

Saffiyah Smiles

by Billy Bragg

Following the shocking scenes of white supremacists marching through the streets of Charlottesville in the summer of 2017, my mind went back to an image of a young woman facing down a ranting fascist with nothing but a serene smile. Saffiyah Khan had been taking part in a counter demonstration against the neo-fascist English Defence League in Birmingham, England, in April 2017, when she saw a woman being surrounded by taunting EDL supporters. Saria Zafar was targeted because she was wearing a hijab and when the police failed to intervene, Saffiyah stepped up and got in the face of the loudest aggressor, holding him at bay with nothing more than a smile until police eventually intervened. A press photographer captured the moment and the picture went viral. Local Labour MP Jess Phillips memorably tweeted the image with the caption “Who looks like they have the power here?”

Saffiyah Khan’s selfless act of solidarity is an inspiration to us all and a reminder that sometimes you can confront hatred by calmly making plain how ridiculous its propagators are.

Angry white men
dressed like Elmer Fudd
shouting something
about soil and blood.
A woman of colour steps out from the crowd
and does something to make us all proud

Just like Victor Hugo told,
‘To love is to act’
and her act was bold
Bold as love
she made her stand
And with a smile
took power from the man.

Oh, don't you know
we come together when Saffiyah smiles
All 'round the world,
people come together when Saffiyah smiles.

Cosplay Nazis
marching in file
Hitler's haircut
is back in style
Resistance on the streets of Birmingham
and with her smile she disarms the man.

Oh, don't you know,
we come together when Saffiyah smiles
All 'round the world,

people come together when Saffiyah smiles.

This is what solidarity looks like!

This is what solidarity looks like!

This is what solidarity looks like!

This is what solidarity looks like!

This is what solidarity looks like!

For lyric video of Saffiyah Smiles, see <http://billybragg.co.uk/bridgesnotwalls/>