CASE STUDY: *The Incident* (2017)

**The Film:** Short film  
**Writer/Director:** Meedo Taha  
**Producer:** Wesam Nassar  
**Budget:** $30,000  
**Financing:** Primarily private  
**Production:** Three days; September 6, 7, 8, 2016  
**Shooting Format:** 16 mm film  
**Screening Format:** DCP  
**World Premiere:** UCLA MFA Directors Spotlight, Directors Guild of America, Los Angeles, CA  
**Distribution:** Screened at numerous international festivals, such as Edmonton IFF, Heartland FF, Cambridge FF, Denver FF, Foyle FF, Crossroads FF, Tallahassee FF, CARE International Film Awards, Sacramento FF, Athens IFF, SENE Film, Music & Arts Festival, RiverRun IFF, and ÉCU - The European Independent Film Festival.  
**Awards:** Directors Guild of America Student Film Jury Award for Women and Minority Directors.  
**Website:** [https://www.theincidentshort.com/](https://www.theincidentshort.com/)

**THE FILMMAKER**

Meedo Taha is a Lebanese filmmaker from Beirut, Lebanon. After earning his Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Tokyo and working in the field in Europe and the Arab world, Meedo transitioned his career to filmmaking, earning an MFA in Film Directing from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where he directed several short films. “The Incident,” his latest short film, was partially produced in association with UCLA and was the first film he submitted to film festivals.

**OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS**

At a bus stop near Beirut, a veiled Lebanese woman and a migrant Syrian worker get in a tumultuous moment and are arrested. They must argue their innocence in the face of the only witnesses: a bus full of women on their way to Koran school, each with her version of the truth.

**DEVELOPMENT**

Meedo was living in Dubai, teaching screenwriting and directing at the American University in Dubai (AUD) when the idea for the film first came to him. In multinational
and multiethnic Dubai, he was surrounded by different kinds of women, coming from different cultural backgrounds. He noticed how each one of them was perceived by the other differently, based on where she came from, her education, or how she dressed, and not based on who she really was. This led Meedo to study diversity seemed on the surface to be a positive phenomenon, when examined further, did not seem inclusive. Everywhere he went, he noticed how people were kept in separate groups even in places where they all existed side-by-side like in the metro or at the supermarket. There was rare intermingling between the various groups. He started thinking about what would happen if two people who did not belong to the same group, who belonged to two distinct labels, suddenly found themselves at a location, like a bus stop or an elevator, where they had to interact because something out of the ordinary occurs. This thought did not leave him. It was like a nagging voice that would not go away. The more he thought about it, the clearer it became. He started seeing two strangers, a man and a woman at a bus stop. At first, he wasn’t sure what would happen, what kind of incident would occur at the bus stop. He just knew that something would happen, something that to him seemed like a fight, but he wasn’t sure. Then, he thought what if the audience would not know for sure what really occurred. That’s when he decided that the incident that happens at the bus station will be told by the witnesses, in their own culturally-inflected if not biased perspectives.

Meedo has a unique way of working out a story. Instead of writing an outline, he uses a combination of writing, outlining and drawing. The result is an actual mapping of the story as shown in the example attached. The visual layout of the story helps him plot the story, transferring it from his mind to the paper. In this process, he is able to create backstory for each character to get to know them better and to help him figure out how they serve the story. At this time of the story development, the two main characters had crystalized into a poor Afghani migrant worker and an Iraqi woman in Hijab, both waiting for a bus in Dubai. This process of the mapping of the story helps him figure what is the next natural development in the story. In this case, it is the bus arriving. Then, this leads to the question, who is on the bus? A group women? Why only women? How will the women react when they see the incident that occurs between the man and woman? Whose side will they take? This process helps him create cause and effects. He describes the process like someone walking in a dark tunnel with a flashlight and as he walks the flashlight helps him discover areas of this tunnel that were first unseen. After this process, he writes the first draft and shared it with colleagues he trusts.

Based on some of the feedback he received from colleagues, he realized that setting the story in Dubai required a lot of specific knowledge about the various cultures of his characters. So, he then thought why not set the film in Lebanon. He has deep familiarity with the culture there. This is how his two main characters evolved into a conservative, Lebanese Shia, veiled woman and a Syrian migrant worker. And, the setting changed to Bhamdoun because he wanted a neutral Lebanese setting in terms of sect. Moving the story to Lebanon helped him plot the story more clearly. The different plot points became clearer and the acts more defined:
ACT I: set up, the inciting incident at the bus stop
ACT II: reaction to the incident and the testimony of the witnesses about the fight
ACT III: the verdict on the incident, and who will make this verdict.

