 2011? What Voting Means in a Hybrid Regime", in S. Perrot, S. Makara, J. Lafargue and M.-A. Fouéré (eds.), *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, Kampala, Fountain, 2014; M. Hilgers and J. Mazzocchi, *Revoltes et oppositions dans un régime semi-autoritaire : le cas du Burkina Faso*, Karthala (coll. "Hommes et sociétés"), 2010.

23. M. Bennani-Shraïbi, M. Catusse and J.-C. Santucci (eds.), *Scènes et coulisses des élections au Maroc : les législatives de 2002*, Aix-en-Provence/Paris, Iremam/Karthala, 2005; J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (ed.), *Élections au village : une ethnographie de la culture électorale au Niger. Les pouvoirs locaux au Niger*, tome 2, Paris, Karthala (coll. 'Voix d'Afrique'), 2015; L. Baamara, C. Floderer and M. Poirier (eds.), *Faire campagne, ici et ailleurs : mobilisations électorales et pratiques politiques ordinaires*, Paris/Aix-en-Provence, Karthala/Sciences Po Aix, 2016.

24. P. Ménoret, "Le cheikh, l'électeur et le SMS", *Transcontinentales. Sociétés, idéologies, système mondial*, no. 1, 2005, pp. 19-33; P. Ménoret, "Apprendre à voter ? Le cas des élections saoudiennes de 2005", *Genèses*, no. 77, 2009, pp. 51-74.

25. M. Hilgers and J.-P. Jacob, "Anthropologie de la candidature électorale au Burkina Faso", *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 228, 2008, pp. 171-90; T. Bierschenk, "The Local Appropriation of Democracy: An Analysis of the Municipal Elections in Parakou, Republic of Benin, 2002-2003", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2006, pp. 543-571.

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it over the past decade<sup>26</sup>. The social history of the vote - essentially French and centring on the nineteenth century - has also considered its invention, learning, and ritualisation, placing particular emphasis on its devices and objects<sup>27</sup>. It seems relevant to us to reread and continue this work in order to go beyond the debates around the sociology of electoral competence and the democratic "modernity" of the electorate. The aim is to revisit this relationship to the object in contemporary situations when it is no longer a question of inventing the elector, or even elections, but of transforming, through new techniques or devices, the manufacture of the vote in a context where we are witnessing the accumulation of knowledge that produces more demanding and, at the very least, different voters. Informed by the renewal of anthropological approaches in terms of material culture - and in particular the founding works of Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff and Jean-Pierre Warnier<sup>28</sup> - we seek to retrace the circulation of the object of the vote, its diffusion, its pitfalls (its "social life" or "career" to use Arjun Appadurai's terms) to analyse how and to what extent the materiality of the vote shapes the political subjectivation of individuals<sup>29</sup>.

Placing voting materials and campaign materials side by side may seem daring. These two materials are in fact not supposed to meet during the election. They are designed to circulate in very distinct temporal and geographical spaces, with campaign materials being prohibited from the moment they enter the polling stations. The idea is to break down the

26. Among recent works, one might read with interest: D. Gardey (ed.), *Le linge du Palais-Bourbon. Corps, matérialité et genre du politique à l'ère démocratique*, Lormont, Éditions du Bord de l'eau, 2015 or the literature on the politics of the counter for example. We should also mention the founding works of Fernand Braudel, Daniel Roche for historical background, or those of M. de Certeau.

27. A. Garrigou, *Le vote et la vertu : comment les Français sont devenus électeurs*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1992; by the same author, *Histoire sociale du suffrage universel*, Paris, Seuil, 2002 and "Le secret de l'isoloir", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 71-72, 1988, pp. 22-45; Y. Déloye, "L'élection au village. Le geste électoral à l'occasion des scrutins cantonaux et régionaux de mars 1992", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1993, pp. 83-106; by the same author, *Les voix de Dieu. Pour une autre histoire du suffrage électoral : le clergé catholique français et le vote, XIXE-XXE siècles*, Paris, Fayard (coll. 'L'espace du politique'), 2006; Y. Déloye and O. Ihl, *L'acte du vote*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008; M. Offerlé, "L'électeur et ses papiers. Enquête sur les cartes et les listes électorales (1848-1939)", *Genèses*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1993, pp. 29-53 and *Un homme, une voix ? Histoire du suffrage universel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983. See also Florent Piton's ongoing doctoral work on the voter card in Rwanda or Juliette Ruaud's work on the social history of electoral practices in Senegal.

