
*Gender, Emotions and Labour Markets*, a collection of essays focusing on emotional labour and emotion work by Ann Brooks and Theresa Devasahayam, examined emotional labour within the context of economies with an expanding service industry. They placed their work within the debates around emotions in organisations and the work-life balance. However, these debates largely focus on the West with little attention to Asia. This book has therefore attempted to address the gap in emotional labour debates both in Asia and the West.

In the Introduction, the concepts of emotions, emotional labour and emotion work are explained and contextualised within a range of conceptual frameworks.

In Chapter 1, Devasahayam show how, for working women in Asia, work and family are seen as complementary with little appreciation of what this entails. She draws on a range of statistical data to show women’s labour force participation and the areas in which gaps still persist. The chapter also discusses several factors that impact on women’s career opportunities. She concludes by rendering globalisation as a ‘double-edged sword’ for Asian women which has encouraged them to enter the labour market but which has also led to a process of ‘female proletarianization’. She argues that gender inequalities are disadvantaging national interest and its perpetuation under globalisation is being addressed at both the national and transnational levels.

After setting the contextual foundation, Devasahayam and Brooks set off to discuss the changing patterns of care-giving and emotional labour in Asia. The burden of emotional labour is shown to have been transferred to female migrant domestic labour in Chapter 2. Emotional labour responsibilities are showing signs of change due to the political imperative to see women employed in productive labour. Furthermore, they show that this change is also contributed by decisions made by women in Southeast Asia to remain single, delay marriage or not to have children.

In Chapter 3, Devasahayam examines the feminisation of labour particularly female migrant domestic labour. She examines how Southeast Asia has become a hub for the feminisation of migration. She explores the experiences of female migrant domestic labour in terms of meeting the emotional labour demands in receiving countries at the cost of their own emotional labour needs. Whether skilled or unskilled/low-skilled, these women are making meaning in their migration experience, albeit with problems and difficulties. The opportunities and risks related to migration for the individual who decides to migrate are addressed in Chapter 4 by Devasahayam. She discusses how migrant workers are vulnerable to a range of abuses because of the social construction of migrant workers as ‘non-citizens’. She shows that ambivalence towards the human rights discourse has contributed to the pervasiveness of migrant rights abuses in Asia. She also goes on to show that the human rights discourse is more of a problem in the host countries rather than in the sending countries. As a consequence of this, the solution to this issue is with individual states that lack political will and, in addition, there is also a lack of a regional framework to protect migrant workers’ rights.

In Chapter 5, Ann Brooks inspects how globalisation is restructuring traditional labour markets and the way in which individuals are redefining their market position and their identity. She discusses how women are positioned in ambiguous and contradictory ways with regard to economic discourses and public policies. She analyses the emotional labour...
demands and work-life balance on professional women in the US and Asia and show that the pressures are different in terms of demographic patterns and in terms of the availability of support structures in both context. Female migrant domestic labour is an essential part of the emotional labour support in Asia. Brooks shows that the added value provided by these workers for the success of professional women is hardly recognised by the receiving countries.

The gains made by professional women are not shared by female domestic migrants at the other end of the spectrum who service the professional women. Brooks analyses this in Chapter 6 where she examines the emotional labour demands faced by these women, as well as the violation of their human rights. Brooks puts forward the reason behind why they are abused and subjected to human rights violation as 'biopolitical others'. She shows how female migrant workers suffer degradation and humiliation from employers while dealing with the situation of being away from their family and the need to do long-distance care-work.

In Chapter 7, Brooks looks at how men are positioned within emotional labour debates as fathers, spouses and in-caring professions globally and assesses the implication for changes in the relationship between men and emotional work. She shows that traditional conceptions of masculinity are slow to change even when men are engaged in ‘female-dominated occupations’. She points out that this issue is not well understood and is under-researched in the field of emotional labour.

In the Conclusion, Ann Brooks gives an overview of the book and attempts to briefly bring a coherent conceptual argument on issues emerging from emotions, emotional labour and emotion work in the different cultural context of Asia and the West. However, Brooks admits that the authors draw from paradigms used in the West to assess whether similar patterns are developing in Asia and the Asia Pacific. Therefore, the claim of an Asian and Western perspective in understanding emotional labour and emotion work as proclaimed in the title is not to be found. I also do not see the need for the two different perspectives when the fundamental issues rise exist in both context and where the major concern is about human rights, whether it is in Asia or the West. Such a request aside, Gender, Emotions and Labour Markets is a valuable piece of work that raises many questions on and for women within emotional labour and emotion work debates globally and its implications for the gendered division of labour in an increasingly global economy that continues to perpetuate gender inequality.

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