lifetime service in the Anglo-Egyptian army. General readers of military history as well as scholars will learn much from *Slaves of Fortune*.

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A SUCCESSION OF FALSE DAWNS IN KENYA

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Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011. By DANIEL BRANCH. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. Pp. xi + 366. $35, hardback (ISBN 978-0-300-14876-3).

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Daniel Branch's political history of Kenya since independence deals with the consequences of choices: paths taken in the mid-1960s could not later be retraced; rejected alternatives mutated to extremes but never entirely disappeared. Branch's economical and lucid account follows the working out of what at times seems an inevitable tragedy of unrealised hopes and angry despair, especially if read against the deeper background of Kenya's colonial past.

The first choice facing Kenya's new rulers was between building a nation and securing the state: Kenya's new rulers chose the latter. In 1963, Kenya needed social stability and economic growth. Both the old masters and the new rulers deemed the centralised state best able to deliver both. A field administration, accustomed to implementing orders, and a central bureaucracy were regarded as far more reliable as instruments of order and development than politicians and ideologues. 'Firm government' of the colonial kind was, in any case, all that most Kenyans had ever known. A *majimbo* alternative of strong regions and weak centre, created during the transfer of power to assuage 'minority' fears, was jettisoned after independence, only to reappear two decades later in the context of a discourse of autochthony rather than as a constitutional contrivance. The nation, meanwhile, was left to build itself. Kenya's many communities were too fractious and too jealous of their autonomy to be obedient 'nationalists': citizens would always be householders first. Perhaps working for oneself would, in time, create a shared 'Kenyan' identity of freedom, responsibility, and mutual accountability, but the odds were against this and the state did not intervene.

The second fateful choice was the decision to opt for the politics of 'recognition' (which treated communities separately and overlooked inequality) rather than of 'redistribution' (which would have looked to class rather than ethnicity to allocate resources and promote inclusion). The logic of 'recognition' encouraged the development of patronage networks in which members of the ruling elite played the key mediating roles and benefitted from privileged access to power and resources which they deployed to build and deliver support in the localities. Strong government, with carefully calibrated access to power at the top and competition between patrons would, perhaps, ensure that patronage systems would support rather than threaten central authority and would discipline the citizenry. A populist, but hardly 'socialist' call for redistribution was crushed in the late 1960s, along with the party that advocated it, but the redistributive ideal lived on in increasingly radical and 'subversive' demands for social justice by the marginalised, the dispossessed, and the disappointed. By the mid-1970s, the party had largely been replaced by

patronage, and the old accepted inequalities had been transformed into a single divide between a capitalised and connected 'gatekeeper' elite, increasingly resorting to force and corruption to maintain its position, and the broad mass of Kenyans for whom the hope of a modest self-sufficiency through land or salary was dwindling.

Along with the late colonial apparatus of order, Kenya's rulers also inherited the problems that such concentrations of unaccountable power create. Kenya's dissolution began at the centre with the gradual delegitimisation and finally disintegration of the state. Before Kenyatta died, violence was replacing order, corruption had become endemic and the ruling elite was split into factions. Moi, following in Kenyatta's footsteps, completed the process, while using methods that the conservative author of *Facing Mount Kenya* and the principled defendant at Kapenguria might not have countenanced. The 'Professor of Politics' was an expert at exploiting ethnic divisions to bolster his authority and he used his control of the security apparatus to silence dissent wherever he imagined it. His warning that 'multipartyism' would unleash the violence of 'political tribalism' (to use Lonsdale's phrase) was a self-fulfilling prophecy. With violence and corruption so deeply entrenched in the business of politics, Moi's successors have yet to find a way out of Kenya's long crisis.

There is far more despair than hope in Branch's history. Indeed, his narrative is structured around a succession of false dawns, moments when Kenya seemed to have reached a turning point, but failed to alter course. However, as he points out, even at the worst moments there were always critical voices calling for accountability and willing to risk the terrors of Nyayo House to expose corruption and brutality. Critics believed in responsible government and understood that Kenya could not survive without it. There were many visions of 'The Kenya We Want', but no dispute that 'The Kenya We Live In' was not it. How the two might be aligned has been central to Kenya's courageous public debate.

Between Hope and Despair focuses on the calculations and actions of individuals within Kenya, but modern Kenya has also been shaped by external and more impersonal forces. As Branch notes, the rate of population growth – from four to forty million in fifty years – was more than even a well-managed economy could have coped with. The result has been another generation facing landlessness and unemployment and taking arms against them. Moreover, the favourable terms of trade and investment that funded Kenyatta's politics and smoothed its rough edges did not do the same for Moi. Declining export earnings squeezed patrons and made 'gatekeeping' in the form of milking aid and investment vital to political accumulation and survival but more risky and more damaging to the national fabric. The politics of elite accumulation and redistribution could not survive without a constant flow of funds from outside. Once these dried up, the only recourse was to 'eat' the state itself.

Focusing on the ruling elite leaves the lives of ordinary Kenyans largely unexamined, as Branch himself admits. However, power in Kenya has always been highly personalised: what 'Big Men' do matters and is thought to matter by Kenyans themselves. Power also gives the few the authority to speak for the many, and Kenya's elite have ensured that their narratives, whether commanding or critical, will be heard over those of others. Other histories will doubtless focus elsewhere – on social and cultural change since Independence, perhaps – but this book, with its strong narrative and sharp analysis, gives us a starting point; it is also a book that Kenyans will be eager to read.

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