STRADDLING WORLDS:
MUTIPLE-CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY

Audrey Covert

There are a myriad of on-going discussions in the world today relating to the status of dual- and multiple-citizenship holders. As more people across the world claim citizenship of multiple countries, their identity as members of individual nations and cultures becomes confused. As Tanja Brondsted Sejersen says, '...a distinction can be made between citizenship as a status (where you are either a citizen of a country or not), a set of rights (which are not necessarily dependent on official citizenship), [and citizenship as] an identity' (2008: 523). I have chosen to examine the effects of the legal status of dual- and multiple-citizenship holders on their personal identity as members of each nation and culture, and of the wider world.

I conducted my research among students in St. Andrews who held legal status as dual-citizens. I sat down with each of them separately, conducting something between an interview and a conversation in order to better understand their views and feelings. I quickly realized that one of the keys to understanding differing views on dual-citizenship could be found in each person's personal and family history - how had they come to obtain dual citizenship? I myself am a dual citizen of both the United States and the Netherlands. I obtained my dual-citizenship through inheritance: my maternal grandparents immigrated to the US in 1956, just before my mother was born. She was therefore born with citizenship in both countries, as were my sister and I. Despite this, I do not speak Dutch nor have I spent much time in the Netherlands. I have always understood dual-citizenship in a very specific way due to my own personal and family histories. In conversations with other dual-citizen students, I was able to better understand other views of this phenomenon.

In reference to citizenship, the term "identity" comes to mean two different things. Firstly, it refers to 'how the self conceives of itself, and labels itself' (Mathews 2000: 17). Equally important, however, to the concepts of citizenship and identity is the way in which other

people define you. While I may consider myself to be both Dutch and American, someone born and raised in the Netherlands may not consider me to be Dutch - both of these views become part of my identity.

When it comes to citizenship in any country, there are broadly two different ways in which a person can acquire citizenship. Each of these creates a very different relationship with the nation of citizenship. The first way to acquire citizenship is through blood or inheritance - such as I have with the Netherlands or as one of the students I talked with, Maggie, also American, had with Poland. Similar to me, she has never lived in Poland nor does she speak Polish. For us, then, the experience of our second citizenship is less about the present than it is about the past - our families' pasts. Knowledge of traditions and culture depend less on the present state of the nation than they do on the way the nation existed when our families left decades ago. Many of the people I spoke with whose citizenship was inherited felt as though they were 'frauds' or merely masquerading as citizens of the other country - this usually had to do with a lack of linguistic skills. They felt as though they were not members of the national community of the country to which they had citizenship because they were lacking some essential piece to membership. As Rapport and Overing state, 'awareness of community depends on consciousness of boundary' (2000: 62). For some, their awareness of the boundaries of the national and cultural communities to which they were in theory part of only served to clarify that they were on the outside. Often, this was because while they were legally members, they were not necessarily raised to be members and '...membership consists not so much of particular behavioural doings as of thinking about and deliberating upon behaviour in common' (*Ibid.*, 63).

The reverse of this I found to be true as well. For Elizabeth, it was not her citizenship that defined her identity but rather her customs and connections. Her family, originally Scottish, moved briefly to Canada before finally coming to the United States. Her father was born during the period in Canada, giving him Canadian citizenship, and she was born in the United States, giving her dual Canadian-American citizenship. Despite this, she has never been to Canada and does not identify with it at all, except, perhaps, through a familial love of hockey. She and her

family do, however, identify closely with their Scottish past, despite not having citizenship. Here, the distinction between ethnicity and nationality (legal designations) and culture (a social designation), becomes clear. 'Culture [does] not stress simply the possession of certain attributes (material, linguistic or territorial) but the consciousness of these attributes and their naturalization as essential to group identity' (Amit 2002: 20).

In comparison to inheriting citizenship through family, citizenship can also be acquired through birth in a country. For most dual-citizens, they acquire one citizenship through each means - born in one country to parents or a parent who passes on citizenship of another. Many of the people I interviewed spent a significant amount of time while growing up in each of the countries to which they had citizenship. While they still generally identify with one country as their primary nationality, they have a relationship with each country in the present and these relationships change over time - they are not stagnant. Each of these people talked about how they found that their behavior tended to be a mix of the two cultures and that it changed depending on where they were. Overall, the dual-citizens who had spent a significant amount of time in each of the countries to which they have citizenship seemed far more comfortable with each culture and with their status as a dual-citizen than those who had not. They never displayed the sense of being a 'fraud' that I found with those who had inherited their citizenship.