28. A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, London/New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986; I. Kopytoff, *The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process*, in A. Appadurai (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 64-94; J.-F. Bayart and J.-P. Warnier (eds.), *Matière à politique, Le pouvoir, les corps et les choses*, Karthala, 2004; J.-P. Warnier, *Construire la culture matérielle. L'homme qui pensait avec ses doigts*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

29. J.-P. Warnier, "Pour une praxéologie de la subjectivation politique", in J.-F. Bayart and J.-P. Warnier (eds.), *Matière à politique..., op. cit.*, pp. 7-31.

compartmentalisation of these two political periods and these two fields of academic research to show their porosity and integrate the entire globalised production of the vote, from biometric registration, with Indian or Belgian material, the printing of ballots, in South Africa for example, the manufacture of T-shirts in Dubai or China, the ballot, observed from all sides, to the post-electoral circulation of some of these objects in domestic spaces.

Because they are vectors between producers and sponsors, between state and citizen, between parties and activists, and between candidates and voters, electoral objects force us to look at the exchanges they induce. These are part of a web of power relations that make them particularly strategic transactional moments and determine, as Jean-Pierre Warnier explains, the variability of the value of the object and the social construction of its exchangeability<sup>30</sup>. The "paths and diversions" of an object are in fact like many tangible traces of its social life, of its passage through various registers of value that coexist in the same social space<sup>31</sup>. They express its comings and goings between the material and the social, its different phases of reappropriation and contestation, which constitute various thresholds in the process of subjectivation of the individual voter<sup>32</sup>.

Each of the articles in this dossier focuses on particular aspects of these materialities: how they seek to materialise the state and its citizen-voters, and how these processes of rationalisation are transformed by the social and political contexts in which they are embedded (J. Willis *et al*; A. Rader; E. Muendane and D. do Rosário); the multiplicity of actors, interests, and controversies carried by these truly globalised commodities (A. Rader, E. Muendane and D. do Rosário); and finally the singularisation of these objects redefined by their own uses and circulations (A. Rader, M.-A. Fouéré, E. Muendane and D. do Rosário, P. Grassin).

#### THE MATERIAL OUTPUT OF THE STATE AND THE VOTER

The materiality approach makes it possible to go beyond the conjunctural analysis of elections to situate them within the longer time frame of the simultaneous construction of the citizen and the state. The "invention of the

30. I. Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography...", art. cité; J. Roitman and J.-P. Warnier, "La politique de la valeur", *Journal des africanistes*, vol. 76, n° 1, special issue "Sahara: identities and social mutations as objects", 2006, pp. 205-216.

31. J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, "Beasts, Banknotes and the Colour of Money in Colonial South Africa", *Archaeological Dialogues*, no. 12, 2005, pp. 107-132

32. A. Schwartz, 'Les objets et la sociologie', *Idées économiques et sociales*, no. 143, 2006, [online], < <http://www.educ-revues.fr/ID/AffichageDocument.aspx?idoc=34932>>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

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voter", that is, the extraction of the individual from his or her social environment and his or her fulfilment as a political individual, has been achieved through the introduction and transformation of various electoral objects: the voter card, the ballot box, the voting booth, the secret ballot, etc.<sup>33</sup> Through these, elections exalt a bureaucratic paper order and represent the state as a distinct entity, separate from society, which derives its existence from the adoption of laws and regulations. Justin Willis *et al.* are interested in this issue of the material staging of the polling station in that it tells us about the special relationship between the state and the individual citizen that it seeks to construct in the imaginary. If they are understood as collective rituals inducing or constraining political behaviour or as laboratories for the production of knowledge, elections bring together several microphysical methods of order that have a powerful disciplinary force<sup>34</sup>. Registering, queuing, accepting the individual identification power of the voter's card or electronic register, being ticked off on a list, all these processes produce power, reinforcing the importance of paper, written rule, literacy, and instruction. Voting seeks to 'transform the voter', as Luise White puts it, and produce the citizen; it also exalts the bureaucrat<sup>35</sup>.

It is well known that the presence of the state on the African continent is very uneven, in time and space, and its acceptance is often problematic. This is true both for the populations that are supposed to be governed (especially

33. R. Bertrand, J.-L. Briquet and P. Pels, *Cultures of Voting: The Hidden History of the Secret Ballot*, London/Paris, Hurst/CERI, 2007; P. Pels, 'Imagining Elections: Modernity, Mediation and Secret Voting in Tanganyika at the End of the Colonial Period', *Politique africaine*, no. 83, 2001, pp. 135-50; L. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty. Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2015; J. Willis, 'A Model of its Kind': Representation and Performance in the Sudan Self-Government Election of 1953', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2007, pp. 485-502; J. Onana, 'Faire voter, faire naître au monde politique : apprentissage de l'investiture démocratique et émergence historique de la figure du citoyen au Cameroun', in P. Quantin (ed.), *Voter en Afrique*, *op. cit.* pp. 207-242; C. Toulabor, 'Fraudes électorales et démocratie coloniale au Togo. Cas d'une implantation du vote en colonie', in P. Quantin (ed.), *Voter en Afrique*, *op. cit.* pp. 185-206; A.-C. Trémon, 'Citoyens indigènes et sujets électeurs', *Genèses*, no. 91, 2013, pp. 28-48; F. Cooper, 'Voting, Welfare and Registration: The Strange Fate of the Etat-Civil in French Africa, 1945-1960', in K. Breckenridge and S. Szreter (ed.), *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History*, British Academic Scholarship Online, 2012, pp. 385-412.

