

vocabulary of poverty and wealth, used the root *-gad-* to suggest that the poor could be deceitful, and connected poverty with hunger and wealth with satiety. Proto-North Luhya connected poverty with selfishness and an unwillingness to share food. The root **-kác-*, related to hardness, connected wealth with status and power. Proto-Gwe-Saamia linked wealth, power and age together using the root **-hul-*.

Concepts of poverty and wealth were gendered in Proto-North Nyanza and its descendants, Luganda and Proto-South Kyoga. The root **-yaandu* applied to widows as a form of inheritable wealth and to women and girls abducted during warfare. Proto-South Kyoga restricted their use of **-yaandu* so that the only wealth it signified was bridewealth. Among the Lusoga, the root **-gaig-*, which had previously referred to wealth and the rich, also came to apply to a man rich with many wives.

As the Proto-Nilotic language split into Proto-Kalenjin, Proto-Ateker and Proto-Southern Luo, speakers of these languages associated poverty with kinlessness, thought of the poor as disruptive, and perceived of wealth as a means to gain status. Among the Proto-Kalenjin, the root **-panan-* applied to the poor, orphans and beggars. The Proto-Ateker used **-jak-* to describe both wealth and power. The Proto-Southern Luo, by contrast, used the root **lim-* in words relating to wealth, visiting and gift exchange.

And then everything got worse. The nineteenth century intensified the trade in slaves and ivory and brought with it catastrophic drought, Christian missions, and ultimately colonial rule and its associated taxes. With new ways of life came new ideas and new words. Wealth came to include currency. Clothing came to signify status. The same root, *-dooba*, refers in Lunyole to both abject poverty and to loincloths.

Closing with a Banyole prayer for wealth from the 1970s, Stephens argues that words today for poverty and wealth have a long history behind them – a history grounded in indigenous meanings. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of poverty and wealth in Africa, in the history of poverty and wealth as ideas, or in language as a source of historical data.

James Fenske
University of Warwick, Coventry, UK
Email: j.fenske@warwick.ac.uk
doi: [10.1017/S0001972024000093](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972024000093)

Erik Bähre, *Ironies of Solidarity: Insurance and Financialization of Kinship in South Africa*. London: Zed Books (pb £22.99 – 978 1 78699 858 3), 2020, 216 pp.

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, financial services and insurance companies increasingly targeted their products to previously ignored and predominantly poor Africans in South Africa. Erik Bähre's *Ironies of Solidarity: insurance and financialization of kinship in South Africa* provides a powerful ethnographic account of the expansion of insurance, and its impacts on solidarities at the family, neighbourhood and state levels. This work builds on manifold ethnographic material collected primarily in one of the world's most violent and unequal places, Indawo Yoxolo, a squatter camp in Cape Town, supplemented by popular music and survey data. Bähre mobilizes Richard Rorty's philosophical approach to *irony* in an attempt to reveal contradictions

embedded within insurance, whereby 'you say one thing, but mean the exact opposite' (p. 3). Rorty used the term 'irony' to explore the contingency of morality and the public-private divide. 'The irony of solidarity,' for Bähre, 'means that people and societies help mitigate and overcome adversities, while simultaneously producing new forms of exclusion and suffering' (p. 24).

Indeed, the book demonstrates how insurance both frees individuals from social obligations and refashions old ones, creating new tensions and conflicts, fear and distrust. In the early years of democratization, the African National Congress (ANC) government pursued racial equality and social justice, making the equal distribution of public services, such as social grants, its primary task and attempting to ensure control over resources and markets rather than 'liberating' them from state control. Yet, despite such democratization policies, apartheid-created tensions and inequalities were reproduced in contemporary South Africa. In the book, insurance is situated within classical economic anthropological discussions of gifts, focusing on the aggressive, violent side to them. Rather than drawing on abstract economic models such as neoliberalism, the book shows the messy, lived reality of those who must navigate between the oppressive and liberating characteristics of the financialization of social relations. Thus, this book contributes to a growing body of scholarship that breaks down unnecessary dichotomies that serve to emphasize social relations as warm and caring and economic and markets as cold and coercive. Ultimately, this book offers an exceptional account of the interdependency and co-constitution of the state, market and kinship.