Everyone I interviewed discussed the importance of some form of cultural heritage to their sense of identity and belonging, but it was not the same form of heritage for all (Edwards 2002: 150). What is common across all the cultures is the importance of creating a sense of commonality by finding or creating differences that set them apart from other groups. '...the notion of community encapsulates both closeness and sameness, *and* distance and difference' (Rapport 2000: 62-3). In creating a common difference, the group bands together, creating a sense of community. Being part of this group and this common identity in some way was essential to the way in which each person identified with their countries of citizenship.

Balancing these different cultures and identities was rarely a straightforward process. One person succinctly described her experience as an 'identity crisis' as she tried to establish

herself both as a citizen of each country and simultaneously a citizen of both. Determining where one fits in each becomes a process of straddling two worlds. For some it is straddling generations - establishing where one fits across not just space, but time as well and how a historical identity can be established in the present. For others, it is about straddling space and identity - about figuring out how to simultaneously live in two separate nations and how to bring two different national and cultural identities together. Solrun Williksen and Nigel Rapport describe the process of 'home-making [as the] continual work of placing migrants of identity in time and space' (2010: 4). I would argue that home-making is just one small part of a much larger process of establishing an identity, but that the term "migrants of identity" perfectly describes the way many of those I interviewed understood themselves.

As a dual-citizen, one inherently does not fit in with either culture completely, and one's identity as a citizen of any nation is not the same as someone who has citizenship in only one country. For that reason, the creation of one's personal identity becomes something that one develops consciously, often changing depending on where one is. Many of the ways in which people maintain culture and links to different countries is through the cultural elements they associate with them. For Maggie, this link was through religion. A dual Polish-American citizen, she had only recently acquired Polish citizenship. Her grandparents had been Jews living in Poland, but had been forced to leave after the outbreak of World War II and move to America. Recently Poland, along with some other formerly occupied countries, has begun presenting the descendants of those forced to leave during the occupation with retroactive citizenship. Her relationship with Poland, and her identity as a Polish citizen, is inexorably wound up in her identity as a Jew. She described herself not as 'Polish, but as a Polish Jew.' She and her family have always maintained their link to their Polish heritage through their Judaism. Similarly, her identity as a Jew is linked to her Polish heritage - she said that her links to Poland are still stronger than any links she has to Israel. Holidays are another way that some identified with the countries to which they had citizenship. Hannah is a dual Belgian-Scottish citizen, born and raised in Scotland though she visits Belgium regularly and speaks Flemish fluently. Her family acknowledges Belgian holidays, such as their independence day, and celebrates holidays such as Christmas in the way of their Belgian family, not in the Scottish tradition.

Everyone I spoke with discussed the role of food in maintaining links to their other countries. Food and taste have very strong links to memory (Norbye 2010: 146-7). Many described how their parents and grandparents made specific dishes with national or cultural links as a way of maintaining cultural tradition, even in foreign settings. For Caroline, born and raised in Spain to a Spanish mother and German father, her father's way of maintaining his link to Germany was through food and holidays. He kept a garden for produce in the same way his German family had, but in contrast to the Spanish traditions around them. Caterina has triple citizenship - born in the United States to a Mexican mother and an Italian father. She described being raised on three types of food - Mexican and Italian, but also Syrian. Her mother was half Syrian and half Mexican, but did not have citizenship in both countries. As I described earlier, the cultural link through family history is often stronger than the link developed through residency.

Another clear expression of the way different people identify with their nationalities is through language. The ability to speak the language of a country to which you have citizenship is an important aspect of how you identify with that country - whether or not you feel that you belong. However, there are additional aspects of language that influence or are influenced by one's feelings of identity. When talking with Caterina, she made a clear verbal distinction between having "spoken" Spanish and Italian first and having "learned" English later. This distinction lines up well with the split between having been born in the US but to Spanish and Italian parents. Once again, the importance of family history and tradition over the importance of location becomes clear. Caterina also expressed her need to be perfectly fluent in both Spanish and Italian when she returns to either country. If she makes a mistake, she said people assume she is a tourist, figuratively cutting her ties to her countries. Anna has dual Liechtenstein-German citizenship, born and raised in Liechtenstein to a German mother and a father from Liechtenstein. Since moving away from Liechtenstein to study, Anna expressed that she had been losing some of her fluency. She said that this made her uncomfortable and sad, as if she were losing part of what shaped her identity. Language is a very key element to national and cultural collectiveness and identity, if for no other reason than it is one of the first things that a stranger will learn about you.

An interesting element of many of my discussions was the dichotomy that they revealed in reference to the way dual-citizens often feel about their place in each country. There was a simultaneous need to fit in and be accepted as part of the culture, but also the wish to feel unique and to stand out. Gabriella, an English-Spanish dual-citizen, born and raised in Spain, discussed how she tends to adopt the habits of whichever culture she is in to fit in. This can be seen as an attempt to establish and maintain membership in a particular cultural or national setting (Rapport 2000: 63). Similarly, she said that she does not spend time with other Spaniards while in Britain or other British while in Spain - that doing so makes her feel as though one culture is "invading" the other. However, she also becomes defensive of each culture while she is in the other country - expressing her conflicting allegiance to both countries. In contrast, many of those with whom I talked expressed a constant feeling of being different than those around them. For some, this is an actively cultivated front, allowing them to feel unique in each country. For instance, Nic, a dual British-American citizen, says he feels British, especially when he is not in Britain, and feels far more American when he is, and that this allows him to create a unique identity from those around him.

