



## Information for Social Change

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**The Tree That Remembers, directed by Masoud Raouf  
50 minutes, 19 seconds; The National Film Board of Canada, 2002  
Prize-winning film-maker at the National Film Board of Canada**

### **Film review by Julian Samuel**

Canadian-Iranian Filmmaker Masoud Raouf's *The Tree That Remembers* offers proof that the National Film Board executive producer Sally Bochner is fully committed to allowing "visible minorities" to make documentaries. This film won the Silver Award for Best Canadian Documentary at Hot Docs, and Gold Award at Yorktown.

Raouf's effort consists of interviews with Iranian exiles who were imprisoned, tortured, and who now live in Canada. The film is filled with wall-to-wall interviewees who cry. Their suffering, which is supposed to touch us on a personal level, is shown without sustained political or historical analysis except for one or two sentences which offer the most craven criticism of Canada. What is the point of showing us tears without exploring the international complicity (and the silence of the corporate mass media) which has partially contributed to the enormous suffering of Iranians? The film does not expose how western governments (including ours) silently sell profit-making instruments of repression to Iran; the Canadian arms industry is never mentioned, the tears flow endlessly.

In a "globalizing" world the following questions are more relevant than ever: Did our country, Canada, support Savak and the Shah? Internationally, was Canada sufficiently vocal in criticizing Iran? What were or are Canada's links with current Iranian regimes? Do the NFB bosses control the content of this film? These questions, ignored by the director, are relevant when discussing Iranian suffering past and present.

*The Tree That Remembers* has not got a central thesis or focus. A suicide is tacked at the beginning and at the end for perfunctory continuity. Moreover, the camera work is boringly traditional and the editing transpires without a single international interconnection, and the comatose animation sections are inserted into the film to stay the charge of "talking heads" rather than enrich the work.

Years ago, even our gigantically pro-Israeli CBC set the suffering of the people of Iran in an almost-analytical context (Canadian sales of weapons were not exposed, of course). Other film-makers have tackled the same subject with more rigour. Rufia Pooya's 1980

film *In Defense of People* elegantly exposed American support for the Shah's violence. Raouf should have studied Pooya's work before making something that is much worse than the average CBC documentary on Iran.

By not exposing Canada's role in supporting Iranian dictatorships, sentimental films such as *The Tree that Remembers* actually perpetuates the suffering of Iranian people; their suffering is presented as something out there in the far away blue yonder, as something not connected to Canada. Their suffering is very much connected to what Canada does in terms of trade relations and foreign policy. This film does a profound disservice to the people who were and who are currently being brutalized; it tries to be poetic rather than expose arms trade deals and bankrupt foreign policy. I am confident that Canadians would pressure their elected politicians to change things if they were given rational information on how Canada, in its own small way, contributes to the suffering.

Julian Samuel

Film-maker and writer Julian Samuel, has made a four- hour documentary on Orientalism and has published a novel, *Passage to Lahore (De Lahore à Montréal)*. He can be contacted at: [jjsamuel@vif.com](mailto:jjsamuel@vif.com)