permanently in Hong Kong. Therefore, women mainly from the rural part of Indonesia, motivated by a worsening of their economy in the 1990s, began to enter Hong Kong in larger numbers. Today, over 1,20,000 women from the Philippines, over 90,000 women from Indonesia, and thousands more from other parts of South and Southeast Asia are working as maids on two-year contracts in Hong Kong. They are sending much-needed remittances to their families abroad.

Racialization intensified during these economic downturns, particularly when the labour of 'foreign' domestic workers was cheaper and more favoured than the Chinese domestic workers from Mainland China. Increasingly, 'foreign' workers were seen as naturally suited for domestic work. They were dehumanized – treated as no more than foreign commodities, 'furnished' by agencies in their home countries in the first stage of the labour-packaging process, and then 'filtered' and selected by agencies in Hong Kong, who would present past records of these 'products' and ensure that they were 'good value for money' before they were 'hand-picked' by fussy employers. Thus, racist abuse is no doubt a large part of the migrants' working lives in Hong Kong.

Adding to the new edition is research that suggests diverse forms of resistance to the exploitation to which migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong are subjected. 'They are not simply subject to institutionalized power', Nicole Constable says, 'Rather, they are implicated in a field of discursive power in which they both contest and contribute to alternative versions of reality' (p. 203). They have ways of circumventing the rules and they practice subtle forms of 'sabotage'. However, these individual ways of presenting their critique of the power structure under which they are exploited have not been able to challenge that structure.

This book is a useful resource for those studying labour migration.

Hsiao-Hung Pai

doi:10.1057/fr.2008.33

Sex, culture, and justice: the limits of choice

Clare Chambers; Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2008, 294p, ISBN 978-0-271-03301-3 (Hbk), £37.50

Clare Chambers' aim in this book is to find a way to mesh feminist and postmodernist insights about social constructionism with universalist, liberal principles of freedom and equality to deal with enduring forms of gender inequality and injustice. According to Chambers, previous theoretical attempts by liberals and feminists (she would not regard those categories as mutually

exclusive) to tackle gender inequality fall short because they treat choice as a 'normative transformer', which transforms an otherwise unjust practice or situation into a just or acceptable one (p. 21, p. 38). If women declare that they have voluntarily chosen something – cosmetic breast implants and female genital mutilation are examples typically discussed in the literature and in this book – then many conclude that a liberal state must not prevent them. Chambers would like to see these practices banned because she regards them as incompatible with gender equality and justice, and she believes that a *liberal* (or, more precisely, a perfectionist liberal) state can consistently do so. Her interwoven arguments toward this conclusion are complex, meticulous, and inventive, drawing on theories of, and debates about, social construction, embodiment, multiculturalism, political liberalism, the nature of autonomy, and the justifiability of paternalism. It is not possible to rehearse all of them in this short space. An overview of one strand of the argument will have to suffice.

Based on the strength of her chapters (1–3) about social construction producing and constraining choices, Chambers argues that the state should intervene in gender unequal outcomes, even if they are the product of individual choices, if they meet two conditions, what she calls the *disadvantage* and *influence* factors: 'Together, they express the idea that if an individual is encouraged to make choices that disadvantage her, then the ensuing inequality is unjust – particularly if the disadvantage is significant and enduring, and if the encouragement comes from those who make different choices and so end up better-off' (p. 118). The upshot is that 'many unequal internal norms of cultural and religious groups should be restricted by a liberal state' (p. 118), including, for example, Orthodox Jewish and Muslim divorce law that permits men, but not women, to obtain a divorce without their spouse's consent, and the Catholic Church's ban on female priests. The mechanism through which individuals could challenge their community's norms and practices chambers calls an 'equality tribunal', which would be similar to existing employment tribunals charged with investigating discrimination in employment practices. Chambers compares her equality tribunal to the mechanism preferred by liberals in cases where women's equality rights conflict with multicultural rights – the so-called 'right of exit' – and argues that it is superior. One reason, she says, is because women are not then confronted with a stark choice between their culture or their equality. Rather, the equality tribunal, if successfully appealed to by a woman facing patriarchal norms, will enforce her equality *within* her culture: 'if the culture is to survive at all, it must be in a modified form that enables *all* individuals to participate in it in conditions of equality...' (p. 150). The book's resonances with Susan Moller Okin's (1999) famous – or infamous – essay are strongest in passages like this one.

