BOOK REVIEW

Robtel Neajai Pailey. *Development, (Dual)Citizenship and its Discontents in Africa: The Political Economy of Belonging to Liberia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 276 pp. Illustrations. List of Figures and Tables. List of Acronyms. Bibliography. Index. $99.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1108836548.

Robtel Pailey's compelling study of dual citizenship in Liberia touches on a question that is not only timely and relevant but also contested in many countries across Africa and beyond: how to (re-)frame discussions on citizenship in countries where large segments of the population are (temporarily) living outside of the national border but express belonging to their homeland. The author's detailed deconstruction of the historical, political, and judicial developments that inform this question in Liberia reveals that there is no right or wrong answer to be found. In fact, Liberia's proposed bill on dual citizenship, which is currently prohibited, has been debated for over ten years without a clear outcome.

In her analysis, Pailey unpacks the complexity of the "political economy of belonging" by taking into account the struggles of national governments to find a balance in their policies. She not only explores narratives of development through aid from abroad but also includes concerns and experiences from so-called homelanders (the term Pailey uses to refer to those residing within Liberia). This holistic approach results in the development of a theoretical model for constructing citizenship that links identity (a passive given based on birthright or descent), practice (being actively involved in development projects), and interaction (exchanges between government agencies and subjects both locally and transnationally).

Throughout the book, the author returns to the centrality of crises in the conceptualization of citizenship in Liberia. She explores, for example, the negro clause introduced following the experience of slavery by the settlers who founded the Liberian State, which restricted citizenship to those who could prove negro descent, the structural exclusion of autochthonous populations by the settler regime, and the more recent civil war, which amplified structural inequalities and brought about new and massive waves of migration.

Two elements of Pailey's chapter on theory, methodology, and her own biography are worth remarking on, as they are significant for the remainder of the book as well. First, one strength of the analysis is the impressive number of interviews the author conducted with people both in the diaspora and within Liberia. She distinguishes between the "wide" diaspora and the "near" diaspora, referring to those residing in the Global North and those residing in the Global South, respectively. This distinction is an important qualifier that deconstructs the very notion of diaspora as a single community that speaks with a single voice. The author does well in bringing across the divergence of the actors' experiences and the ways their experiences inform constructions of citizenship. Still, given the largely discursive nature of the data, one is left wondering about actual social practice. For instance, given that dual citizenship is illegal in Liberia, Pailey describes on multiple occasions how people maintain two passports and travel back and forth, seemingly without major problems. It leaves the reader wanting to know more about actual dual citizenship practices, for instance, of passport issuing agencies, customs offices, or travelers, and how their practices influence the legal and socio-economic discussions.

Second, throughout the book, Pailey refers to her own experiences in working on the topic of dual citizenship for the national government. These observations add ethnographic depth and demonstrate the relevance of the book not only for academic analyses but also at a policy level. Pailey's biographical excerpts are further significant as she reflects on her positionality as a highly educated Liberian woman working and living abroad. She demonstrates that she is part of a young generation of Liberian scholars that engages with a difficult and complex heritage. She reflects critically on the use of "post-conflict" in describing the continuing inequality that characterizes Liberia's contemporary political predicament. She refrains from using the "misnomer 'Americo-Liberian,'" even if only in a footnote, since freed slaves were denied citizenship and would not be considered "American." She also makes a point of using historical sources written by Liberian authors, something that is severely lacking in other works. All these points are indications of the book's significance beyond the simple discussion of politics of belonging in Liberia.

One important question remains unanswered. Pailey highlights how she focuses on urban populations since discussions on citizenship and belonging are more pronounced in urban/cosmopolitan settings. However, it is well established that smaller settlements along the Liberian-Guinean border such as Ganta and Voinjama experience recurrent episodes of violence and intense land conflicts, in which discussions over citizenship and migration take center stage. Engaging with literature on the position and acceptance of strangers in these communities is central to understanding expressions of belonging to the nation-state. Despite this minor shortcoming, this is an important contribution to our understanding of how citizenship is constructed in West Africa and beyond. What is more, the book is well written and accessible. The way the chapters are set-up makes it well suited for

educational purposes in a number of academic disciplines such as anthropology, history, or political science.

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