34. J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2006. Around the idea of elections as a laboratory, see K. Coles, 'Election Day: The Construction of Democracy Through Technique', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2004, pp. 551-580; and for the idea of a 'microphysical method of order', see T. Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1991, pp. 77-96.

35. L. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

in the very particular case of nomadic populations<sup>36</sup>) and for the external actors that are supposed to recognise this entity. Civic education textbooks, biometric voter registration technologies, voter registration cards, etc. are all projects in the service of rationalising and building the state and asserting sovereignty. In this issue, Anna Rader shows how the deployment of biometric voter identification in Somaliland is part of the rulers' assertion of full sovereignty even when their state is not recognised by the international community<sup>37</sup>. The sophistication and uniformity of registration and voting procedures and formalities are also symbols – with varying degrees of performativity – of the centralisation of the state and the penetration of its margins. Registration undoubtedly allows for a better knowledge of the enlisted citizens. It is sometimes more readily accepted than other counting and control devices, associated with taxation, for example<sup>38</sup>. It can also give rise to processes that are constrained to a greater or lesser extent depending on whether it is carried out jointly with more repressive state entities, such as the Ministry of the Interior (when the production of identity and voter cards is concomitant), or through the very tight network of decentralised territorial administrations. However, this state investment does not necessarily produce an accurate cartography: this is demonstrated in this issue in E. Muendane and D. do Rosário's article on Mozambique, where sending obsolete machines to opposition areas distorts the morphology of the electorate as well as the balance of political forces in parliament. Finally, technical artefacts are part of the continuous fabrication of a bureaucratic aesthetic of modernity that responds to aspirations that are often disappointed and constantly re-fuelled<sup>39</sup>.

Through the bureaucratic production of the electorate, several articles in this dossier thus re-examine the day-to-day relationship between citizens and the state. Justin Willis *et al.* demonstrate that, while the object of the polling station is to establish the state as an entity distinct from society, designed to produce an ideal, unmediated citizenship, practice and experience often

36. For a comparative reflection on voter mobility, see L. Bargel, "Une carte, trois communes et deux États. Conflicts for the institutional appropriation of border alpine pastures", *Norois*, no. 238-239, 2016, pp. 85-95 and "Les 'originaires' en politique. Migration, local attachment and electoral mobilisations of mountain people", *Politix*, no. 113, 2016, pp. 171-199.

37. See M. F. David, "'We Are not a Failed State, We Make the Best Passports': South Sudan and Biometric Modernity", *African Studies Review*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2016, pp. 113-132 for a description of a similar logic in Southern Sudan.

38. G. Piccolino, "Infrastructural State Capacity for Democratization? Voter Registration and Identification in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana Compared", *Democratization*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2016, pp. 498-519.

39. M. Göpfert, "Bureaucratic Aesthetics: Report Writing in the Nigérien Gendarmerie", *American Ethnologist*, no. 40, 2013, p. 2; J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity. Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.

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subvert this, suggesting that the state is in fact deeply embedded in society, notably through a set of intermediaries. Indeed, this perspective restores to their rightful place the junior civil servants who, through their daily practices of mediation, through the role they can play in redefining, adapting, or translating bureaucratic rule, co-create the state, electoral citizenship, and their imaginations<sup>40</sup>. In Somaliland, the writing work that governs the census process in the absence of a reliable civil registry produces citizens: it fixes identities, the spelling of a patronymic, and even the biography of the voter by assigning him or her an official date of birth, the same for everyone: that of 1 January or of his or her registration (see Anna Rader in this issue). In Mozambique, the material is handled (in the primary sense of the term), transported, by a "small staff" that is not necessarily well trained, non-professionalised, replaced at each election, and recruited on a clientelist basis (see the article by E. Muendane and D. do Rosário). This co-production of the state is not limited to bureaucratic actors, but also includes a multiplicity of extra-state relays, be it civic education NGOs, political parties, women's associations, but also religious leaders, teachers, neighbourhood chiefs, etc. All these actors produce the election and thereby, make it real: they transmit, translate, pass on objects, and contribute to their production and uses<sup>41</sup>. Today in Cameroon, the information on the national identity card - carried on the voter's card - is, for some of them, the result of oral testimonies for lack of birth certificates. In the border areas of Nigeria, the issuance of identity cards and voters' cards depends on negotiations between local public figures and administrative chiefs<sup>42</sup>.

