

*Taking Oath Citizenship, Perjury*

*“Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in your reading have been like the blast of triumph out of Shakespeare, Seneca, Moses, John and Paul.”*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Today is the day I become an American citizen. I am waiting for someone to call my ticket number as I place myself on this wooden bench that has felt the face of too many bottoms plunking down, getting up, lying down, sleeping. I wish I could rub myself against this draped flag, 7' by 13', make a dress of it, or just feel it between my fingers, watching the ripened colors of justice slip in and out. One lad next to me is silently reciting from the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'an, another boy is fingering his handheld gaming device, and I am reading fragments from Irshad Manji's The Trouble with Islam. Illustrative of the “Free Exercise Clause,” one can see the execution of practicing a religion liberally; there are no setbacks, boundaries, or judgments being cast. Yet this scene is all-too ironic: one boy is affirming his core religious values through the holy scriptures of Islam, another boy is embracing the technology to which we have grown too close, too conditioned, and I am questioning how a Muslim can live a life with equal allegiance to a religion in a burgeoning secular nation.

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely wish not to proclaim my status as a citizen in this nation, this cruel nation that strips me of my other citizenship in Bangladesh. A dual citizenship – which I had hoped for – would have anchored me to two places: one, which I no longer feel part of and one, which I have dissolved into. Sometimes I wonder which is which – but mostly, why I could not choose.

Upon criticizing “support and [defen]d the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies...” in the oath, I realize I am utilizing the very first amendment to the Constitution: my right to free speech as an American citizen. Should everyone not be allowed the elastic clause of expressing ideas – though sometimes heretic – to the rest of those willing to listen? Spelled out, our right to free speech is the one right in which we are all capable of voicing our concerns. We must turn on the dial of discourse to an extreme – or a high at the least – and release from the passive speech . Let’s detach ourselves from what we associate with, shake our heads when we realize others’ wrongdoings, and risk what we have for something we all deserve.

As the oath of allegiance declares, one must “entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen.” Must I vow to obliterate the last sixteen years of allegiance to the foreign country in which I was born and raised for most my life? If “so simple” a process must involve a pledge, it is not a choice but rather, an obligation – yet it is not verification, nor a promise of loyalty. It is the gathering of those who wish to make him or herself a “citizen.” Must I be bound to one country, when instead, I can be a citizen of the world?

In this simple process of taking the oath, one must recite it with a fellow hundred citizen wannabes in a cramped room and receive the certificate that binds & offers our status as no longer alien, foreign. A few will tear up and dab at their eyes with furrowed sleeves, others will fidget with the handout of the written oath (some chewing a corner off, others rubbing it between their fingers), and one will wonder just how much longer.

As I let my mother read an excerpt from The Trouble With Islam, I feel her rage slither through the open crack between her plum lips. *That's not true! The Qur'an does allow one to think for him or herself*, she explained to me, defensively. *So Americanized, aren't you? Sometime I wonder if we ever made the right decision.* Not only did she fail to realize that she had just exercised the First Amendment, but also, that she was part of a minority: the ones who wait to take this oath and cradle it with utmost audacity, draping it in the flag of Bangladesh.

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