

palabre that makes it a good candidate for this sort of endeavour, especially when examined in the context of the constitution of the public sphere.

To conclude, it is pertinent to underscore that Bidima's study broadens our understanding of the public sphere due to his originality and capacity to synthesise different strands of thought. This notwithstanding, the reader is still left in the end with questions about the relationship of theory and praxis. Since *palabre* is a non-violent means of structuring conflicts, how should we conceive its application in contemporary international politics that is challenged by silent/ non-dialogical violence? How is the practice of *palabre* possible where people do not share the same initial presupposition – that violence or conflicts can be structured through a 'staging' of the word? In all, it must be conceded that Bidima has done a very important work here which deserves the critical attention of philosophers, political theorists, legal scholars as well the general public.

UCHENNA OKEJA
Goethe University

Civic Agency in Africa: Arts of Resistance in the 21st Century edited by EBENEZER OBADARE and WENDY WILLEMS

Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014. Pp. 236. £45 (hbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X14000524

This is an excellent collection, well-edited and, without exception, well-written. The premises and themes of the collection are simple but radical: that African civil society and civil subjects are not replicas of Western models, but embody their own histories and social conditions; and that the African sub-altern speaks, but in a variety of interesting, novel, and entertaining ways. Humour and innovation, informality and creativity become key motifs in this book.

Having said that, the book then becomes a 'sampler' of different forms of civil expression and civic agency. What is privileged is expression and agency from below, but comedy, satire and music stand out as examples. To this extent, the collection follows well-worn tracks, e.g. Fela Kuti in Nigeria, Malian music (which of all African musics is probably the most embedded in the 'world music' scene), and the cartoons of Zapiro in South Africa.

But music requires a production base – recording studios and the like – and political cartoons requires newspapers, whether printed or web. Those 'below' need access to technology. Although talk-back radio is discussed (in Mali), it is this aspect of civil agency which is under-written in this collection: the technological mastery and access to technology by the under-privileged. Even the brief account of the North African 'Arab Spring' fails to delve deeply into social media or citizen reporting on smartphones. But, in the access to technology, the smartphone has proved the great leveller and democratiser, as both access to late-capitalism (in the form of money transfers) and expression and protest (in viral messaging and images) become possible.

The fault of the collection is simultaneously its richness. Its examples of civic action are all rich, but they are also for the most part set-pieces which can be studied as set-pieces. The fluidity of late-modernity, or a form of African post-modernity, is not fully captured here.

'Difficult' set-pieces like Somali piracy are not within this collection, but hustlers and certain local reinventions of capitalism thankfully are. The boundaries between civic action and outlaw behaviour and outlaw organisation are things to be more problematised, hopefully in a successor collection.

The theoretical shadows of the Comaroffs and James Scott infuse this book, and speak most tellingly of an historical and socio-cultural context for all analysis of Africa. Insofar as Scott has always spoken about rebellion and resistance, including the dangers of resistance, the most moving chapter in the book belongs to Susan Thomson's account of peasant resistance in a post-genocide Rwanda, all too often reduced to a binary of Hutu and Tutsi. Thomson speaks of the many other complexities of life and conditions that cannot be escaped – but are still resisted.

What is moving also, although not designed to be so, is the Foreword by the late Patrick Chabal. It may well be one of Patrick's last works. He warns us that resistance may be nefarious as well as beneficial. This is a sobering thought to be carried into the explorations that make up a technologically limited but otherwise exhilarating book.

STEPHEN CHAN

School of Oriental & African Studies

The Horn of Africa (Global Political Hot Spots) by KIDANE MENGISTEAB

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014. Pp. 272. £15.99 (hbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X14000536

This comprehensive, thematic review of the Horn of Africa is part of a series on 'Hot Spots in Global Politics' and there is no doubt that the Horn is just such a case. Mengisteab's contribution is to place the causes and consequences of conflict in the Horn into perspective and to provide some reasonable explanations for why the eight countries of this part of Africa have been home to so much war and violence. With the exception of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is the only book in the series focused on Africa, and strikingly, the only one to tackle the question of violence in more than one or two countries. This is warranted, since extricating the sources of conflict for any one of the countries of the Horn without a regional discussion would be quite impossible and Mengisteab's work is well-placed to consider the topic as a regional one.

The central claim is that the primary failure is that of domestic and regional governance, but that these are exacerbated by other factors, such as historical legacies, global politics and hastening environmental degradation. Mengisteab considers each in turn, first reviewing the types and intensity of conflicts in the sub-region, as well as the impacts of these on social, economic and political life. Certainly, the legacy of empires and colonial states and the role of external actors as exacerbating conflict in the region, while well-understood, are crucial and convincing. Similarly, the role of poor resource management, as Mengisteab calls it, together with accelerating climate change and globalisation of climate-related resource demands (water, land for cultivation, mineral resources), are indisputably critical. More interesting is Mengisteab's discussion of state and regional governance. First, he argues that domestic governance has failed, and he seems to attribute this to weak accountability systems, parallel and