The plurality of state or non-state, national or foreign actors, in the co-production, dissemination, or interpretation of these objects makes it possible to analyse the way in which the citizen-voter is confronted with other mediations of materiality and other "subjectivising governmentalities"<sup>43</sup> than that of the official electoral institutions, and to question the way in which this

40. M. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1980. See also V. Dubois, "Politiques au guichet, politiques du guichet", in O. Borraz and V. Guiraudon (ed.), *Public Policies 2. Changing society*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2010, pp. 265-286; J. Weller, *L'État au guichet. Sociologie cognitive du travail et modernisation administrative des services publics*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1999.

41. É. Massicard also studied the role of neighbourhood leaders in the distribution or retention of voter cards in Turkey. See "Circumvention versus contestation? Usages partisans et institutionnels des dispositifs de vote en Turquie", Paper presented at the AFSP colloquium, Thematic Section 3 (Materialities of the voter: Comparative empirical approaches to voting systems), Aix-en-Provence, 22 June 2015.

42. C. R. L. Mbowou, *Être sans papier chez soi. Identification, visibilité et invisibilité in the Cameroonian margins of Lake Chad*, Master's thesis in political science, Paris, University Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013.

43. J.-P. Warnier "Pour une praxéologie...", art. cit.

shapes or does not shape new imaginaries of citizenship, working with the articulation of dynamics that are simultaneously local, national, and international. Practical norms modulate the ideal state order to lead to an always partial institutionalisation of the vote and to maximise the opportunities seized as much by 'counter-powers' as by political elites or intermediaries seeking to assert their authority by positioning themselves as part of the chain of production, distribution, or interpretation of the object<sup>44</sup>.

### **ELECTORAL OBJECTS, GLOBALISED DEMOCRATIC COMMODITIES?**

This composite and do-it-yourself material contrasts with the standardisation of electoral rules and techniques disseminated by organisations specifically dedicated to this international standardisation<sup>45</sup>. The unfinished work of the state to assert its hold on objects is indeed done within the framework of a transnational space where multiple actors defend interests and ideas on the smooth running of the electoral process. Beyond the state sphere, international experts (private and public), technicians, "democracy engineers", "facilitators", local and international non-governmental organisations, commercial enterprises - from India or South Africa, for example, but also local ones - produce, use, or comment on these objects, according to their own criteria. In the never-ending quest for 'democratisation' or 'electoral integrity', technology has gradually become overwhelmingly prominent and is a major part of the assistance and observation programmes accompanying many elections. These material innovations are part of distinct value regimes, both commercial and political, which converge at the moment of the election. The democratic performativity of these techniques has already been deconstructed<sup>46</sup>. This collection is more interested in the juxtaposition

44. B. Gaïti, "Between facts and things. La double face de la sociologie politique des institutions", in A. Cohen, B. Lacroix and P. Riutort (eds.), *Les formes de l'activité politique*, Paris, PUF, 2006, pp. 39-64.

45. R. Bertrand, "The Engineers of Democracy: Election Monitoring Agencies and Political Change in Post-Suharto Indonesia", in R. Bertrand et al (eds.), *Cultures of Voting, op. cit.* p. 126; N. Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers. Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005; B. Petric (ed.), *Democracy at Large. NGOs, Political Foundations, Think Tanks and International Organizations*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; D. Recondo, "Tailors of Democracy: UN Electoral Assistance as told by its artisans", in J.-F. Baré (ed.), *Paroles d'experts. Études sur la pensée institutionnelle du développement*, Paris, Karthala, 2006, pp. 29-56. The single ballot paper is one of those objects standardised by the recommendations of electoral experts even if it means producing aberrations, such as this oversized ballot paper of the local elections held in 2011 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which was 1 to 56 pages in A2 format generating discussions around the mode and time of folding and the required dimensions of the ballot boxes. "Giant ballot papers for the legislative elections in the DRC", RFI, 24 September 2011, <<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20110924-bulletins-vote-geants-elections-legislatives-rd>>, accessed 3 December 2016.

46. K. Coles, "Election Day...", art. cit.

of the orders of value in which these objects are evaluated and the debates surrounding these values, which thus constantly challenge the process of representation.

