

## A Book Review on The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power by Alex de Waal. London: Polity Press, 2015

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The author, Alex de Waal, who is a specialist in the Horn of Africa, brings about, in this his latest book, a new perspective on politics in this region. The book is about how 'real politics' functions in the Horn of Africa in a way that is of a business fashion. It focuses on agents of *real politics* in this troubled region. De Waal gives 'a contemporary historical ethnography of these men: their power, their relationships with one another, and their norms and ethics.' He argues that the leading and increasingly new normal structure that guides these actors behavior is what he calls the "political marketplace". Enriched by the author's detailed knowledge of the Horn of Africa region and decades-old experience and conversation and working relations with senior power elites, military and security people and other actors in the region, the book is organized in twelve chapters.

At the core of the book is the 'framework of political marketplace' which refers to the idea that 'politics is business and business is politics'. According to him, it is the current structure of governance whereby politics is none other than transactional. The author employed the framework as an actual occurrence in certain states and as 'a general principle of political life'. He noted that in the political marketplace, politicians act as "political entrepreneurs" and "business managers" in an attempt to capture and retain power in an intrinsically volatile system. Money, war and power are highly interlocked. Politicians, De Waal underscores, 'actually exchange services and rewards, loyalty and money, for prices set by the elementary principles of demand and supply, and also influenced by whoever is able to regulate the market.' The author argues that the skill and success of politicians depends on whether they operate in line with political market principles.

According to De Waal, the Horn of Africa is a region where political entrepreneurs and business managers operate under this framework. 'They actually exchange services and rewards, loyalty and money, for prices set by the elementary principles of demand and supply, and also influenced by whoever is able to regulate the market.' The region, he opines, is "an advanced and militarized political marketplace". There are four factors, according to the author, that gave rise to advanced political marketplace systems or in other words known as 'variables of real politics': political entrepreneurs' political budget; lack of monopoly over the means of coercive force; the inability of institutions to resolve political disputes; and the incorporation of the states in the global political economy in a way of subordination. In this regard, Horn states can be said to good examples of such exposition. Thus, formal structure of governance is alien in "political marketplaces" such as the Horn of Africa.

The author explores Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Somaliland as perfect case studies for political markets. As baffling as it may sound, with detailed discussion on these case studies, De Waal sees Ethiopia as exception of the political marketplace. Based on the seven case studies, the author argues that the Horn of Africa is part and parcel of the global patronage structure where political loyalties are "instrumentalized and dollarized in a regional political marketplace".

The author provides concluding remarks. Though it is difficult to check the role of money in global politics easily, a mechanism needs to be devised to reduce its devastating impact particularly on the states that are politically and economically weak. De Waal, in a way that seems more of idealism, suggests that the contemporary global politics that is characterized by "political marketplaces" can be fixed if we pour more humanity in the political order and non-political markets in politics.

The issues stated in the book are relevant to the study of political science in the sense that: 1) it deals with the concept of 'power' as something that should be seen in relation to money and armed conflict; 2) it also captures the idea that 'Weberian state' is hardly present in advanced political marketplaces, mostly poorer and weaker states; and 3) it is related to economic interdependency theory and political economy.

Regarding methods, he seemed to have shied away from the conventional political science methods by applying an ethnographic approach to explore the issue at hand. In addition, he employed a political economy approach of explaining politics in one of the most conflict-ridden region in the world, Horn of Africa. He tried to make sense of the role of money over a political order. The author benefited from a massive source of primary data from heads of states, top military and security officials etc. and his personal observation as an active part of peace dealings in the region. From theoretical standpoints, though the author seemed to have inclined towards realism (real politik) in terms of understanding politics, he in contrary does not take state as a primary actor.

De Waal's work is a very relevant, detailed, empirically grounded and thought provoking work that introduced new and original framework - *political marketplace*- for understanding politics in the Horn of Africa. He excellently tried to show the interplay among money, war and power in the region and the inadequacy of any attempt of dealing with conflict by different actors without considering this reality. On top, the author's contribution to the existing body of knowledge on politics in the

Horn by bringing about fresh perspectives is another strong side. It is a very useful guide for anyone who wants to further study politics in the Horn of Africa.

That said, the book also has at least three drawbacks. First, it singlehandedly takes money as a determining factor in regulating politics in the Horn of Africa and almost totally ignored the role of state and other institutions as well as good-hearted agents. Second, though the author seems to wear a political scientist glass in seeing politics he failed to adequately

link his findings with concepts and theoretical perspectives of political science and international relations. Finally, the book has tended to wrongly present Ethiopia a rather different story than part of an advanced political marketplace like other case studies in the Horn of Africa. The author tried to romanticize Ethiopia as an exception as it, he argued, declared "democratic developmental state". Despite the fact that Ethiopia is a country that is neither democratic nor developmental state with widespread corruption and weak state institutions.