

Book Review: At Home in Two Countries: The Past and Future of Dual Citizenship by Peter J. Spiro

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*Dual citizenship is a concept that has greatly transformed since the term's first use in the early 1900s. As misunderstandings nonetheless abound about its legal status and implications, Peter J. Spiro traces the historical emergence of dual citizenship and offers a defence of its value in the twenty-first century in **At Home in Two Countries: The Past and Future of Dual Citizenship**. While she would welcome more reflection on dual citizenship outside of the book's US focus, Madeline McSherry finds this a comprehensive, thought-provoking and vital read that will be of interest to policymakers, lawyers and dual nationals alike.*

***At Home in Two Countries: The Past and Future of Dual Citizenship*. Peter J. Spiro. NYU Press. 2016.**

Find this book: 

In 1867, John Warren stood before a British jury on charges of treason and awaited the verdict. Though he had renounced his allegiance to the crown when he naturalised as a US citizen, Warren was born in Ireland and was therefore being tried as a Brit for his participation in an uprising against the Queen. As the presiding judge explained when he sentenced the 'Irishman' to fifteen years of hard labour: once a subject, always a subject.

Thus began the phenomenon of dual citizenship—the inadvertent consequence of one sovereign refusing to relinquish its citizens to another. Though the term was not used until the start of the twentieth century, the multitudes of immigrants naturalising in the US in the late 1800s resulted in a large number of de facto dual citizens: individuals claimed by both their new nations and the lands they had left behind.

We've come a long way since the days when Kings and Queens squabbled over people the way sovereigns have clashed over territory. Today, I, like many dual citizens, can both cruise across Europe on my Irish passport and be greeted at JFK with a hearty 'welcome home' sporting my US one. The historical trajectory of dual citizenship—from international security threat to commonly accepted privilege—is the subject of Peter J. Spiro's comprehensive new work, *At Home in Two Countries: The Past and Future of Dual Citizenship*.

Former US Supreme Court law clerk and member of the National Security Council, Spiro draws on his background and experience every step of the way, tracing the court cases and laws that coincided with evolving norms around dual citizenship. But although the author takes readers on a scholarly journey, *At Home in Two Countries* remains accessible through the anecdotes and case descriptions that bring individuals like Warren to life.

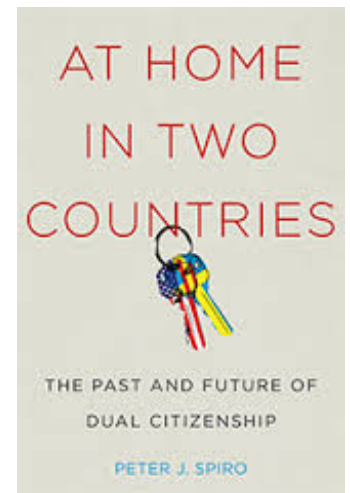




Image Credit: Dual Citizenship ([LaNicoya CC2.0](#))

Throughout it all, Spiro's premise is clear: dual citizenship has become an important social and political reality—'a commonplace of globalization' (3). Even during the hot and cold wars of the mid-twentieth century when policymakers despised it most, dual citizenship was on the rise. But the negative stigma that developed around the status back then, fuelled by fears of disloyalty and images of two-faced Cold War spies, remains in part today.

But, as Spiro points out, the threat has always been overstated. During the Cold War, not one major espionage case involved a dual citizen. And today, as interstate conflict becomes less common, competing state allegiances can seem a trivial concern. Even in the context of US counter-terrorism, where anxieties about dual nationals have resurfaced with the rise of the so-called 'Islamic State', Spiro argues convincingly that dual citizenship does not pose an increased threat. He explains that if the government 'knew enough about a U.S. citizen's complicity with ISIS to strip him of his citizenship', it would certainly know enough to intervene and prevent a terrorist attack.

Yet Spiro's argument goes a step further: dual citizenship is not just a benign reality; it also serves states' national interests. Acquiring formal nationality can help immigrants assimilate into their new state. It may also put them in a position to help spread their new culture back home. For states with large immigrant populations like the US, this may mean the expansion of US values abroad—a free form of soft power and a simpler way to spread the ideals of a free-market democracy than invasion (see Iraq, 2003).

And for the states that these immigrants leave behind, diasporas can become powerful economic resources. Here, Spiro tells the story of the 'Tomato King', a Mexican immigrant to the US, whose tomato-planting machine made him rich enough to be able to send money back home to fund a series of public works projects. With these benefits in mind, Spiro goes on to suggest that dual citizenship be elevated to a human right.

But not all of *At Home in Two Countries* is as optimistic. Spiro also points out a more disconcerting consequence of dual citizenship: 'the dilution—even the trivialization—of citizenship solidarities' (140). He claims that dual nationality 'is undermining state-based identities' (131). But for those who do not already subscribe to theories of globalisation that anticipate the fall of the nation-state, Spiro's suggestion of a post-national world is unlikely to be convincing. Possessing multiple formal attachments to states does not have to mean that those state ties will weaken. As Spiro himself argues, 'we do not always work from such zero-sum assumptions' (104).

Spiro admits that his story is US-centric, as it was the US that has been history's largest recipient of immigrants and a pioneer of legal norms around the issue. Yet other examples from diasporic communities from around the world—such as Indians in the UK, Turkish subjects in Germany and Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia—would have given a book of such global import a more global feel. A greater international focus might have also helped Spiro bolster his rather brief analysis of the relationship between citizenship and global inequalities.

At Home in Two Countries is a thought-provoking and important read for policymakers, international lawyers and a growing number of dual nationals interested in this complex global history. Spiro bids us to wonder what the future of global politics will look like in a world of shifting borders and calls for us to rethink nationhood in alternative ways. How will we reimagine our national communities in this new age? If the post-Brexit rush of British citizens registering for Irish passports is any indication, perhaps Spiro is right: that citizenship will more closely resemble membership in a club, with passports 'like credit cards, each offering different interest rates or rewards programs' (150).

Madeline McSherry is a writer and editor completing an MSc in International Relations Theory at the LSE, where her research centres on discourse and representation in foreign policy. She holds a BA in English and Hispanic Studies from Boston College and has lived and worked in the US, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. Find her on twitter @madmcsherry.

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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