My admiration for the book exceeds my reservations, but I'll start with what I regard as its weaker points. In places, Chambers gets bogged down in ground-clearing literature review that only the most patient (or obsessive)

readers will enjoy. This happens, for example, in the Introduction, where, in my view, Chambers devotes too much space to Will Kymlicka's (1995) liberal multiculturalism and Seyla Benhabib's (2002) version of deliberative democracy – rehearsal unnecessary to understanding and appreciating her arguments in the subsequent 270 pages. On the other hand, I craved a larger, more general, critique of the claims of liberal neutrality and anti-perfectionism (a view widely held by political liberals who insist that the state must be neutral towards competing conceptions of worthwhile or valuable lives). I wished to hear more about how Chambers proposes to rebut those who would characterize her position as 'femi-nazi' – that is – as promoting a very limited set of 'approved' practices for women. In Chapter 2, she points to authors, such as Cass Sunstein (1992), who contest the claims of liberal neutrality, but much of this discussion is reserved for Chapters 6 and 7, which become much more technical and specific.

The book's distinctive contribution, in my view, is its sophisticated articulation and defence of a form of feminist perfectionism. While Chambers shares with many feminists the worries about taking men's and women's choices at face value (since their choices often seem to reproduce gendered harms and inequality), not many bite the bullet and argue that the state must therefore sharply restrict those choices (exceptions are Yuracko (2003), and, less forthrightly, Levey (2000)). Discussions of how social construction *works* can sometimes be too abstract or general, so I greatly appreciated Chambers's use of the notion of 'cosmetic knee implants' to jolt readers into appreciating how thoroughly bizarre cosmetic breast implants are, in the absence of patriarchal norms and pressures: 'Until breast implants seem as peculiar as knee implants, we cannot say that a woman chooses to have them for reasons divorced from patriarchy and thus that her decision is irrelevant to justice' (p. 40). Throughout, Chambers's book draws fruitfully on two literatures – post-modern philosophy with its giants Foucault and Bourdieu, and analytic political philosophy with its giants Rawls and Raz (among others). These literatures are frequently kept separate in the academy and attract separate followings, but Chambers succeeds in bringing them to bear on one another. Plenty of feminists have tried to write books that have an impact on – in the sense of altering – mainstream, androcentric, liberal theory. But they have sometimes failed, perhaps because they are too dependent on jargon peculiar to gender studies, or because they do not engage enough with liberal theorists' recent debates and preoccupations. Chambers' book deftly avoids both of these problems, so there is real potential here for this book to alter mainstream liberal thinking.

Faith Armitage

references

Benhabib, S. (2002) *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Kymlicka, W.** (1995) *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levey, A.** (2000) 'Liberalism, adaptive preferences, and gender equality' *Hypatia*, Vol. 15, No. 4: 127–143.
- Okin, S.M.** (1999) 'Is multiculturalism bad for women?' in Cohen, J., Howard, M. and Nussbaum, M. (1999) editors, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sunstein, C.** (1992) 'Neutrality in constitutional law (with special reference to pornography, abortion, and surrogacy)' *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1: 1–52.
- Yuracko, K.** (2003) *Perfectionism and Contemporary Feminist Values*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

doi:10.1057/fr.2008.32

Trans/forming feminisms: trans-feminist voices speak out

Krista Scott-Dixon, editor; Sumach Press, Toronto, 2006, 255pp.,
ISBN – 13 978-1-894549-61-5, ISBN – 10 1-894549-61-9, £17.50

This collection centres around the question of which experiences and struggles trans and feminist political projects share, asking 'how might trans and feminist ideas inform future struggles for social justice and the enhancement of human dignity' (p. 12). Editor Scott-Dixon is refreshingly open and honest in her introduction as she positions herself in relation to this politic. She uses a social and political model of difference and self-identification rather than a model situated within scientific and medical discourses that have historically classified and systematized gendered and sexed bodies and lived experiences, seeing social structures and environments as being the things that present obstacles, rather than individuals having the 'problem', deficit or 'disorder'. This is a perspective that opens up a healthy space for debate and discussion and the collection is an eclectic array of contributions. The diversity manifests in a range of pitch, subject matter, style, tone, tenor and readership. It includes personal narrative, utopian wishing for a world without gender, and angry venting, as well as theoretically robust analyses of essentialist positions, specific subjectivities, and ideological state apparatuses such as the law. There are 27 pieces from 25 different authors and such a plethora of perspectives is interesting, but it makes this a book to dip-in-and-out of. This is a smorgasbord or appetizer of trans-feminist voices – some you'll leave to one side and others, you know you'll order as a 'main course' in the near future.

Daryl B. Hill's chapter 'On the Origins of Gender' in the opening section 'Narratives & Voices' draws on various trans people's understanding of the