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Review of *The African Women's Protocol* by Rosemary Semufumu Mukasa, Oxfam, Great Britain, 2008.

Reviewed by Jessie Kabwila Kapasula, Dept of English, University of Malawi, Chancellor College

Rosemary Semufumu Mukasa's *The African Women's Protocol* (2008) focuses on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women which entered into effect November 25<sup>th</sup> of 2005. This Protocol is a groundbreaking milestone in the protection and promotion of women's rights in Africa because for the first time in international law, it definitively outlines the right of women to medical abortion when pregnancy is a danger to the mother's health or life and results from incest or rape. It also unequivocally calls for the legal prohibition of genital mutilation, abuse of women in advertising and pornography. The Protocol engages a spectrum of economic and social welfare rights for women from marginalized population groups. Mukasa's book is a product of policy research that evaluated the implications of the Protocol in order to promote its mobilization campaigns in three countries – Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa. The book has five sections that open with an overview followed by reports of the three countries, closing with an overall summary. It concentrates on four themes: governance, violence against women, health, and reproductive rights. As an African woman who has lived in the three above mentioned Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries, and as one who has done extensive interdisciplinary research on women's rights in the SADC region, I find the book not only well researched but a fluent demonstration of Mukasa's experienced grasp of the subject matter. The book employs a case study approach that lays a convincing foundation from which Mukasa advances arguments that neither glorify nor pathologize Africa and African women; a trap that most books engaging African women fail to escape. This book is useful for classrooms of many disciplines including Women's Studies, Gender Studies, African/a, Law, Philosophy and Comparative Literature.

*The African Women's Protocol* engages issues pertinent to women of the SADC region such as laws on land, marriage, inheritance rights and property grabbing, violence against women and HIV and AIDS. Locating the Protocol in a brief history of Africa's economic and gender politics enables the book to frame the social context of The African Women's Protocol, thereby helping the reader appreciate the temporal and spatial challenges facing the Protocol. The book stands out amongst peer literature mainly because, unlike many, it registers both the achievements and

challenges of African women. For example, it names indigenous patriarchy (Ajayi Soyinka, 1996) as a major stumbling block in African woman's attainment of land and sexual rights, thereby taking a position in relation to a longstanding debate about the role of patriarchy in African woman's lives. It reiterates the advantages that come from the fact that The African Women's Protocol is homegrown, laying bare the problems that come with depending on the neo-colonial state to publicize the Protocol. In this way, the book manages to portray Africa and African women's agency in the struggle for gender equality, without utopianizing them.

Mukasa's definition of female genital mutilation (FGM) in this book is Euro-westcentric in the way it homogenizes and pathologizes the practice, as if there is one FGM. The book adopts a generalized approach that fails to nuance FGM. It needs to engage FGM from a context specific and subject centered approach as illustrated by Forna in *Ancestor Stones* (2003). How Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)'s have often loyally serve the Euro-west's neo-colonial, neo-liberal and globalization agenda, using the woman question to divide and rule the 'post-colonial' state in Africa, is an issue that does not come out in this book. The very fact that this research is funded by OXFAM raises red flags and a lack of a rigorous investigation of NGOs fans those flames. Apart from their Euro-western funding base, NGO's tend to be elitist in the kind of African woman they engage. Therefore, an interrogatory rather than a camaraderie approach, when it comes to NGO's, would have produced a more representative and convincing discussion of findings, especially to an anti-colonial SADC region women's studies audience.

In conclusion, this is a book that is a must read for anyone engaging SADC women's issues. No other book in its discipline has as much detail, laying bare the strength and challenges of African Women's Protocol. It is clear evidence that its author is not only committed to the cause of African women but has devoted much time and effort unearthing what should be done in order to improve the lives of African women. It just needs to eliminate the repetition, critically engage NGO's and not only rely on the written word as an avenue of research because the majority of SADC women are not literate. Zimbabwe's Dangarembga has eloquently shown this in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Uganda's Baingana in *Tropical Fish* (2005) and Tanzania's Lema in *Parched Earth* (2001), just to mention a few examples. As Ogundipe advises in *Remaking Ourselves* (1996) there is an urgent need to make sure we are looking for African women's voices in spaces which they reside. Supplementing written word research with orature and popular culture on African women of South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique would enrich this book.