

In sum, the collection provides a unique opportunity to observe the ground-level realities and to begin to understand the complexities that people experience in a fast-changing diverse society like Singapore. With underlying themes of inequality, labour mobility and globalization, the book will be of interest to students of sociology and labour studies and readers interested in real-life case studies and detailed accounts. The book essentially gives a voice to working people in celebration of their hard work and experiences, thus offering an engaging and relatable read that even a general audience would appreciate.

Suhaila Zainal Shah

Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Cluster, Singapore University of Technology and Design, 8 Somapah Road, Singapore 487372; email: suhaila@mymail.sutd.edu.sg.

DOI: 10.1355/sj35-3l

Blood Work: Life and Laboratories in Penang. By Janet Carsten. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019. xv+237 pp.

In her new book, *Blood Work*, Janet Carsten extends her meditation on kinship and relatedness in everyday life to technical settings and medical workplaces. By navigating blood banks, surgical theatres, staff-only laboratory areas and community drives for blood donation, Carsten shows how the mysterious power of blood to confirm certain connections or to sever them is amplified in these nodes of medical infrastructure. As the material properties of blood are scrutinized for accuracy and safety in these sites, Carsten emphasizes that the symbolic and moral meanings of blood thicken rather than diminish. She meticulously traces how blood is valued, categorized, analysed, stabilized and reconnected with its unruly force by providing rich ethnographic details that reflect the cultural and political complexities of contemporary Malaysia. In this carefully crafted ethnography, blood banks and hospital laboratories reveal unexpected social dramas and reflections on morality, danger and politics that are otherwise hidden in the daily rhythms of systematized work.

The public life of blood that this book captures unfolds differently from phase to phase. At the stage of donation, the most important process is gathering and categorizing the intended donor's personal information. While this kind of bureaucratic practice aims to turn the unknown blood into an 'objective' medical entity, stories from blood donors indicate that the motivation and significance of giving blood is deeply embedded in personal biographies, kinship obligations and economies of care. Carsten argues that blood affords a "naturalizing effect" (p. 73) that allows its acceptance as a fixed, 'scientific' fact, while it still retains relational capacities. In moving to hospital laboratories, Carsten turns her attention to their spatial division and architectural elements and to the division of labour among technical staff members. As patterns of living arrangements in a house reveals so many things about family life, the laboratory life of blood is also remoulded by the nature of the place it inhabits and also by the people who work with it. The routine work of extracting blood from patients or donors, processing it according to standardized procedures and producing numerous sample records is what eventually transforms blood from a bodily substance to a laboratory object. In this domain, the social qualities that blood used to carry are supposed to be purified, yet Carsten engagingly shows that this very technical line of work fundamentally relies on human engagement and imagination. By illuminating the commitment by laboratory staff to being proficient at their job, to creating a collegial work environment and to helping patients in need, Carsten delves into the emotional and moral dynamic of laboratory life. The supernatural aspect of blood, moreover, is also a crucial dimension: the uncanny presence of ghosts in the hospital space not only speaks of the risks and dangers that are ever-present in dealing with blood but also of its vitality—one that can easily overflow the limits of modernity.

While the book engages in a sustained discussion of key concepts in science and technology studies, it also offers a new perspective in understanding the social and cultural fabric of urban Malaysia. Penang is an emblematic city of Southeast Asian modernity that presents how categories of race, religion and nation have been shaped

and transmuted by colonial and cosmopolitan migration histories and rapid modernization processes. The short sections dealing with newspaper accounts on blood effectively contextualize ethnographic chapters by allowing readers a glimpse into the country's crucial moments of cultural and political contestation. Media coverage and public speculation on organ transplantation from a Malay donor to non-Malay recipients, Anwar Ibrahim's political future upon the issue of a blood test, scary women vampires, and unregulated hospital charges all reflect the surprising density of social worlds in which seemingly calm laboratory work is done. The education and work trajectory of medical technicians that Carsten richly presents is also instructive in discerning how issues of ethnicity, religion, gender and social inequality play out in post-independence, industrializing Malaysian society.

As the book demonstrates the numerous meanings and connections that blood evokes in and out of laboratories, the telos of blood seems to be fluidity—the lines of vitality flowing across boundaries. Throughout, Carsten faithfully focuses on what people think, talk and do about blood and how such engagement indeed makes it so alive. *Blood Work* is indeed a call to attentiveness to human agency that transmutes the inert into the living and the technical into the social. It beautifully illustrates the animating force emerging from our everyday routine practices of working, eating and living together. The book affirms that laboratories and other sorts of up-to-date technological facilities cannot but require 'traditional' human socialites, although they have become increasingly undervalued and eroded in this era of artificial intelligence and big data. This will be an inspirational read for those interested in richer ethnographic accounts of science and technology and of Malaysia. It is also a work of theoretical mastery that will be an outstanding teaching resource on modernity, medical anthropology, material culture and the anthropology of work.

Bo Kyeong Seo

Department of Cultural Anthropology, Yeonhui Hall 111-1, Yonsei University, 50 Yonsei-ro, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul 120-749, Korea; email: bo.seo@yonsei.ac.kr.