



INDIAN SUMMERS

COLONIAL BRUTALITY IN ALL ITS FINERY



Yoly Zentella

Friend A is in prison arrested for a murder he didn't commit. He has been tortured by the police into confessing and is battered and bloody. Friend B visits him in his cell:

B: "What happened?"

A: "This is what a confession looks like."

"When they arrest a man like you they look for evidence. If they can't find it you walk free. When they arrest a man like me if they can't find it, they simply invent it."

B: "I think I'm beginning to understand."

A: "I'm the very worst of my kind. I refuse to lie down, I dared to stand up to them as their equal . . . and that is my real crime. And I knew that one day, one day I would be punished for it."

B: "This place is despicable."

A: "It's all my fault."

B: "How can you say that?"

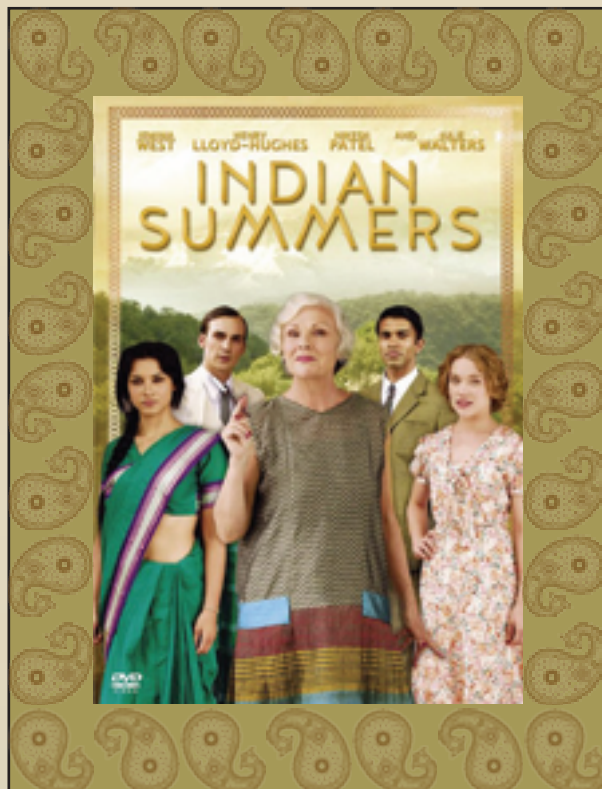
A: "Because I was foolish enough to believe that the rules did not apply to me. We are all given a part that we must play. We all have levels that we cannot move beyond. It's really very simple. Keep your head down, don't question anything, don't challenge anything. Play your part . . . It's the only way to survive."

Familiar? This telling dialogue takes place between an Indian prisoner, Ramu a rich landowner, and his Anglo British friend Ian, a newcomer to India. The words are historical in nature, connected to settings where people of color, past and present, live under a system of colonization, dominated by Anglos with a false sense of racial superiority and entitlement -- South Africa, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Palestine.

The dialogue is from a BBC period drama *Indian Summers*, released in 2015. The topic, a colonized India during the early 1930s in midst of rebellion against a dying British rule, the Raj. Gandhi is in prison on a hunger strike. He has urged all Indians to unite, and the British government is doing its best to sabotage this

unity by playing groups against each other.

The setting is Simla in northern India at the foot of the Himalayas. The camera takes the audience along busy market streets



crowded with Indian natives as British in carriages or rickshaws push past crowds. Collisions with pedestrians must have been a common hazard, on the screen it happens to a main Indian character, Dalal. British stores catering to British needs describe well the process of transplantation to an eastern enclave, outsiders making themselves at home, a home where they are the unwanted intruders. The color bar is part of the Anglo-Indian culture. The ex-pat Simla Club's sign reads, "No dogs or Indians allowed". *Indian Summers* raises the viewer's emotions from the very beginning.

Scenes of Anglo-Indian interaction suggest seething Indian anger at despoliation, gentrification, humiliation, exploitation, subservience and subjugation. Resentment lies under the bowing and scraping of servants who utter "yes

Sahib" at every turn. Contrasting is the political emancipation of Indian women awakening into a political consciousness. One can see the moment when someone gets the connections between the political street demonstrations and the behavior of the sell-outs. And yes, it is acknowledged that the latter act out of a need to survive, to feed their families while preferring to work in lush, well-manicured lawn and mansion environments rather than peddling on the street, scraping together a living. But it still hurts to see self-degradation.

