

Ring Lecture Series, WiSe 2023-2024
New Frontiers of Research on Welfare in the Global South

Convenors: John Berten, Alexandra Kaasch, Minh Nguyen, Huy Tran

The Cruelty of Solidarity: healthcare between state, market and family in Brazil (rescheduled)

23. November 2023, 16:00 – 18:00 c.t., Zoom event



Scan for registration

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Private health insurance is at the center of a global financial system that epitomizes capitalism and all its related inequalities, conflicts and threats to sustainable futures. At the same time, private health insurance is also a form of solidarity that enables people to overcome health related adversities. After all, private insurance finances and organizes often complex healthcare treatments. Private insurance is a form of solidarity at the center of financial markets and therefore takes a theoretically and for some also ideologically uncomfortable position. Yet it is that position that allows us to reconsider how and when finance is enabling care and when and how it is contributing to cruelty. What are the dynamics of care, cruelty and solidarity when paying attention to private insurance? What are the everyday consequences of private insurance in relation to healthcare provided by the state and kinship? This talk is based on ethnographic research in Brazil, mainly in Brasília and São Paulo, where people have to face many challenges when organizing and financing healthcare such as aging, high levels of inequality, rapid urbanization and struggles over emancipation. Brazil has an extensive but also limited public healthcare system and the moralities and responsibilities of the state and the family regarding healthcare have also provoked heated political tensions that divide Brazilian society. What perspective can we shed on these struggles over healthcare and solidarity when taking private health insurance -as a form of solidarity in the market- as the starting point of the analysis?

Erik Bähre is Associate Professor at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University. He specializes in economic anthropology and is especially interested in how finance raises moral issues regarding solidarity, care and responsibility. He recently completed an ERC Consolidator project on the morality of insurance and is author of the ethnographies 'Money and Violence: Financial Self-Help Groups in a South African Township' (Brill, 2007) and 'Ironies of Solidarity: Insurance and Financialization of Kinship in South Africa' (Zed Books, 2020). The latter also appeared in Portuguese with EdUFSCar (2023).