The commodification of the objects of the vote is by no means self-evident. Apart from the fact that it is limited in a certain number of countries, particularly in Europe, it was initially a market for electoral expertise, and not objects, that emerged at the turn of the 1990s in the wake of the 'third wave of democratisation'. The "democracy-makers", who were mainly North American and European at the beginning but were soon joined by experts from the Global South, first offered their services, financed by international donors, in the field of legislative reforms and democratic certification<sup>47</sup>. Gradually, in the face of repeated dissatisfactions despite legal and institutional reforms, new objects emerged in the range of electoral solutions. Initially a source of limited commercial opportunities (indelible ink, translucent ballot boxes, then transparent ones rather than opaque), these objects, incorporating more and more technologies, now constitute a significant share of expenditure and, therefore, a vast market. Elections are expensive in African countries: in Kenya, the 2013 election would have cost \$20 per voter, the 2016 election in Ghana about \$15, while in a Western democracy it would cost \$3<sup>48</sup>. For the August 2017 general elections in Kenya, one-sixth of the budget was allocated for the modernisation and replacement of equipment purchased in 2013 (identification kits, transmission of results) for about 35 million euros<sup>49</sup>. After the sale of software enabling the creation of computerised lists, this market is now mainly fuelled by biometric and communication technologies. Biometric identification, for the establishment of civil status, electoral registration, or the distribution of social benefits, emerged in South Africa for historical reasons, and has spread across the continent since the end of the 2000s<sup>50</sup>. Repeated elections, changes of government, and obsolete or poorly stored materials guarantee a flourishing future for the forty or so European, South African, and Indian companies that have invested in this market<sup>51</sup>.

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47. Electoral expertise is often associated with institutions 'from the North' (such as the European Union, the Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute), but in addition to the fact that some of these organisations are multilateral and truly international in their recruitment and geographical base (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance based in Addis Ababa, UNDP whose experts are of various origins...), some countries have become 'models' that are being disseminated in electoral knowledge networks: this is the case of Brazil or Mexico, as well as Ghana.

48. M. Wrong, "Africa's Election Aid Fiasco", *The Spectator*, 20 April 2013.

49. *Business Daily (Nairobi)*, 26 May 2016.

50. K. Breckenridge, *Biometric State*, *op. cit.*

51. Interview with business executives from one of these companies, Nairobi, 16 June 2016.

The sustainability of the latter is all the better assured since it is supported by a group of professionals, both in the global North and South, for whom material innovation is an adequate response to the problems encountered during elections. Democratic techniques, like those of 'development', appear to be a means of responding to the political and economic expectations of populations without interfering in the internal workings of these societies<sup>52</sup>. They would be 'neutral' because they would not require any particular mediation and would 'significantly reduce human control and influence in the process'<sup>53</sup>. Freed of human beings, these techniques would make it possible to inspire confidence in the process, "integrity", as is now required by the norms in circulation. As we shall see, once they have been returned to the social dynamics inherent in the electoral process, these objects of varying degrees of sophistication produce trust as well as suspicion. It is in fact the material evidence of credibility that they are supposed to provide. The multiplication of standardised techniques designed to guarantee voter authentication, single voting, double transmission of results, etc., are part of the development of an objectifiable credibility regime. Beyond the old controversies surrounding the politicisation of electoral certification<sup>54</sup>, the presence/absence, efficiency/failure of these technologies provide common criteria by which to determine this credibility. However, even minimal discussion and consensus around this issue are necessary for all actors to continue to invest themselves<sup>55</sup>. A 'credible' election is necessary for governments that can claim a certain legitimacy. It is also necessary for the 'independent' administrations in charge of organising the elections: the companies that provided the material, the experts that advised, the NGOs that monitored and controlled, also thanks to sophisticated technologies - all share an interest in relying on the latter to claim to evaluate the quality of the elections and possibly agree to improve it during the next elections.

The regular controversies that surround the objects shed light on the fragility of the electoral order. With each reform of electoral laws, prior to each election, suppliers - often foreign - extol the benefits of using their technology

52. See J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine. Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1994 and, on elections, K. Coles, "Election Day...", art. cit.

53. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Introducing Electronic Voting: Essential Considerations*, Policy Paper, December 2011, Stockholm, IDEA, p. 5; for a historical discussion of the neutrality of technology in the electoral process, see P. Pels, "Imagining Elections...", art. cit.

54. G. Geisler, "Fair? What Has Fairness Got to Do With It? Vagaries of Election Observations and Democratic Standards", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1993, pp. 613-637.