The 10-episode drama tells a many tiered story. A murder mystery, British and Indian forbidden love, frustrated passions, and personal lies and secrets woven together with threads of social disquiet caused by the colonial process. Dirty politics, racism, brutality, injustice, double standards in Anglo-Indian law, and low regard for native life collide with native nationalism, political resistance, activism, and armed Indian retaliation, called *terrorism* by the colonialists. Loyalty, trust, love, hate, and resentment between the colonizer and colonized are present at every turn. Indian caste and mix race issues underline overlapping plots.

The British empire's -- England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales -- presence in India, and eventual rule, lasted over 350

ISLAMOPHOBIA — NOT A BRIDGE BUILDER

Nadine Saliba

Editor's Note: This testimonio was presented at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center on March 26th celebrating the 4th edition of *This Bridge Called My Back, Writings by Radical Women of Color* with Cherrie Moraga.

There is a telling etymological connection in Arabic between the words bridge and courage. The root is the same. Bridge is جسج (jisr) and courage is جاسج (jasara).

It is a fitting connection because it does require a sense of daring to create "bridges of consciousness," as expressed in *This Bridge Called My Back*, by exploring our diverse cultures, classes and sexualities, and by forging a sense of solidarity across barriers of state-imposed borders and national lines.

At this critical political and historical moment, when every time a terrorist attack takes place in Paris or Brussels or San Bernadino, we, as Arab and Muslim American communities, brace ourselves for a spike in anti-Arab and Islamophobic rhetoric by politicians and the media (portraying us as the quintessential enemy of the West and the US) which inevitably leads to a spike in hate crimes, it is a matter of survival for the Arab American community - often labeled by scholars and activists as the "invisible ethnic group" - to tread that bridge towards visibility. A visibility on our own terms, not the way we are portrayed in corporate news and entertainment media to bolster public support for US political domination and military adventures in the Arab world.

As political conflicts have risen between the US and the Arab world, Arabs and Arab Americans have been positioned as the "enemy other" giving rise to a heightened ten-

sion between Arab American and majority US culture. In the shadow of the so-called war on terror, Arab-Americans have been marginalized, and racially and religiously profiled by federal law, state policing as well as a rising cultural animus. Branded as "others," we are designated by the US Patriot Act as instigators and framed within judicial rulings as the antithesis of "American".

Arab immigrants have experienced an increased sense of ethno-political consciousness forged by their opposition to western imperialism and the hostility and marginalization they encounter in the US, in addition to ongoing attempts to exclude them from the political process and lock them out of political life in this country. As an example, we are in the midst of virulent anti-free speech campaigns on college campuses, state legislatures and the US Congress to de-legitimize and criminalize the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, known as BDS, led by Arab activists and their non-Arab allies in support of Palestinian liberation.

We have no choice however but to resist and remain steadfast against all these serious and dangerous attempts by very powerful forces to shut us down. And it requires courage - as they try to instill fear in us every step of the way - courage to continue on that bridge, that path, that struggle, this movement towards our liberation and the lives we deserve.



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years. The first commercial incursions began in the 1600s. Slowly the Brits made India part of the crown, eventually becoming the jewel in the crown of the British monarchy; imperialism and capitalism combined forces to possess a beautiful and resource rich country with millions of potential servants, laborers, field hands, and women to sexually exploit and forget.

British presence officially ended in 1947 when India and Pakistan became self-governing after partition. The division is evidenced in maps as West and East Pakistan on either side of India. Partition was part of the divide and conquer colonial policy. By the time the Brits pulled out, India was in the shambles that colonizers notoriously leave behind with added tensions between castes and religions created by the Brits in the interest of division among the native populations.

As entertainment *Indian Summers* is a worthy period drama

because of tense plots, beautiful photography, and excellent acting. Thinking politically, it's worth is in the graphic portrayal of the damage done by colonialism. One could argue that this type of viewing is frivolous, encouraging appreciation of the concept of empire. Instead, *Indian Summers* encourages us to think of how this history applies to other situations where living under the terrors of colonialism and apartheid continue today and how we express solidarity with the victims. And, *Indian Summers* connects to us here at home as we listen to the current presidential election debates and the domestic and foreign personal and political policies of the candidates.

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