

23). She details how the two SOEs passed through different technopolitical regimes, from the apartheid state to the ANC-led government, which – after an initial period of fiscal austerity – also put an emphasis on infrastructural development. Inter alia, this account is narrated through the changing perspectives of race and labour relations.

In 2004, the Anglo-Dutch steel producer LNM Holdings N.V. acquired a majority stake in Iscor. The following year's trading was commenced under the name Mittal Steel Ltd. Nevertheless, Eskom remained a SOE. Since 2007, there have been regular power outages in the country, to which the government euphemistically refers to as load shedding. Today, and depending on the region and time of the day, there is no electricity for between 7 and a half and 10 hours a day. This situation affects not only private households but also companies, for example the catering industry, as well as – particularly alarming – 80 per cent of the public healthcare system. Rural areas and townships tend to be hit harder than middle- and upper-class suburbs. Last year, in 2022, there were 200 days without stable power supply (48 days in 2021). Moreover, almost 30 years after the first democratic elections in 1994, a good 15 per cent of people in South Africa still have no access to electricity at all. Ballim's revised PhD research offers a detailed and solid account of the complicated relationship between the South African state and the semiautonomous SOEs, which contributes to a better understanding of the mess the country is in today.

Silke Hackenesch (ed.): *Adoption across Race and Nation: US Histories and Legacies*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2022, 229 pp.

Reviewed by
Benedikt Stuchtay, Marburg

Child adoption is an example of how a social phenomenon is losing its numerical importance in the present day, but it is nevertheless attracting more and more attention from researchers. There are many reasons for this. Critical adoption studies pay much more attention than did earlier studies to factors such as race, gender, social inequality and poverty (social class), and political and economic interests. These more comprehensive studies have opened up a simple understanding of adoption based on the value of caring and love, together with a certain focus on adoptive parents (which is due to the source material and fiction) to include other perspectives that shed a very critical light on the adoption process and the adoption scene. Thus, the classical phrase “in the best interests of the child” has been reformulated for research purposes into a special concentration on the child and its birth parents. The legal development and the institutional framework, which have traditionally received much attention, are now more in the background of the research. The adoption issue has thus become more deeply rooted in social reality. When it acquires a transnational dimension, as it does in this excellent volume, it directs our

attention to a social and cultural fact of the present that has always been present in the past since Moses's reed basket, namely a world-historical fact. By using US history as a backdrop, Silke Hackenesch's volume carefully unfolds the various dimensions of the transnational approach, which in its subtitle also addresses the aspect of legacy. This makes the book extremely valuable and perspective rich.

Transnational adoption is undoubtedly a very good example of a historical problem whose legal and social, cultural and economic, and emotional and psychological facets, to name but a few, are wrapped up with a fundamental political complex of issues. It is impossible to think of adoption without "race and nation", at least for the history of the twentieth century, and certainly not in connection with the USA. There are many forces influencing adoption: for example, unwanted childlessness, the cultural construction of fertility, (in) fertile identity, reproductive medicine, administrative and legal expertise in the mediation process between biological parents and adoptive parents, societal discursive forces and political patterns of order, the principle element of emotion, the central significance of knowledge-historically generated structures, and not least so-called illegitimacy. Considering the history of adoption, which has traditionally moved between these and many other forces, it becomes apparent that it reflects the conflict that has existed since its beginnings between a desired, ultimately artificially produced parenthood and an unwanted one. If the former was frequently denied, then the latter represented the field of tension in which the foster or adopted child found itself.

In this respect, the volume expands these traditional parameters listed above, to which the history of adoption must be ascribed an essential significance, by adding two categories whose dynamics became fully apparent after 1945. In the introduction, the editor outlines the research panorama surrounding international adoption. The paradigm that prevailed until the middle of the twentieth century was that of "matching". According to this paradigm, adoptive parents and adoptive children were to be matched as closely as possible in terms of appearance, religion, cultural life, and so on (what Ellen Herman refers to as "kinship by design"). Transnational and transracial adoption radically changed this.

As is so often the case in the history of adoption, wars were once more decisive, which is why both the Second World War and the Korean War had such far-reaching consequences for the history of adoption in the USA. Children whose fathers were members of the US armed forces in Germany, as in the case of Korea, were referred to as "war babies", for whom the USA was by no means a "colour-blind" society, although this society was defined by immigration and understood itself as pluralistic. Domestic transracial adoption posed great challenges to the concepts of belonging and nation, and aspects such as cultural heritage, identity, kinship, domesticity, and "racial diversity" not only were and are fiercely contested but also have consequently led to constant disputes over the right of interpretation. Because this volume systematically juxtaposes and contrasts the cases of Germany and Korea, it succeeds in its nine individual studies in illustrating racial inclusion and racial ex-

clusion as social, political, cultural, emotional, and humanitarian and as mechanisms arising from the ideologies of the Cold War.

As individual as each case of adoption is, adoption reflects, confirms, and repeats structures. These include individual social and economic inequalities, usually between the families of origin and the adoptive families but no less between the countries and the societies from which both families come. The stigma attached to biological mothers can be traced back to global phenomena, and the self-perception of nations as supposedly racially homogeneous can also be examined in transnational contexts. In any case, as the volume makes clear, race is “the mobilising factor” (p. 6).

The case studies and research trends show which social groups were disadvantaged at the time and which are still under-researched. This makes it all the more urgent and significant that the volume devotes a great deal of attention to the adoption of Black children and, in the same context, to Black American couples who wanted to adopt. *Discrimination* is a term that runs like a red thread through the sources in this context. Therefore, it is not surprising that the traditional principles of adoption – humanity, care, and love – are evoked on the one side but are also met with little sympathy on the other side, where adoption is associated with neo-liberal neo-colonialism, old-fashioned privileges, and a Western world-historical continuity of self-sufficiency.

Ultimately, these many areas of tension point to a core element of the history of adoption, which, since its beginnings, has revealed highly emotional, fragile, and vul-

nerable aspects of human life. Legal and political frameworks cannot conceal these aspects because the individuality of each adoption case, which is also highlighted in many individual examples in this volume, contributes to the sum of individualities, which in turn form the basis for the definitions of *belonging*, *identity*, and, in the broadest sense, *citizenship*. By highlighting these points, this very valuable volume emphasizes the importance of adoption studies for interdisciplinary research undertaken by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and many others. It makes clear where the deficits have been and where the opportunities and scientific challenges still lie. Finally, it demonstrates the richness of the questions associated with the history of adoption. To have brought them to the fore across race and nation is certainly one of the most engaging aspects of the volume.

Simon Godard: *Le laboratoire de l'internationalisme. Le CAEM et la construction du bloc socialiste*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2021, 325 pp.

Reviewed by
Sara Lorenzini, Trento

Le laboratoire de l'internationalisme, by Simon Godard, is a fine account of the life of a too-neglected institution, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or COMECON). It is a splendid example of institutional history, describing the objectives, the policies, the infrastructures,