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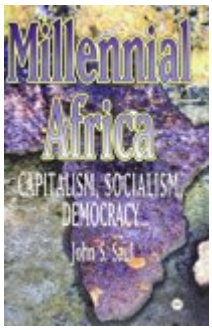
John S. Saul. *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy.* Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2001. 293 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-86543-950-4.



Reviewed by Rosemary Elizabeth Galli

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Africa between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

John Saul's new book is a collection of essays, the third such volume in a series begun in 1990. The first essay focuses on the state of African development which Saul and his co-author, Colin Leys, define as penetrated by capital but not capitalist. It would not be completely unfair to say that this sets the tone of the volume--a tendency to view Africa's problems primarily, although not exclusively, in terms of its insertion in the global capitalist system, a new version of dependency theory with a nod to Geoffrey Kay. Africa is "forced at least for the moment merely to slot into the role...that has been defined for it by capital and its functionaries beyond the continent's borders" (p. 25). In terms of Africa's major internal problem, the authors focus on the "precapitalist" production relations in which the mass of society are still grounded that make it easier to "mobilize people in terms of ethnicity or religion than in terms of a social and economic project beyond the local level" (p. 33). An inability to accept people for what they are and their attachment to social, psychological, cultural aspirations makes it difficult for Saul to deal with politics on the ground, as seen in the later essays.

The second essay berates mainstream Africanists for accepting globalization and silencing a political economy critique. Saul takes to task Carl Rosberg and David Apter for seeing democracy as replacing socialism as the preferred solution for Africa, Adam Przeworski for saying despairingly that "socialism is unfeasible" (p. 66), and Richard Sklar and Michael Lofchie for embracing capitalism as the developmental mechanism for Africa. He throws his lot in with Colin Leys, Manuel Castells and Ankie Hoogvelt who argue "that it is the nature of Africa's insertion into the deeply wounding process of capitalist globalization that is crucial to comprehending the continent's current plight" (p. 56).

While in some ways exciting and certainly provocative, *Millennial Africa* suffers from raising issues that were important and crucial at the time of writing but now seem somewhat dated. The most important of these issues is the free market ideology of the 1980s and early 1990s that sought

to legitimize the free flow of capital, currencies, jobs, people, drugs, and so on, out of state or any kind of social control. Yet the worst excesses of structural adjustment programs imposed by the international financial institutions and major donor countries--including wholesale reduction of state budgets in all areas and especially health and education, large-scale dismissals of state personnel, and the diminishing of state economic power--have now been recognized and, to a limited extent, states are being brought back as 'development' agents.

Instead of simply cataloguing the problems for states and their populations caused by global capital, Saul's contribution would have been more meaningful had he addressed, in at least one of the essays, the question of how, in concrete terms, African states might attempt social control over global capital and subordinate markets to social purposes. Particularly in the analysis of Mozambique and South Africa, he might have sketched out policies or strategies needed to bring about the "society-wide transformations that could actually change the lives of the vast majority of the population" (p. 146). In contrast, John Friedmann [1], also writing in the 1990s, describes a number of roles for the politically progressive state, including opening a democratic space for popular discussion of alternative development that would include decision-making and action, mobilizing financial resources for such development, supporting community-based initiatives, removing legal obstacles, legislating in favor of community-driven development and providing a supportive administrative framework for alternative development. Friedmann emphasizes the need for organized civil resistance to move states in this direction.

Saul, too, talks about alternative politics. In what for me was the most important chapter of the book, Chapter three, he takes apart the current discussions surrounding democratization and "good governance". The international donor community, including the World Bank and major donor countries, defines good governance in liberal democratic terms. Saul shows clearly that this, perhaps deliberately, misses the most critical point: the question of the relationship of the governed to government, of citizens to the state. What really interests the major players in the development debate is the relationship of governments to capital. Liberal democracy is but a variant of the liberalism that has inspired structural adjustment programs. There is therefore a logical link between the introduction of such liberal democratic institutions as multi-party systems, constitutionalism, individual rights, a regular electoral process and market liberalization. As Saul comments, democratization is in effect a recycled version of modernization theory. The kinds of states produced by this process are not 'strong' but weak, supine to the forces of global capital and the institutions that represent and safeguard it. In a significant reversal of the position he held as late as 1989, Saul sees the FRELIMO government of Mozambique (chapter four) as an example of this kind of government.

Saul contrasts liberal democracy with popular democracy or "genuine popular empowerment," of which there appear to be no African examples. South Africa, which he examines in some detail in chapters five and six, is also a state compromised by its commitment to capitalism. The standard against which he measures African states is that of Benjamin Barber who writes of "strong democracy...defined by politics in the participatory mode" through which "active citizens govern themselves directly, not necessarily at every level and in every instance, but frequently enough and, in particular, when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is being deployed" (p. 96). These are heady words and deserve an exposition of what this can mean in the African context, even if confined to the two cases Saul knows best. However, he disappoints. For the case of Mozambique, all he can come up with is the hope that the liberal institutions established there can

open a space for empowerment "that could spring from the assertions of actors in civil society like trade unions and women's movement structures (now liberated from the deadening hand of monoparty control) and from the claims advanced by more self-confident peasant activists and agricultural cooperativistas" (p. 144). This is more on the level of rhetoric than the serious political economy analysis Saul insists upon throughout the book. Had he updated his material he would have had to note that the women's movement in 1999 once again affiliated itself with FRELIMO despite its earlier efforts to shake off monoparty control. Who are these self-confident peasant activists and agricultural cooperativistas? Just how much influence do the trade unions exercise in domestic politics?

In regard to South Africa, Saul's analysis covers the political scene from the end of apartheid to 2000. Yet here, too, he does not move his arguments on alternative politics beyond mass action, a mobilization of the base, with no indication how this might be institutionalized and turned toward a democratization of the political parties or government, beginning at the local levels. Rather Saul emphasizes labor unions as "the most important players on the left in South Africa" (p. 218) and dissent at the national level of church groups and a number of non-governmental organizations. The only grass-roots groups he mentions are women's groups. Chapter six is the closest that Saul gets to an analysis of concrete situations and the limits of political maneuverability but it is does not go much beyond showing the shift to the right of the African National Congress and the naming of potential groups on the left. Saul has recommendations on how to break the current impasse: a policy of growth through redistribution as the starting point of structural reform but what would structural reform mean in the context of South Africa?

What is most lacking in Saul's exposition is a vision of what a society responsive to the needs and aspirations of the majority of people would look like, of how people might govern themselves (as per the Barber quote mentioned above), of how the different levels of society and the state from local, regional, national to global would be involved and their conflicting claims adjusted and reconciled. John Saul gives a one-word formula in response to these questions: socialism. After the disillusionment suffered by countless millions over the past century with governments that called themselves socialist, those who still espouse the socialist alternative need to spell out not simply their beliefs but also the mechanisms and institutional arrangements for which they are prepared to struggle.

In the Afterword, Saul himself sets this as a task for radical scholars. Because he is such an important student of Africa, I invite him "to move beyond criticism to critique, beyond chartering the continent's injuries and registering and supporting 'resistance' towards the even more central task of articulating a vision of something else worth struggling for" (p. 244). A deeply pessimistic book born out of a tendency to see everything in terms of dichotomies, capitalism or socialism, liberal democracy or popular democracy, ***Millennial Africa*** would have been a better book if it had also dealt with the stuff of practical politics, the only way open for moving forward towards popular democracy.

Note

[1]. John Friedmann, ***Empowerment: the Politics of Alternative Development***, Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

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