




“Suspect Belongings”: The Traitor as a Figure of Betrayal in Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie-Rose*

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In *The Last Resistance*, Jacqueline Rose writes, “As far as nationhood is concerned, flesh and blood – or in Freud’s formula ‘blood and nerves’ is a suspect form of belonging” (22). As fresh cycles of violence erupt with deeper and darker understandings of who belongs where in a world in which vast swathes of people live as stateless or exiled people, the forms of belonging to the nation, the group, or the clan have become ever more suspect. In this study, the central figure for this suspect form of belonging is the traitor. I analyze Etel Adnan’s novel, *Sitt Marie-Rose* (1978), translated into English as *Sitt Marie-Rose* (1982), to examine how, as a traitor, a woman brings out the tenuousness of group cohesion and belonging in times of war.

Etel Adnan is a Lebanese-American poet, painter, and novelist whose work mixes genres, disciplines, and cultural idioms. *Sitt Marie-Rose* is a fictional account of the real-life story of Marie-Rose Boulus (Adnan, “To Write”). Boulus was a Syrian Christian social worker in Beirut who was abducted and killed by the Christian Militia during the early stages of the Lebanese Civil War. At once martyr and traitor, she gives a body to the political and sexual anxieties associated with the traitor. In this paper, I put Adnan’s novel in conversation with psychoanalysis, drawing on the study of traitors by Sharika Thiranagama and Tobias Kelly to examine how the figure of the traitor can be gendered. A female traitor’s betrayal destabilizes not only the tenuous lines of group cohesion or national belonging but also the implicit sexual forms of bonding present in such groups. This inner undoing provokes vicious violence: “we do not want to hear the unsettling news that might come from anywhere else. We are never more ruthless than when we are trying to block out parts of our mind” (23), writes Rose. I take the figure of the traitor, in this case the female traitor, as a figure for that inner unsettling of our enchantment with ourselves and our nation. Thus, the novel renders visible the vulnerability and tenuousness of national belonging: Adnan proposes a model of love that upsets the fragile but hardened brotherhoods, leading to other solidarities that transcend the love of the same (brother) by introducing sexual difference, the woman, and the traitor (Manuratne 160–219).