

Born in Evin: A Review

By: Dawn Erley

Director Maryam Zaree takes her audience on a journey, both historical and emotional in nature, in her documentary “Born in Evin.” On the surface, the film chronicles Zaree’s quest to understand the circumstances surrounding her birth in an Iranian political prison called Evin. Her initial inclination is to uncover the truth, despite her family’s refusal to openly discuss their experience within the prison’s walls.

A particularly beautiful moment in the documentary is Zaree’s conversation with Chala Chafiq, a renowned sociologist. Zaree desperately illustrates her need to understand a history that she feels entitled to knowing, as it is a part of her life. The lovely and insightful Chafiq encourages Zaree’s undertaking, however, she raises an important point: the story Zaree is choosing to tell is not solely her own. It is a collective history, with a shared trauma attached to it, one that belongs to all the prisoners of Evin. Zaree internalizes this insight and approaches the rest of the film with tenderness. Her desire to uncover the truth becomes superseded by the desire to protect the mental well being of those affected by this traumatic event.

“Born in Evin” evolves from the story of a woman attempting to understand her past, to the story of a collective attempting to grapple with their demons. Zaree contrasts her father’s violent accounts of Evin with warm home video footage to illustrate both the light and darkness that accompany dealing with trauma. Her emphasis is placed not only on the sorrow that trauma brings about, but the necessity of allowing light into one’s life in order to continue living after traumatic events. Zaree recognizes that trauma is a complex, multifaceted issue that has devastating effects on individuals who are plagued by their memories. However, Zaree also recognizes that healing means turning one’s focus to the beautiful aspects of life. Healing requires us to look at the wonder of a birth, rather than focusing on the fact that that birth took place in a prison. Zaree comes to realize that starting a dialogue around trauma, asking questions, is more important than the answers one receives. It is okay if survivors of trauma are not ready to delve into the details of their suffering, as long as they know they have someone who will listen if they choose to share their story.

The interviews Zaree includes in her documentary are fantastic. While her story is fragmented, the individuals she encounters display such humanity, empathy, and strength, which ends up taking precedence. This beautifully crafted film is an essential viewing for a multitude of reasons. While I did not walk away with what I expected, I acquired a more valuable takeaway: the significance of listening

to those who have experienced trauma. This film will shed light on how to help your loved ones cope on their own terms. I highly recommend watching "Born in Evin."