

Foreword

Childhood sexuality is a politically fraught and contested terrain in academic and policy discourses. In *Childhood sexuality and law: A feminist critique from a Malawian context*, Dr Godfrey Kangaude offers a provocative and compelling examination of how legal and institutional discourses construct, deny and regulate childhood sexuality, using Malawi as a case study.

Drawing on feminist and post-structuralist theory, Kangaude explores how children's sexual subjectivities are treated in legal, educational and health institutions. He demonstrates that legal texts, such as Malawi's Gender Equality Act and judicial decisions, are not neutral instruments; rather, they are sites where meaning is both contested, valued and revalued through institutional discursive practices. Anchoring his inquiry in the construction of the sexually active child in the Kenyan court case of *Charo v Republic*, he shows how institutions often frame sexually active children as deviant or in need of correction, even while claiming to protect their rights and well-being.

What makes this book particularly significant is its insistence on reading laws and policies not just for what they state, but for how they frame issues, what they obscure, and whose voices they silence. Kangaude challenges scholars, practitioners and policymakers to confront, rather than replicate, dominant assumptions about childhood, gender and sexuality when creating and applying laws and policies in these areas.

This work is both intellectually rigorous and politically urgent. It calls for social, political and legal environments that affirm, rather than erase, children's experiences of embodiment, intimacy and sexual agency. More than a critique, it is an invitation to imagine more just and affirming futures for children across legal, institutional and cultural landscapes.

As someone who has worked in feminist psychology using post-structuralist tools to analyse adolescent pregnancy, I find this book a timely and important contribution. It offers an illuminating example of how to engage with childhood sexuality through close readings of sex and gender laws that move beyond narrow doctrinal approaches. It insists that children be seen and heard as sexual subjects rather than passive recipients of adult protection.

Finally, the book is a pleasure to read. Kangaude's clear and fluid writing guides the reader through a journey of discovery. He seamlessly interweaves theoretical, methodological and analytical discussions, bringing theory to life through his in-depth treatment of key issues around childhood and sexualities. Most strikingly, his commitment to critical reflection 'through the practice of humility', a practice to which we should all aspire, shines through the text and makes for extraordinary reading.

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