



FILM: **THE INSULT**

FDG RATING: 4.4 ☺☺☺☺☺

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Ziad Doueiri: *director, writer*
Adel Karam: *actor, Tony Hanna*
Kamel El Basha: *actor, Yasser Salameh*

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DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE INSULT**

What makes *The Insult* such a powerful film is that it has much broader significance than the Palestinian Lebanese conflict that is the heart of the story. The film illustrates how personal history and cultural bias triggers our reactions to people and situations and these responses can have a rippling explosive effect. The conflict at the drama's center is so personal, visceral and universally recognizable, that it could take place anywhere in the world. We see the same dynamic play out in the news every day.

But in this film, we get to know and care about the two men, Tony Hanna, a hot headed young mechanic from Lebanon with a pregnant wife, and Yasser Salameh, an older, mature, stoic, Palestinian refugee who has proven his skills as a competent civil engineer, and is foreman for city construction projects in the Lebanese town, reporting to a Lebanese construction manager who values his knowledge and skills. Both Tony and Yasser are scarred by the horrific atrocities they and their families experienced.

While watering a few plants, did Tony purposely let water spill from his apartment balcony gutter directly onto Yasser working with his crew below? Possibly, gossip has spread that a Palestinian is running construction projects in the Beirut residential neighborhood or maybe Tony recognizes his accent. Yasser notices the illegal pipe and offers to fix it. Tony defiantly declines so Yasser has his crew fix it anyway. Tony immediately smashes the new pipe resenting Yasser's interference. Yasser's reaction is to yell that he is a "fucking prick."

If emotions and egos could be held in check no matter how infuriating the circumstances, the world would be a much better place. As expected, especially given Tony's impetuous personality, he demands an apology. Yasser is urged by his boss to apologize so everyone can move on. But when he reluctantly goes to Tony's house and sees him in the garage listening to extremist right wing Christian platitudes at full volume on the TV, lamenting the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon, the men's hostility for each other is unleashed. Tony snarls, "I wish Ariel Sharon had wiped all of you out," meaning the Palestinians. Remembering the Sharon-ordered 1982 massacre in Lebanon of the Palestinians, Yasser punches Tony so hard in the gut, breaking two ribs, that he is unable to get up until his wife finds him and lugs him to the house causing her to go into labor prematurely.

Now the stakes are much higher, lawyers (who naturally escalate everything) get involved over the assault so the men end up in facing off in two courtroom scenes where their character backgrounds are revealed and we learn about the horrible events that have happened to each man. One resident reviewer noted that it took a while to understand the cultural nuances of the film and started over twice, because in the beginning she could see the events and the emotions, but not the whole story. (Basically, it's Christian natives vs. Muslim natives, with, in between, Palestinian refugees who reside there, unwanted and denied citizenship.) The courtroom scenes fill in the backstory details. Each man has been affected by a traumatic historical event in his youth: the Damour massacre in the case of Tony, and Black September in the case of Yasser. Another discussion participant confessed that her allegiance kept switching back and forth from Yasser to Tony as our understanding of each man goes deeper. We praised the objectivity of the film, presenting both sides with equal empathy.

The courtroom drama was notable on its own merits: the presiding judge was a female which we did not expect in a middle eastern country and the demeanor, questions and responses exhibited extreme fairness. There were actually three seated judges and we wondered if that was to purposely have Muslim, Christian and Palestinian representation. Yasser's defense lawyer is female, a brilliant young attorney empathetic to the Palestinian plight. Also, she is the daughter of Tony's renowned lawyer, an ardent nationalist. But this odd dynamic does not deteriorate, rather each has increasing respect for the other as their arguments play out. In an all too familiar situation, the city and nation outside of the courthouse take notice of the increasingly inflammatory trial resulting in protests in the streets, pundits debating on television, and the sense that violent conflict could break out at any moment. The courtroom scenes were riveting, noted one discussion participant, and the layering of stories was genius.

A couple negative comments pointed out that situations seemed contrived to drive a point. And that the middle eastern conflict has been overdone in films. A counter comment pointed out that this film tells the middle eastern conflict story in a very different way, unbiased and much more personal with a positive, feel good ending and relevance that extends to the conflicts that are happening today.

It's a plea for greater understanding from all of us about each other's suffering and that we are often more alike than different. This was illustrated in two lighter scenes: when after a day in court the two men leave the building and Yasser's car won't start. Tony starts to drive away but then circles back to start Yasser's car for him. He is as skilled as a mechanic as Yasser is a construction engineer. Also, they both strive for utmost quality in their craft: Yasser explains to his boss that he used construction materials from Germany because the local ones were inferior and would fail. In his auto shop, Tony explains to a customer, that a 2nd hand replacement German auto part is better than a new part made in China.

The acting was outstanding, and the story riveting. We appreciated the flash back that showed how beautiful the country was before it was torn apart. Our almost unanimous high scores of 4s, 4.5s, and 5s were torn asunder by a couple lower scores resulting in a still positively resounding 4.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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