55. M.-E. Pommerolle, "Donors and the Making of 'Credible' Elections in Cameroon", in T. Hagmann and F. Reyntjens (eds.), *Development without Democracy: Aid and Authoritarianism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Londres/Uppsala, Zed Books/Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2016, pp. 119-138.

in terms of voter turnout and reducing fraud; opposition political parties protest against the acquisition of materials or the adoption of devices that could put them at a disadvantage at the time of voting; moral contractors (NGOs, legal associations, 'experts', etc.) challenge verification systems, civic education associated with new materials, etc.<sup>56</sup>. The recurring questions are therefore: can election materials be a mere commodity? Are the new technologies still democratic? Does their origin - often foreign - not call into question the sovereignty of the state? Consensus on the value of these objects is rare and conditions are often met for the beliefs projected in them to conflict. Firstly, the electoral market in which they are traded is considered to be biased: public controversies and discreet discussions challenging the awarding of contracts for the supply of recent technologies are commonplace in many countries<sup>57</sup>. The proximity of certain governments to the winning companies, the proven or alleged distribution of bribes, and the mediocrity of certain selected companies all contribute to calling into question both the quality of the objects and their market value. Second, the democratic value of election materials is a matter for discussion. The multiplicity of available technologies, their combination and sophistication mean that they are very often perceived, in the media or among voters, as "black boxes" susceptible to manipulation<sup>58</sup>. Introduced in the name of transparency, they are instead seen as relatively opaque. While companies point the finger at the "human factor" in the failure of these objects<sup>59</sup>, the mistrust is more to do with the supposed political intent of those who control the process as a whole. And their promoters, aware of this mistrust, can offer few arguments, aside from technical and educational ones, to reassure voters: "Credibility is not and cannot be ensured by technology alone. It is a facilitator, but each process must be well planned. [...] We hope Kenyans will adapt to the technology; and understand how it works," argued the head of the Independent Electoral

56. Debates sometimes creep in from within the state apparatus, as in the debates surrounding the introduction of electronic voting machines in Namibia in 2014 between the Namibian Electoral Commission and the Law Reform and Development Commission of the Ministry of Justice, which opposed the need to attach to electronic voting a printed ballot receipt that allows the voter to see and check it before it is placed in the ballot box. N. Shejvali, 'Electronic Voting Machines', *Election Watch*, Briefing Paper No. 1, October 2014; Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 'Electronic Voting and the 2014 Namibian General Elections', Assessment Report, n.l., n.d., <<https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/nam2014eisa.pdf>>, accessed 3 December 2016.

57. These controversies have flourished in Cameroon as well as in Chad, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Namibia, and so on.

58. This observation on the Ivory Coast and Ghana can be found in: G. Piccolino, "Infrastructural State Capacity...", art. cit.; on India in M. Banerjee, "Sacred Elections", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 42, no. 17, 28 April-4 May 2007, pp. 1556-1562; on Namibia in G. Dobbler, "Waiting and Voting in the Village: Electronic Voting Machines in Namibia's 2014 Elections", paper presented at the ACPA Study Days, Paris, CERI, 31 May 2016.

59. Interview Nairobi, 16 June 2016.

and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) following the shortcomings of voting and results transmission technology in 2013 in Kenya<sup>60</sup>. The latest challenge to these electoral objects concerns their provenance. The sovereignty claimed by the introduction of these power infrastructures is up for debate, in a still ambivalent mode. Namibian voters, the first on the continent to use electronic voting machines made in India<sup>61</sup>, wonder whether they can trust them. Wouldn't a local manufacturer be more likely, in fact, to favour the current leadership, which is capable of controlling their activities? What about the involvement of a French company in the census process and the manufacture of identity cards and voters' cards in a former colony<sup>62</sup>? We can see how the question of material modernity serves as a basis for questions about the true holders of sovereignty, especially during an election period: the world at large, the state, the people? The materiality of the vote strongly challenges the relationship between states and foreign and standardised technologies. This point allows us to reflect on the "production of expertise and authority<sup>63</sup>", in terms of voting material, and in particular the ambivalence of authority from the outside world<sup>64</sup>. The aim of this collection is also to demonstrate the local uses of products designed partly from the outside and the practices and uses - sometimes unexpected - or, in Appadurai's terms, the paths and diversions to which they give rise.

#### THE SINGULARISATION OF THE ELECTORAL OBJECT

The contrast is striking between the regulated and static order of the polling stations on the one hand and the carnivalesque campaign scenes on the other, where painted bodies and customised vehicles move around in a space saturated with sounds and visuals. This reflects another rift between the idea of a rational and disciplined voter and that of a militant crowd, and makes it possible to revisit the individual and collective subjectivities produced simultaneously and not necessarily exclusively by objects (see the article by J. Willis et al.). Their ostentatious staging and the distribution of trinkets involve mechanisms of exchange that have already been amply described.