For others, this feeling of difference comes from the way others react to them. Julia, a French-American citizen, is constantly labelled as an 'other' - her American friends label her as 'so French' and her French relatives as 'so American.' Similarly, Caterina has found that her family and friends will introduce her as a foreigner, no matter where she is. Anna actively chooses to project one identity over the other, often choosing to present herself as from Liechtenstein, partially because of the novelty associated with such a small country, and partially to avoid some of stereotypes associated with Germany. However, she expressed how at times it got tedious to answer the endless onslaught of questions that came with presenting herself as from Liechtenstein, and at those times would choose to label herself as German instead. One of the unique aspects of being a dual-citizen is this continual opportunity to choose how you label yourself. Anna chooses whichever label she is more comfortable with in a particular situation. Others often simplify much more complicated situations in order to avoid long conversations that require detailing one's personal history. Julia often labels herself as 'French, but I grew up in the US.' This label does not necessarily express how she feels about

her relationship with each country - it minimizes her link to the United States - but gives her an easy answer to the ever present question, especially in St. Andrews, ‘Where are you from?’ Similarly, Caterina does not always reply with the same country when asked this question. However, she has found that friends who know her whole story will often stop her and correct or clarify for her when she chooses to do so. While each of us has a certain ability to self-identify, the interference of others and the labels they attach to us can have as much, if not more, impact on the way we are perceived by those around us.

One very interesting aspect of the discussions I had were the distinctions people made between nationality and citizenship and identity. Depending on the context, the legal status of citizenship can have a profound effect on the way one self-identifies (Amit 2002: 6). Hannah suggested that there is the legal status of being a citizen of both Belgium and Scotland and there is additionally the identities she creates for herself as a citizen of each. She is, in effect, balancing two nationalities and two identities. Maggie’s newly acquired legal citizenship has affected her identity, but she also feels somewhat empty without the cultural background she would have experienced had she lived in Poland. For Elizabeth, who does not consider herself to be Canadian at all, her passport was a means of access, a ticket that provided her with opportunities, not of identification or to suggest a status of belonging. The legal status that citizenship provided has had little effect on her identity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the people that I interviewed are American as one of their two (or three) citizenships. I believe there are two qualities of the United States that create a situation where so many people identify themselves as not just American, but American and something - whether they possess legal status elsewhere or not. The first of these qualities is the youth of the United States as a country. With less than 250 years since declaring independence, the United States is a far younger country than most of the other countries to which we associate. By associating ourselves with an older country, we create the potential for a much longer personal family history - we do not disappear off the map in 1776. The second of these qualities is the “melting pot” nature of America. Identifying as an American, while it unites us in many ways, also fails to recognize the incredible diversity present in the US.

Acknowledging the national and cultural differences allows us to recognize this diversity. For Maggie, part of being American intrinsically means being something else as well - no one is just "American." She found that this is communicated verbally as well. When discussing her dual-citizenship, the "American" always came second - she always said she was "Polish-American," never "American-Polish." In my discussions, I have found this to be true across most Americans - the American part is understood and common, it is the other part that is the identifying piece. There is a necessary qualifier to American citizenship that is not found in other countries. I think this is also seen in ideas of national and sanguineous purity that have been so common throughout the centuries in other parts of the world. Whereas, for instance, historically in Britain it is something to be proud of if you have "pure" British blood, in America, often people are proud of how many different countries they can trace their family to. Caterina recognized a different, if connected, verbal pattern in her experience. She identifies herself as Italian and Mexican and American, but not, Italian-American or Mexican-American. In the United States, microcosmic communities exist where immigrants of specific countries develop their own communities. These communities in turn develop their own cultures, separate from both their mother countries and from the wider American culture within which they operate. Caterina expressed that the distinction between *Italian and American* and *Italian-American* were not easily understood by those outside the United States. Due to its unique cultural mix, the United States presents an interesting study on the lives of dual- and multiple-citizens and their identities.

Identity is a complicated subject, influenced both by the way one views oneself and the way others do. Even national and cultural identity, perhaps simple when first viewed, present a complicated pattern, especially in light of globalization. Dual- and multiple-citizenship are on one hand mere legal terminologies that recognize a person's link to multiple countries. However, they also create a much more complicated question of how one identifies with those countries to which you ostensibly "belong."

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