

Email interview with the Spadina Literary Review, <http://spadinaliteraryreview.com/>.
Questions received February 4, 2016; answered February 9-10, 2016.

1) Are you someone who generally participates in politics in a partisan way, or is it rather that specific issues (for example *The Bible Code*) provoke you?

I'm not normally politically active. I was active thrice: the first time as a youth in 1982-1984, fighting against the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and in favour of a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (at the time this was novel; now it is almost universally agreed upon yet not within reach). This period ended when I was drafted to the Israeli army like every other 18 years old, and had to cease my activity. After my 3-years compulsory military service (as a math teacher) I moved to the US for study, and my mind was elsewhere.

The second time I was active was indeed in relation to the so-called "bible codes" (though I'm not sure if this counts as "political"). Here what led me to become active was the feeling that mathematics, my academic discipline, was being misused, and the realization that I'm better positioned than almost anybody else to respond to that: I had math skills, and programming skills, and the relevant language skills, and that's a rare combination.

My third "activity" is the oath affair. Here I have never set to be active and never desired it. All I wanted was to become a Canadian citizen without having to affirm loyalty to an institution I could not be loyal to. It was a personal matter, not a public one, and the publicity, from my perspective, is incidental. An almost complete log of my activities regarding the oath is at <http://drorbn.net/Canada>.

2) What do you think prompted you to focus on the queenie part of the Canadian citizenship oath, since presumably you could have kept quiet like most people and taken your citizenship without hassle?

I was disgusted by the thought that I'd have to affirm my loyalty to what I consider to be a repulsive institution.

3) I believe civil rights lawyer Charles Roach started the process many years ago, but by last year the case proceeded on behalf of Michael McAteer, Simone Topey, and yourself. I should mention lawyer Peter Rosenthal as an active ingredient. How did you meet the others involved in this legal battle?

Peter Rosenthal is a mathematician alongside being a lawyer, and I've known him since my first days in Canada, back in 2002. One day in early September 2012 we had a chance meeting in the corridor at the math department at the University of Toronto. I mentioned to him that I've been avoiding taking Canadian citizenship for the 5 years prior to that because of the oath. He mentioned to me that he was involved in a legal challenge to the oath. And the conclusion was obvious. I've only met McAteer and Topey via Rosenthal.

4) I've seen some nasty comments on your decision to renounce the royalty part of the oath, including an adverse editorial in the *Globe*. Overall, what kind of support (or antipathy) have you received from colleagues, students, acquaintances, and the public?

You haven't seen the worst. I never got explicit threats, but I did get "Hitler was right", and "I hope you die of some horrendous disease", and various other profanities that my son had to translate for me. I also got (and am still getting) a large number of supportive messages, including the nearly 30 other people who added their disavowals to the web site I maintain, <http://disavowal.ca>.

My colleagues, students, and acquaintances seem supportive, some even very supportive. Though one never knows – there may well be people I know well who are very critical of me yet choose not to let me know.

5) Did you receive any support, or at least encouragement, from any known political figures?

No.

6) Do you accept the argument that the queen and her successors as spelled out in the oath are not meant to be taken literally as human individuals at the top of a social pyramid, but rather are meant to be taken as mere symbols of our form of government with its commitment to democracy, equality, etc?

Do note that the queen and her heirs and successors are not abstractions. They really do exist in our physical universe, and they really are privileged under the law, forever. Taking them as symbols to the exact opposite, namely to "democracy and equality", would make George Orwell proud of his invention of "doublespeak". Or perhaps, ashamed.

7) In the end, you chose to swear the oath then renounce a part of it, as the courts had made clear was your right to do so. You have set up a website, disavowal.ca, inviting others to make similar declarations. Do you plan to participate in further political action or protest against the oath and/or against the monarchy itself? If so, how so?

I'm now a Canadian citizen, and my protest against the oath I took was, in my mind, adequate. No one could possibly suspect that in taking the oath as I did I professed any kind of loyalty to the monarchy. So from the personal perspective, which was after all my original motivation, I am not committed to any further action. This said, I have set up <http://disavowal.ca> mostly as a service to others who wish to disavow, and for future activists who may use it later. I don't plan to take any initiatives, yet it may be that when others will publicly disavow in the future, and when the laws will change, people will ask me about my opinions as you are asking me now. I plan to continue responding to such requests.

8) Did you write to the monarch explaining your disavowal as at one time you meant to do? If so, did you hear back?

No, my opinion changed. Why would I write to that person who should not be where she is, or maybe, as the other side thinks, is merely a symbol and therefore should not opine on a political issue? By the way, I did CC two government ministers in the letter announcing my intent to disavow, and later on the disavowal itself. I got no responses.

9) Besides Canadian, you hold Israeli and U.S. citizenship. I assume you took the U.S. oath. How do you compare it to the Canadian oath, especially the part that seems to require you to bear arms if they need you to?

I'm a US citizen by birth and so I've never taken the US citizenship oath and I've never thought about it carefully. This said, according to <https://www.uscis.gov/policymanual/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume12-PartJ-Chapter3.html>, under certain circumstances conscientious objectors may omit the "bearing arms" part of the US oath. No parallel option is available in Canada.

BTW, citizenship, like royalty, is a privilege, and it is worthwhile to compare the two. In an ideal world of love and harmony citizenship would not be necessary. But we don't live in that world yet, and citizenship is a necessary evil. The same necessity for a royalty class does not exist. Citizenship is mostly granted by virtue of "living in the land". For social reasons, it is sometimes also inherited. But for non-residents it is inherited at most for a generation or two, after which the social rationales expire and so does inheritance. Finally, nobody is required to bow to citizenship.

10) What sort of constitutional arrangement would you advocate for Canada — e.g., a homegrown monarchy, a viceroy, a presidential system? Who is to be the Head of State?

I obviously dislike the idea of a monarchy, but what I fought was the idea that I have to pretend to have personal allegiance to the monarchy; I did not fight the monarchy itself. If others want to keep the monarchy, I regret it, but so be it. Having a head of state does not require personal allegiance to her/him; such allegiance is very distinct from allegiance to the country itself. (I did vow the latter while disavowing the former).

As an aside, much as I think about it I fail to understand why at all do we need a head of state. Switzerland does not have a head of state (unless you are willing to assign this title to a committee), and nobody seems to feel that something is amiss.

11) Are you winning or losing this battle?

In the personal sense, I've already won. I am a Canadian citizen. I was humiliated a bit by having to take an oath and then retract parts of it, but I didn't sacrifice my principles. In the more global sense, who knows? The battle against the oath will continue as more and more people will be open about their discomfort as they are made to take oaths to the monarchy: immigrants, public servants, and soldiers, here in Canada and elsewhere. Sooner or later, the oath will go – this is a part of an undeniable historical process in which the reach of the monarchy continuously shrinks. But I have no idea how long this will take.