

BOOK REVIEWS

Aili Mari Tripp. *Women and Politics in Uganda*. Madison. The University of Wisconsin. 2000. Xxvii+277 pp.

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Aili Mari Tripp's book, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, is about the historical development of the women's movement in Uganda. Tripp analyses the impressive flowering of the women's movement since the National Resistance Movement's (NRM) ascendance to power in January of 1986. Using case studies, Tripp argues that the NRM administration has provided a fertile democratic ground on which the women's movement has flourished. She argues that political leaders in Uganda established a popular and inclusive democratic culture that allowed women to congregate and define their political and economic interests largely on their own terms – how they could be integrated into the new participatory political dispensation.

Thus, Tripp is concerned to demonstrate how the movement progressively gained momentum and established a foothold in Uganda's high politics as well as the grassroots. She contrasts the women's movement in Uganda with the experiences of women in other African countries such as Kenya and Ghana. She aims to show the achievements and women's attainment of political autonomy. Tripp attributes the autonomy to the democratic culture in Uganda. She is concerned with the experiences of Ugandan women under different political systems. Tripp analyses the conditions of women under various administrations from Kabaka Mutesa II through Milton Obote, Idi Amin Dada to the current NRM leadership under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Be that as it may, the bottom line of her argument is how the women's movement has flourished under the NRM government.

In her treatise on the participation of women in the political economy, Tripp explains some factors that have frustrated the progress of the women's movement in Uganda. She cites perverse patriarchal attitudes and masculine institutions built over time in the country as the cause. Yet Tripp argues that despite the fact that androcentric values seem to be deeply rooted in the population, women have resisted moves by male leaders to frustrate their autonomy over the years. For instance, led by Rebecca Mulira, Rhoda Kalema, Pumla Kisosonkole, Yemima Kabogozaza Mukasa and Sara Nyandwoha Ntiro, women used religious organisations such as the Young Christian Women

Association (YWCA), the Anglican Mothers' Union and the Catholic Women's Guilds to provide them with the necessary skills for political action on issues that were their concern (see pp.37-38). In 1950, for example, under the aegis of religious organisations, women played a sterling role in the campaign for the return of the exiled Kabaka to Uganda. This involvement in politics gave the women the relevant political training they required on modern political management, thus improving their political skills in the process.

Tripp argues further that despite the gains women have registered in past few years, the women's organisation suffered incarcerations under the various dictators in Uganda. For instance, at the height of political excitement, Amin Dada decreed that unmarried single women should marry immediately. He also ordered his notorious soldiers to rape women as a way of controlling their supposed waywardness and disobedience (see pp. 69-70). In spite of all the hardships they experienced, women continued to agitate for more political space and to fight laws that oppressed them. For example, women in Uganda encouraged public debate on the efficacy of polygamy, sexual abuse and issues such as defilement of young girls. Women wanted serious steps taken to curb the bad tendencies that facilitated their oppression.

Moreover, women organised themselves under the umbrella of Uganda Council of Women and Interest-Group Politics with the aim of minimising differences between males and females (see p. 41-45). In fact, in more recent times, Ugandan women have demonstrated a strong resolve of ensuring that their rights are respected across the country. In 1986 after the NRM takeover of government, 20 leaders of the National Council of Women (NCW), Action for Development and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) paid President Museveni a courtesy call with a memo in hand, requesting that more women be included in the government. Given the mounting pressure exerted on him by women, Museveni conceded and asked the women leaders to make recommendations to his office of leaders of their choice. The good news for the women was that most of their recommendations were adopted immediately. These included the appointment of 9 women ministers. By 1989, 8 out of 75 ministers in the NRM government were women (see. p. 70).

Further into her text, Tripp argues that there was a proliferation of groups both at local and national level. She notes that in spite of the proliferation, women chose to maintain religious based women's groups as buffer organisations they could fall back on if needed. She maintains that these steps helped to prepare ground for women's more inclusive participation in the political process in Uganda (see p. 104-105). With their perception of the religious movement as an ally, women in Uganda continued to take steps to stem religious sectarianism, ethnic and class divisions.

Intriguingly, Tripp argues that more women than men have persistently opposed the revival of multi-party politics because of fear of resurgence of sectarianism and violence in public life. Her argument is that the politics of exclu-

sion would only lead to turmoil and the resurgence of masculine attitudes and female oppression. But Tripp fails to convince the reader that the multi-party political dispensation would work against the interests of women. My position is that women would actually benefit from a more open political democratic system. Such a system would take on board the views of subaltern women as well.

To add flavour to her book, Tripp uses the case studies of Kampala, Luwero, Kigezi and Busoga to illustrate how women's experiences differ from those of men. She argues that when women have entered the public arena they have brought on board new concerns and interests. For instance, Ugandan women leaders have dealt more with issues concerning health, childcare, sexuality, and family planning – issues previously confined to the private sphere and shunted to the political periphery (p.141). From the information that the reader obtains from the text, the reader might be led to conclude that the NRM no-party dispensation has led to increased participation of women in grassroots women's organisations. The argument goes that this is because they cater to the women's immediate existential needs of the day. This is highly debatable, however.

What, then, are the strengths of Tripp's book? She engages thoroughly with grassroots women's organisations, identifying reasons why women have succeeded in the NRM government and the women's movement. She skillfully uses sociological and historical tools to analyse the success of grassroots women's organisations. Clearly, her study is a significant contribution to women's studies. More importantly she demonstrates the discrepancy of using the same yardstick to measure the success of women's movements across the globe without taking into account the specific conditions that shape women's activities in different geographical and political spaces. But the author must be criticised for presenting women as a homogenous group under the NRM. In this regard, Tripp ignores the class-based interests that shape human alliances, including women's groups. Certainly, Ugandan women are not a homogenous group!

Glenn Adler (ed.). *Engaging the State and Business: The Labour Movement and Co-determination in South Africa*. Johannesburg. Witwatersrand University Press. 2000.

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The concept of 'co-determination' has enjoyed a considerable popularity among industrial sociologists during the 'South African transition'. This par-