**Race Traitor**

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June 16th 2016 and another writing deadline. Alone in front of the screen and a final draft, doubts creep in. I wonder if the claims that we had made about the theatre of British immigration enforcement and an intensification of xenophobia and racism need to be toned down. The cursor, a familiar heartbeat flickers with my uncertainty. I do not know who or what is sitting on my shoulder. It is a time of many uncertainties, falsehoods and rumour; ‘post-truth politics’. The leader of the UK Independence Party unveils a new campaign poster: an unruly queue of mostly brown-skinned refugees. The slogan in towering red capitals “Breaking point”; underneath in white, “the EU has failed us all.”

A tea break at last and the company of a portable radio. An MP has been attacked and is being taken to hospital. I don't think that I have heard her name before. *Jo Cox*. A bystander says the attacker shouted ‘Britain first’. I can’t take in what is unfolding and yet the breeze of shock carries me towards something familiar. The precariousness of the streets of South London in the 1970s, a child’s senses alive and honed to the possibility of over-spilling, fickle resentments. I taught myself to move carefully, to move between the present and what might lie around the corner. It would be years before I would learn to connect feeling and language, to learn from Fanon, Lorde and Anzaldúa that this splitting and living of time otherwise was both a gift and a kind of madness. All of this flows between the radio, me and the streets of West Yorkshire where Jo Cox was attacked. It happens slowly, without me noticing. Under the sound waves, I am being bound to this young woman.

Later, the dreaded news: Jo Cox has not survived. She died from her injuries. An orchestra of violence from a knife, a gun and hate-filled fists.

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18 June 2016. ‘My name is death to traitors, freedom for Britain’. This is how Thomas Mair, the man charged with Jo’s murder responds when asked to confirm his name at his first court appearance.

Traitor:

noun. a person who betrays someone or something, such as a friend, cause, or principle

origin. Middle English: from Old French *traitour*, from Latin *traditor*, from trader ‘hand over’

22 June. Brendan Cox, Jo’s husband is speaking to thousands of people who have gathered in Trafalgar Square to celebrate what would have been her 42nd birthday. ‘Jo’s killing was political’ he says. ‘It was an act of terror designed to advance an agenda of hatred towards others’. A plane flies over the square, trailing a banner. ‘Take Control #VoteLeave’.

I dream of Jo. It is both a prayer and a dream. This time I have no doubts. Jo was assassinated because in Thomas Mair’s eyes and puckered thinking, Jo’s xenophilia made her a race traitor. In the council house where Mair lived, the police find a small library of Nazi literature, white supremacy and manuals on bomb making and home made gun assembly. Described as a loner, he had incubated the fantasy over 17 years of killing a ‘collaborator’.

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*One of the many creoles spoken on the South Asian subcontinent is Urdu which makes a distinction between ‘ajnabi’ and ‘ghair’*.

These are the words of the social theorist Avtar’s Brah. In her essay ‘Scent of Memory’, Brah delves into the deeper moments and relays between closeness and distance. She tells us:

*An ‘ajnabi’ is a stranger; a newcomer whom one does not yet know but who holds the promise of friendship, love, intimacy. The ‘ajnabi’ may have different ways of doing things but is not alien.*

*She could be(come) ‘apna’; that is, ‘one of our own’.*

*The idea of ‘ghair’ is much more difficult to translate for its point of departure is intimacy; it walks the tightrope between insider/outsider.*

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Brah’s words come back to me now. *Apna Jo Cox. Apna*.

**Reference**

Brah, A. (2012/1999) ‘The Scent of Memory: Strangers, Our Own, and Others’, *Feminist Review*, 100:27-38.