60. Notes taken during a commentary by the Director of IEBC at the University of Strathmore, Nairobi, 5 July 2016.

61. See G. Dobbler, "Waiting and Voting in the Village...", art. cit., as well as similar questions reported by Anna Rader in this issue on the South African manufacture of Somali voter registration cards.

62. One thinks here of the French company Safran-Morpho, which carried out the census and the production of identity cards and electoral cards in Mali.

63. J. Roitman and J.-P. Warnier, "La politique de la valeur", art. cité.

64. N. Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers...*, op. cit ; B. Petric (ed.), *Democracy at Large...*, op. cit.

The inventive zeal of a partisan display is of course part of a quest for political favour. If putting clientelism in context has helped to qualify their effects on the vote, taking an interest in the objects of exchange seems to open up even more avenues<sup>65</sup>. The production and circulation of campaign objects reveal a variety of producers and policies of value<sup>66</sup>. The strictly financial dimension of campaigns, which is often neglected, influences their progress, which is often governed by the "merchandising" of the ruling parties (hence the fierce struggle of those putting up and taking down posters described by Marie-Aude Fouéré in this issue). The ruling parties and their elites, as the article by E. Muendane and D. do Rosário on Mozambique shows, dominate the electoral market (most often they give away material when the opposition sells it). But this power of the ruling party does not exhaust the logic of production and circulation of electoral propaganda. The production and distribution of campaign materials, and sometimes even ballot papers, can be decentralised or even privatised and be the responsibility of each candidate, increasing the possibilities of reappropriation and misappropriation. Local bosses produce partisan material while waiting to be reimbursed; activists, or interested voters, buy small campaign items from China to participate in the election celebrations. Some voters, as in the Ugandan presidential election in 2016, support their candidate, the challenger, by making donations at rallies, completely reversing the terms of trade.

Moreover, this is not limited to the relationship between the state and citizens or candidates and voters. P. Grassin and M.-A. Fouéré clearly show how taking an interest in objects and their uses makes it possible to broaden the view not only to political or technical personnel, but also to non-voters, non-activists, those who are deprived of the right to vote but who are nevertheless exposed to politics, who contribute to the staging of campaigns (such as dancers at rallies or the young people who beat up candidates armed with whistles and recruited to "make noise")<sup>67</sup>, or who exercise other forms of political participation that are all too quickly reduced to manducatory

65. H. Combes and G. Vommaro, *Sociologie du clientélisme*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015; L. Zaki (ed.), *Terrains de campagne au Maroc. Les élections législatives de 2007*, Paris, Karthala, 2009; R. Banégas, "Marchandisation du vote, citoyenneté...", art. cité.

66. J. Roitman and J.-P. Warnier, "La politique de la valeur", art. cité.

67. On the role socially assigned to women in the festive reception of party representatives in the village, see J.-P. Olivier de Sardan, "Une culture électorale ? Anthropologie multi-sites des processus électoraux au Niger", in J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (ed.), *Élections au village...*, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

practices<sup>68</sup>. The attention paid in the articles of the dossier to the individual and collective uses of these objects further specifies, and often in an indirect manner, the form and intensity of power relations during these electoral periods. The way in which bodies manipulate and absorb them reveals forms of differentiated politicisation. M.-A. Fouéré clearly shows how the struggles around political advertising engage Zanzibari activists, especially from the opposition, in intense physical and moral battles. This commitment echoes that of the Malawian activists described by P. Grassin, who proudly wear the *chitenje* at meetings. But the partisan fabric is also worn by a group of women who carry on their bodies the attributes of a party that they have only occasionally encountered. Dressed in wrappers, these bodies then appear as political infrastructure in a country with few formal partisan structures. They are also a site of gendered, social, and political distinction: the cut of the *chitenje* (its level of sophistication) conveys information about social differences within the activist group.

From their conception, their production to their exchanges, objects are embedded in a bundle of social relations, contradictory interests, debates, and power games that condition the unpredictability of their interpretations and uses. Their circulation within the space of ordinary social relations inhabited by their own historicity leads them to have social trajectories which, by their very nature, contain their share of the unexpected and failure. P. Grassin and M.-A. Fouéré demonstrate this in particular by drawing out the methodological thread of the object-based approach beyond time and the official electoral space. The personalisation of Zanzibari posters using scissors and glue, their singularisation, apprehend, transform, and reinterpret their original semiology. Similarly, the off-campaign uses of fabric, as curtains or to carry goods, for example, and the - often futile - attempts by political parties to control the good and bad uses of the partisan fabric, raise questions about what it means to be a good activist in Malawi today and point to a political economy of partisan labour that opens up much wider perspectives than the mere study of the vote.

