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'The Insult' Director Discusses Oscar-Nominated Foreign Language Film

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4-5 minutes

The idea for "[The Insult](#)" originated from a real life event much like the one that starts the film. While living in Beirut, Lebanon, director [Ziad Doueiri](#) was watering plants on his balcony when the broken gutter sprayed someone. Doueiri exchanged words with the stranger, but later apologized. "A couple of days later I started thinking this thing could've really gone out of control," he recalls. "The thing could've become very, very dangerous." So he thought, "What if I start my story in a similar way, where the film starts with a very similar incident, very insignificant, and instead of it getting fixed or resolved, it gets complicated?" But the conflicts weren't limited to the action on-screen. The filmmaker faced political resistance off-screen as well. Watch our exclusive video interview with Doueiri above.

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"The Insult" centers on a Lebanese Christian (**Adel Karam**) and a Palestinian refugee (**Kamel El Basha**) who end up in court when a meaningless argument escalates into violence. Their case garners national attention, exposing festering wounds in their country. But although the film explores heavy themes, they actually weren't on the minds of Doueiri and co-writer **Joelle**

Touma when they sat down to pen the script. “We were not thinking on a social scope,” he explains. “We were thinking about those two characters who get entangled in a process that they can’t control.” Yet as the story took shape, those weightier issues started to emerge. “Certainly it must’ve been buried in our subconscious,” he adds.

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The film was recently nominated at the [Academy Awards](#) as [Best Foreign Language Film](#), making it the first [Oscar](#) bid for the country of Lebanon. “Certainly being nominated is a great thing,” Doueiri says. “It legitimizes the film. It puts it on probably one of the most important platforms of the world.” It’s especially meaningful given “the difficulties we had to go through prior to the release.” Because his previous film “The Attack” (2012) was filmed in Israel with Israeli actors, the Lebanese-born filmmaker had “a black spot on my name” and there was resistance to his next project. “There were certain groups who did not want this film to be released,” he explains. Luckily, “we happened to have a government that was very favorable to me,” so “The Insult” was allowed to be shown.

Before sitting in the director’s chair, Doueiri worked as a first assistant cameraman on several Hollywood films, including “Reservoir Dogs” (1992), “Under Siege” (1992), “Pulp Fiction” (1994), “From Dusk Till Dawn” (1996) and “Jackie Brown” (1997). He returned to his home country to helm such titles as “West Beirut” (1998) and “Lila Says” (2004). “The Insult” also competes for nine Lebanese Movie Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Writing. Can it now win an Oscar?

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