
Dr. Faeeza Ballim, author of Apartheid’s Leviathan, is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the History Department at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She is also the Co-Editor of the series, Translating Technology in Africa. Candidly, the author has acknowledged that it was “Keith Breckdenridge, who supervised the dissertation out of which this book arose and who uniquely portended the important role of Eskom and Medupi in post-apartheid South Africa as Apartheid’s Leviathan, according to Dr. Ballim, ”is, firstly, concerned with understanding this seemingly contradictory relationship between the different South African governments of the twentieth century and the state corporations,” (p. 2). Readers are to learn from the publication that the story narrated in it started from the 1960s, which did set the scene “for a heightened repression in South Africa that fits the mold of James Scott’s authoritarian high modernism,” (p. 2).

The 167-page Apartheid’s Leviathan contains six chapters as well as a conclusion, the acknowledgments, an introduction, notes, bibliography, and an index. From the book, its readers are expected to learn a lot about the development of power stations and coal mining systems in South Africa from the late 1960s. However, as a solid historian, Dr. Ballim also provides her readers with a slice of solid South African history in varied ways.

For example, from Chapter 1, “The Unlikely Exploitation of the Waterberg”, the author provides the chilling 1960 fatal confrontation between armed apartheid South African police and unarmed protesters of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the protest organizers. Among other details, she wrote: On 21 March, 1960, police officers opened fire on a group of unarmed protesters in Sharpeville, a township to the south of Johannesburg, killing 69 people and injuring 130,“ (p. 26).

Dr. Ballim went on to elaborate that the PAC organized the public event “to protest the pass laws that the apartheid government had introduced to control and monitor the presence of Africans in urban areas,” (p. 26). From the conclusion, readers are to learn about the state and stater corporations; for example, the story of the state corporations’ activities in the Waterberg ultimately reveals their inter-weaving relationship with both the apartheid and democratic governments,” (p. 129).

Apartheid’s Leviathan is considered a very useful publication for college students, researchers and readers, who peruse books for fun. Antina von Schnitzler, who authored Democracy’s Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest After Apartheid, for example, described the book as a fascinating and
timely study of South Africa’s state corporations; others saw Apartheid’s Leviathan as an indispensable case study on the workings of industrial and political power in South Africa and indeed, beyond.

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