



Information for Social Change

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**The Tree that Remembers, directed by Masoud Raouf
Raouf, an Iranian filmmaker reflects on oppression and freedom,
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 Pat Dillon

In 1992 a young Iranian student hanged himself from a tree on the outskirts of a small Ontario town. He had escaped the Ayatollahs' regime and found refuge in Canada. Why did he take his own life?

The death hit home with his fellow countryman Masoud Raouf. He too was part of the generation who opposed the Shah's despotic rule - only to be cruelly persecuted by the new regime.

The National Film Board Documentary *The Tree that Remembers* is Raouf's reflection on the betrayal of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the tenacity of the human spirit. The film gets its broadcast debut on TVO's *The View From Here* at 10:00 pm, Wednesday, May 22, following its world premiere at Toronto's Hot Docs Festival.

Raouf assembles a group of Iranian exiles in Canada - all former political prisoners like himself who were active in the democratic movement. Shekoufeh, petite and soft-spoken, was confined for months in a coffin-like box. Reza, now a professor of economics, wrote about his imprisonment in *Weeping Tulips*. Firouzeh was separated from her family for years, following a 10-minute trial before a group of fundamentalist clerics.

Blending their testimony with historical footage and original artwork, Raouf honours the memory of the dead and celebrates the resilience of the living.

Framing these accounts are scenes from Iran's recent past. The cruel irony of history is startling in 1979 footage of International Women's Day, where enthusiastic crowds of women take to the streets of Tehran, walking arm-in-arm towards a better tomorrow. Having helped defeat the brutal regime that had come to power in the 1953 CIA-backed coup, they are buoyant with hope. How could they foresee the dark age about to engulf them?

Throughout Raouf uses his own animated artwork to create an imagined sanctuary, shimmering Fauvist landscapes which offer luminous release from hardship and inhumanity. While anchored in a specific history, *The Tree that Remembers* reflects on oppression and survival, pouring light into a sombre universe and finding unexpected fragments of hope.

The Tree that Remembers was written and directed by Masoud Raouf and produced by the National Film Board of Canada. Sally Bochner is executive producer and Ravida Din is associate producer.

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