Analysing the process of vote production during the electoral process rather than analysing it at the ballot box exit allows the object of the vote to be taken out of its electoral usage and put back into its banal and day-to-day post-election use, and thus to re-establish the electoral moment within a

68. J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993 ; F. O'Gorman, "Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780-1860", *Past and Present*, no. 135, 1992, pp. 79-115 ; by the same author, "The Culture of Elections in England: From the Glorious Revolution to the First World War, 1688-1914", in E. Posada-Carbo (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, pp. 17-31.

temporal continuum and in a more ordinary political timeframe. The analysis of the social lives of the objects of the vote has the merit of dilating the electoral moment beyond the period covering the delivery of the material until the vote count - the time at which election observation is limited - to also take into account the "out-of-scope" of the vote (from the constitution of the voters' lists to the transport of the ballots to the counting places, the storage of used and blank ballots and the management of disputes, and beyond the reintegration of the objects into ordinary social spaces that have been trivialised by their programmed political expiry). It allows us to question the non-electoral uses of voting materials, their conservation, their normalisation, and even their empowerment. The voters' cards described by E. Muendane and D. do Rosário in Mozambique serve many purposes aside from going to the polls: they are identity papers that are easy to obtain, they give access to a range of social services, they sometimes serve as a travel document. However, there are methodological limitations to approaching elections through their objects, which in themselves shed light on electoral practices. First of all, it is necessary to mention the collection of data, which is in itself a difficult experience<sup>69</sup>. Firstly, the incessant renewal of the institutions in charge of elections and of the - non-professionalized - staff leads to the disappearance of electoral material, lost in constant moves. This absence of traces is the same in the political parties, which are weakly institutionalised. Party headquarters keep few archives. Finding relevant documents may require a time-consuming search for private archives among the political staff themselves. The commodification of elections leads to rapid obsolescence of technological objects - or their inadequate storage and maintenance - and the constant purchase of new equipment and the scrapping (or recycling) of previously used equipment.

Some electoral objects are by nature ephemeral and may be destroyed as soon as the election is over. Objects are partly exchanged during night campaigns, sometimes behind closed doors (in the private residence of a local party or local government representative). Access to those that survive is often refused on the grounds of the sensitivity of the materials or simple criteria laid down by law (particularly for ballot papers). Keeping election materials at home can also be dangerous because they are considered suspicious in areas where autocratic tendencies are prevalent. Finally, outside

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69. The coordinators of this dossier faced many logistical and political difficulties in organising the exhibition on elections in East Africa: it was easy to collect a wide variety of materials in Tanzania, which was in the middle of the campaign at the time; the collection in Kenya had to be done by local political staff, while the electoral authorities had difficulty finding old electoral items, but were generous with brand new material. Finally, in Burundi, the post-electoral crisis situation made collection perilous.

electoral periods, institutional and campaign material is difficult to access. The objects distributed during campaigns, when they are not consumed on the spot, live an autonomous life afterwards. Detached from their original purpose, they are only found by chance: an electoral cloth wrapper used to pack goods at the market, and which daily use ends up wearing out, a jacket in a candidate's colours worn by a motorbike taxi driver, a faded and partially torn poster that barely withstands the passage of time. Voting is a regular yet isolated event and therefore leaves very little trace. Despite the objective of broadening reflection beyond the time frame of the elections, the collection of objects in itself takes place mainly, if not solely, during the election period and therefore imposes a temporality that partly obstructs analysis. Yet as this collection shows, there is a life for the object after the election - if we look for this carefully.

This collection is both a demonstration that that this object-based approach is heuristically stimulating and a call for transdisciplinarity - historians, sociologists, anthropologists, but also geographers or demographers, can enrich this approach. Thinking about materiality can tell us about the state, a party, a campaign, activism - and about daily life in an authoritarian regime where not wearing the T-shirt of the ruling party or not agreeing to stick the poster of the ruling party on the walls of one's house is both a risk and statement [1]. By following the trajectories of these objects of the vote, we learn about the political geography of the city, the nature of party work, local power relations, the level of bureaucratisation of the state and its capacity to penetrate the peripheries. The approach throws light on a recurring question about elections in Africa: where overall results are often not in doubt, why do elections excite such interest? A detour through materiality reminds us that elections are not simply about results: they are events which bring together multiple projects of discipline, of claim-making and the display of status. The material aspect of these projects is part of their potency - making them present in everyday life. It also provides a focus for their contestation, as the use or significance of multiple items - posters and printed cloths; digital devices and paper registers - is challenged or remade. As things - present, immediate and visible - these items shape behaviours, just as behaviours give significance to them. These objects help make the vivid, noisy, intrusive reality of elections - as events made by multiple actors, tangible and full of possibilities. We can all learn much from the materiality of the vote.

*Voting Materiality*

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