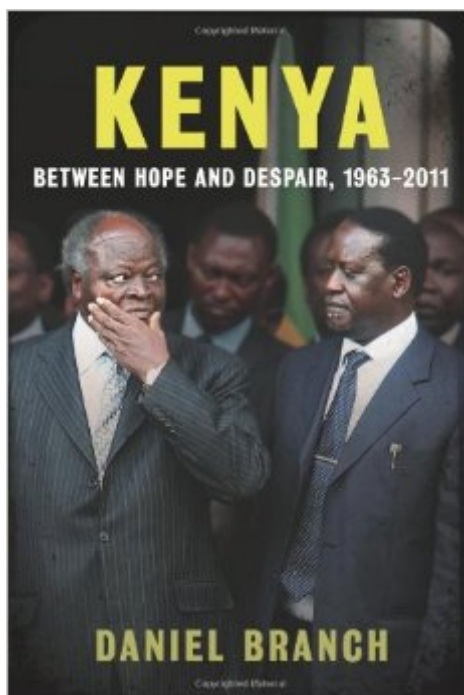


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Kenya: Between Hope And Despair, 1963-2011



Synopsis

On December 12, 1963, people across Kenya joyfully celebrated independence from British colonial rule, anticipating a bright future of prosperity and social justice. As the nation approaches the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, however, the people's dream remains elusive. During its first five decades Kenya has experienced assassinations, riots, coup attempts, ethnic violence, and political corruption. The ranks of the disaffected, the unemployed, and the poor have multiplied. In this authoritative and insightful account of Kenya's history from 1963 to the present day, Daniel Branch sheds new light on the nation's struggles and the complicated causes behind them. Branch describes how Kenya constructed itself as a state and how ethnicity has proved a powerful force in national politics from the start, as have disorder and violence. He explores such divisive political issues as the needs of the landless poor, international relations with Britain and with the Cold War superpowers, and the direction of economic development. Tracing an escalation of government corruption over time, the author brings his discussion to the present, paying particular attention to the rigged election of 2007, the subsequent compromise government, and Kenya's prospects as a still-evolving independent state.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kenyans experienced independence in 1963, but not all enjoyed the rights and benefits of citizenship; they have witnessed economic growth, but have not necessarily been able to find work; they have participated in development projects that have not necessarily delivered improved standards of living; and they have voted in elections without experiencing democracy, according to Daniel Branch in this book. The book explores Kenyan politics from the time of the first president

Kenyatta, through the time of the second president Moi, up to the present time of the third president Kibaki. In the early days the struggle was between the political elite and those like Oginga Odinga who wanted to redistribute the wealth. After a while the struggle was simply between different factions in the political elite who wanted to seize power and feather their own nests. Remarkably, the author does not hesitate to detail instances of corruption and criminal conduct and name names, given the propensity of the Kenyan elite to sue for defamation. Former National Security Minister Chris Murungaru is currently suing KTN for defamation over the allegation that he was a drug kingpin. Former Minister of Trade and Industry Nicholas Biwott was awarded \$750,000 for defamation over the allegation that he murdered Robert Ouko. President Kibaki has publicly threatened defamation proceedings against anyone who claims he is a polygamist. All of these allegations and many more appear in the book. Perhaps the author has greater confidence in the independence of the current judiciary. Although the book's title suggests that Kenya fluctuates between hope and despair, the abiding impression gained by the reader is more on the side of despair.

'Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011' is a 300-page romp through 48 years of Kenya's post-independence history. As a book it is not without merit: the story moves along at pace and the historical meal Daniel Branch serves up is easily digestible. In these respects it is a popular history for the general reader, or someone new to the subject of Kenyan history. Unfortunately, however, for those with a knowledge of the country's history, Branch's multiple errors and unjustified assumptions will prove a problem. Take for example the book's section on the murder of Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Robert Ouko, in February 1991 ('Who Killed Bob', pages 190 - 193). Branch writes: 'To maintain cohesion of the ruling elite, the government nevertheless turned to another well-rehearsed method of asserting its authority', i.e., had Ouko murdered. There is little or no evidence for this assumption and virtually all of the evidence that has come to light since about 1991 suggest that it is wrong. A couple of lines later Branch states; 'On 15 February 1990, the partially burnt body of the foreign minister, Robert Oukjo, was found, close to his home near Kisumu'. In fact, Ouko's body was first found on 13 February that year by a local herdsboy (who did not report it to the authorities) and officially found following a police search on the morning of 16 February. Branch goes on to state that Ouko's relationship with some of his cabinet colleagues in the months prior to his death had 'soured' in the months leading up to his death. There is little or no evidence for this statement (and much that contradicts it) and Branch does not provide evidence in its support.

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