Daniel Branch. 2011. Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011

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Abstract

Kenya has been a beacon of stability in the East African sub-region albeit a political milieu colored by institutionalization of violence over the years and economic marginalization, often viewed in ethno-geographic terms. Daniel Branch's book is a presentation of statecraft and governance crisis in post-colonial Kenya, focusing mainly on the role played by elites. It ought to be noted that the violence that rocked Kenya following the 2007 elections was not a surprise episode but a simmering volcano only waiting to explode. Ethnicity as a medium of political mobilization coupled with profound divisions along regional and religious lines have characterized local politics (Ajulu 2001, p.1) (1) Indeed, the spate of communal violence has either been sponsored or condoned by elites in positions of power. What the author describes as "fetishisation of order" (p. 18) by successive Kenya's ruling elites is an outcome of a strategy of informalizing state repressive institutions to serve political ends. The volume is niftily organized, chronologically presenting dynamics of Kenyan politics under three regimes (Kenyatta 1963-78; Moi 1978-2002; Kibaki 2002-present). It is basically a blend of informed personal reflections and biographical characterization of the most influential personalities in the country's political scene. This approach makes the author's account of Kenya's political history more fascinating.