Irony in solidarity is examined through multiple empirical cases, shedding light on the actual workings of and interaction between insurance actuaries, sales agents, local insurance brokers and their clients. These empirical cases illustrate how insurance companies in post-apartheid South Africa have established markets in low-income townships, deploying insurance classification schemes that mask and reproduce racialized inequalities and exclusion, rather than mitigating them. To make insurance affordable for the poor yet profitable for companies, insurance companies reduce their operational costs by outsourcing the risks to local brokers or intermediary institutions, such as churches and burial societies. This results in social anxiety as brokers target their uncertain businesses to their friends, colleagues and relatives, who live in hand-to-mouth economic conditions, making them fear for the future. In vulnerable conditions, 'when life is insured, death seems more likely' (p. 140); this is illustrated by ruthless cases where people insure others only to kill them to claim reimbursements. Bähre states that, 'when there is no relationship between people, even the most fundamental human values can be ignored' (p. 148). Consequently, people might avoid funeral and life insurance policies that are potentially life-threatening.

Ironically, despite bad experiences with insurance companies and burial services, some people do take out life insurance policies. Revisiting the Weberian iron cage, impersonal bureaucracy is redefined not just as cruel and dehumanizing, but also as potentially emancipating and caring. Life insurance lingers as attractive because of its power to escape unwanted sociality, constituting a private contract between the insurance company and the individual client.

While the term 'irony' is skilfully used to comprehend 'the contradictory ethnographic evidence on how people talk about, experience, and shape insurance' (p. 25), the author's argument could be strengthened by clarifying the meaning of the terms 'solidarity' and 'kinship', both featured in the book's title. While stating that

'[i]nsurance can be understood as a form of solidarity in that people pool money in order to overcome adversity' (p. 3), it remains unclear what exactly solidarity entails and how it differs from *care*, a term also frequently employed in the book. Furthermore, since the book examines a range of social networks that include but also go beyond 'kinship', I wondered whether the term 'social relations' would depict the content more suitably. Despite this criticism, *Ironies of Solidarity* would make a great addition to discussions in new kinship studies, which point out the coercive, darker side of kinship and care. The rich Southern African scholarship specifically emphasizes how kinship – in Africa as elsewhere – requires constant reworking and is intertwined with economic interactions and uncertainty, entailing disputes over state, non-governmental and kin-distributed resources.

Overall, this book provides a refreshing set of analytical tools and an exceptionally strong empirical account of the financialization of social relations and uncertainty, one that convincingly questions the causality between financialization, neoliberalism and inequality in South Africa. It serves as an important resource for scholars across political and economic anthropology and kinship studies, and for anyone interested in the social and economic lived realities of post-apartheid South Africa.

Saana Hansen
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
Email: Saana.hansen@helsinki.fi
doi: [10.1017/S000197202400010X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S000197202400010X)

Joshua Grace, *African Motors: Technology, Gender, and the History of Development*. Durham NC: Duke University Press (hb US\$119.95 – 978 1 4780 1059 3; pb US\$31.95 – 978 1 4780 1171 2). 2021, xiii + 416 pp.

Joshua Grace's *African Motors* is one of very few book-length publications on the history of automobility in Africa today. While transportation in Africa, broadly defined, has attracted the attention of economic historians and historians of technology, the automobile subset began to yield consistent monograph outputs (with reference to Anglophone Africa) only from 2016, when Jennifer Hart's *Ghana on the Go* was published.

Grace's intellectual interest in African automobility came from an experience in a Tanzanian mechanic shop. His car had developed a serious fault, and the scope of repairs proposed by the Tanzanian mechanic was far more extensive than what would have been possible at many North American shops. Grace notes that the car would have been written off as scrap in the USA. Yet the repair process seemed routine in Dar es Salaam garages.

That encounter (and other vignettes, notably a remodelled sports car anecdote involving Frank Taylor, another research subject) became the foundation for the arguments and themes explored in the book. Grace investigates the 'long, often intimate relationship' between Africans and motor vehicles, arguing that automobiles (including the acts of owning, driving, maintaining, repairing and, most importantly, redesigning them) 'provide sites, institutions, bodies, and ideas for locating systems and cultures of mechanical expertise in Tanzania's past' (pp. 11–12). In a monograph