

A Book Review on The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization and Bureaucratic state power in Lesotho by James Ferguson

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The book was an Anthropological examination of the discourse of the aid industry in Southern Africa: Lesetho. The analysis critically examined the development process and the discourse of the aid industry as employed by the leading development practitioners in Lesotho. The book has the following main focus areas by taking in to consideration the national economy of as Lesetho as unit of analysis.

Firstly, there is a focus on the analysis of the development apparatus and framework which has produced the underdeveloped political economy in the country by nurturing the situations for the development actors to decide on development intervention in the country. Secondly, it has critically examined the case study of Canadian government funded Thaba Tseka projects in Lesotho between the years 1975-84. Thirdly, there is a discussion on the theoretical aspects and issues about the situation of development process in Lesetho by drawing on Foucault's analysis of the instrument-effects of development. The book has provided an insightful analysis of the development process using a deconstructive approach and the language to the aid industry. It has also portrayed how the least developed countries are being portrayed in the development arena and the power played by the donor countries and organizations.

The book has asked challenging questions about the development industry by providing an attractive account of the Lesetho development project financed by the World Bank and the government of Canada. In the first section the book focuses on the development discourse depending on the detailed analysis of the World Bank country economic report.

According to the book for development agencies to define LDC as their object of attention and intervention they set the following four parameters. First, the countries like Lesetho must be 'aboriginal' so that they can be modernized with roads, education, and with cash economy; states and their economy must be agricultural therefore they can be developed by the technical improvements and extension necessitating the intervention from the north; they must contain a national economy to provide an appropriate entity for planning and must be subjected to the standard of governmentality as a result they can be responsive to needs of planners 'blue print' project document. The stated points and preconditions make the intervention of donor organizations necessary preconditions.

Taking the stated ideas into consideration, Ferguson argued that the World Bank in its report represented 'a traditional subsistence peasant society in Lesotho, virtually untouched by modern economic development'. They depicted the country as a nation of farmers; and as possessing a national economy and capacity for governance.

In reality, however, Lesotho has long been part of the modern regional economy, heavily dependent on the wages of its migrants to South African mines industries; its agricultural sector is tiny and has little potential; and the concepts of a national economy and governmentality are absurd with nearly all the major determinants of economic life outside the national borders.

Ferguson concludes that the peculiar representation of Lesotho which emerges from the World Bank report must not be understood as simply the product of mistakes or errors. Rather these mistakes and errors are always of a particular kind, and they almost invariably tend in predictable directions.

The statistics are wrong, but always wrong in the same way; the conceptions are fanciful, but it is always the same fantasy; the version toward which all development discourse tends; the picture of Lesotho as an example of less developed country.

Ferguson distinguishes this development discourse from the academic discourse within which he writes and says he 'unreservedly accepts the academic judgment that much of development discourse on Lesotho is wildly inaccurate, by pointing that as there is incompatibility of development discourse and academic norms. The development literature is full of statements which would be unacceptable in most academic settings, while is effectively excluded from the discourse of development'.

But the apolitical core of the development project was ultimately political, adding new facilities for communication, patronage, and provision of services to the government's instruments of control while, more importantly, contributing to the ideological construction of the people of Thaba-Tseka as needy, backward, passive recipients of governance from above in a top down development aid machinery. This resulted in simple power relations in the discourse of the aid industry.

Reference

- Ferguson J. (1990). The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization and Bureaucratic state power in Lesotho by James. University of Minnesota press.