

Faeza Ballim. 2023. *Apartheid Leviathan: Electricity and the Power of Technological Ambivalence*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 167 pp.

Faeza Ballim's *Apartheid Leviathan: Electricity and the Power of Technological Ambivalence* is a monograph on the intertwined South African histories of power, electricity politics, race, labor, and modernity. It is set against the background of the current ongoing energy crisis. This timely book provides a historical foundation for understanding the structural challenges embedded in South Africa's electricity infrastructure and navigates the intricate intersection of electricity, technology, and the socio-political during and after apartheid. Scholars such as Allen Isaacman (2013), Julia Tischler (2013), and Stephan Miescher (2022) studied electricity from the perspective of dams in which they link hydroelectricity to land dispossession, displacement, and alienation in areas where dams for electricity generation are constructed. Ballim, however, brings a new perspective to understanding electricity in Southern Africa. She does so by looking at the intersecting role of mining and the thermal power generation dividend using Waterberg coal fields and the city of Lephalale, a microcosm of histories of electricity and technology in Southern Africa.

The study is grounded on various sources such as archival material from the National Archives of South Africa, where Iscor (SA Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation) archives are housed, Eskom (SA Electricity and Supply Commission) records, personal collection of archival documents from interviewees, and Hansard records of parliamentary debates supplemented by interviews. The use of documents collected from interviews humanized the archives. The book's structure enhances its accessibility and interdisciplinary appeal, with six chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. The author uses electricity as a lens to weave together an array of themes to tell South Africa's multiple histories of techno-politics, racial capitalism, public health, class dynamics, labor reserves, the agrarian question, urbanization, resistance, resource extraction, environmental racism, development and displacement, and the post-apartheid era. Ballim's approach enriches the historical narrative of South Africa's electricity sector and underscores the broader implications of technological advancement in a political and racially charged context.

Ballim critically examines the dual role of Eskom and Iscor as the embodiment of technological ambivalence, serving as instruments and symbols of the apartheid state's power. Through this lens, the monograph brings the intimate relationship between the South African government, Eskom, and Iscor under scrutiny. Eskom and Iscor are state corporations created and operated under the protection of the successive SA governments. These state corporations were emblematic of what James Scott delineates as the project of "Authoritarian High Modernism," beginning in the 1960s when the "apartheid government fully embraced the power of scientific planning to realize racial segregation" (p. 4). According to Scott, Authoritarian High Modernism is a process where "authoritarian governments brutally intervened in societies with their ambitions of control, ignoring the opinions of the local populace in favor of a modernization that rested on the authority of scientific expertise" (p. 4). Ballim concurs with this notion by centering on the role of engineers in influencing the internal politics of Eskom and Iscor.

In Lephalale, Ballim discusses how Iscor's arrival and the modernization drive disrupted the harmonious coexistence between white settlers and the black population. The book lacks assertiveness in highlighting Eskom and Iscor's involvement with apartheid policies, showing their contribution to racial and economic inequalities. While not directly linked to apartheid, Eskom's use of coal from exploitative labor created and maintained disparities. Its formation primarily benefited the white community despite claims of job creation and economic growth for all.

Ballim explains how the city's changes were linked to public health issues, specifically by establishing African townships to address inequalities and promote racial integration. However, poorly managed townships became hotbeds for diseases worsened by air pollution from sulphur dioxide emissions. Furthermore, Ballim argues that the recognition of trade unions was crucial in fighting segregation, giving African workers the power to demand their rights and participate in the South African labor force and decreasing reliance on illegal migrant labor.

In the last chapter, Ballim discusses how the black community in South Africa was initially hopeful when the ANC government came into power, promising to bring progress by providing electricity. In 2007, however, the frequent power outages known as loadshedding became a major setback to this plan. As a result, Eskom's efforts to build new power stations like Medupi and Kusile were hindered by issues of corruption and financial problems. This led to a failure to effectively increase the supply and availability of electricity as originally envisioned (p. 107).

The study of electricity, techno-politics, and apartheid is important in the study and understanding of South Africa's history and Southern Africa in general. Thus, this book is an important contribution to the historiography of the history of science and technology in Southern Africa. I recommend it to anyone interested in the history and political economy of science and technology in Africa. It is an excellent resource for undergraduate and graduate classes on the History of Science and Technology, Social and Urban History, African History, African Studies, and International Studies.

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