Meeodo wrote three drafts with major developments to the story and between these three drafts there were many other minor drafts. He knew the third draft was ready to shoot because of the specificity of the characters and setting (he wrote it after casting and location scouting). The development of the story took around 12 months, from initial spark of idea to script development. He believes this long period helped him develop a better film. Through rewriting, he was able to develop the story from various angles. Meeodo insists that rewriting is essential and encourages his students not to be afraid to allow the story to evolve and the plots points to evolve or change completely. He also believes sharing the script with colleagues is very helpful.

PRE-PRODUCTION
Pre-production and prepping for the shoot took six months. This included securing the necessary financing, casting, scouting for location in Lebanon, and getting the necessary permits.

During this period, Meeodo also did the storyboarding. This helped him visualize the story not only in terms of what kind of shots to use. Storyboarding helped him see the script not only as words on the page but images on the screen. Storyboarding helped him discover the visuals of the film and the style as well as the significance of the silence in the story.

The budget for the film was $30,000. Small part of the money came from UCLA (as he was completing his MFA). The rest he raised himself by teaching. The budget was good and didn't feel suffocating but kept them on schedule and kept them creative. Although this was a short film, Meeodo wanted to pay everyone who worked on the film, and this was what happened. No one worked for free.

He found his producer Wesam Nassar, Egyptian-American, after watching his short film, “El Khateeb.” While Los Angeles was considered as a location stand-in for Beirut, both Meeodo and Wesam realized that the story must be filmed in Lebanon.

PRODUCTION
The shooting of the film took three days, September 6-8, 2016.

Meeodo decided to shoot The Incident on 16mm film. The reason for the choice stemmed from Meeodo’s experience growing up during the Lebanese civil war, when the only source of entertainment for families confined to their homes was television. Socio-dramas like “Eddinye Heik” (The World Is Like This) were dialogue-driven studio-shot TV series where stock characters would spend their days gossiping about each other,
spinning insignificant details of each other’s lives into epic yarns of love and betrayal. Those shows were shot on a combination of film and video, using extremely limited means and relying most on the familiarity of their witty characters and contrived situations. However, wartime also meant power outages. And when the shows were interrupted, Meedo’s neighbors would aim their probing gaze at each other, and so the gossip would continue.

Another reason he wanted to use 16mm is because the story he was writing could happen any time. It could be in the past, it can be now, or it can be in the future. 16 mm was the best medium to use because the grainy texture is timeless. Imperfect by nature, very much expressing its organic nature through its color rendition and grain structure, 16 mm film suggests that The Incident is a story that could take place today, ten years ago, or ten years from now, underlining the cyclical, self-fulfilling nature of gossip.

With the decision to shoot on Super 16mm cemented, Meedo and Wesam faced a three-pronged challenge: 1. Where to acquire the stock and camera, 2. Where to process the film, and 3. Whom to approach to shoot the film.

1. For the stock, they wanted to shoot primarily on Kodak for its naturalistic rendering of color and for its grain structure. They also wanted to embrace the unpredictability of expired film stock. Naturally, they approached Kodak USA first. While Kodak was lovely and extremely enthusiastic about the project, they decided that the risks of transporting several rolls of film across multiple borders (especially with Lebanon’s parochial and unpredictable laws on import) proved untenable. This realization coincided with their discovery of a young dealer in Lebanon who was literally sitting on just the exact number of rolls they needed. Their very conservative and disciplined shooting ratio of 10:1 (meaning they only needed 10 minutes of film stock for every one minute of the film’s running time) was ideal. In addition, they were able to locally secure a number of rolls of Fuji (which, compared to Kodak, is more saturated and contrasty) and decided to use those for the “flashback” sequence. For the camera, they found a functioning Arri SR3 camera at a Lebanese rental house, which they tested on a roll of film, and earmarked for use in production.

2. For processing, again they first approached a US Lab, but upon extensive research of turnaround time, cost, and service, decided to go more regionally. Given that there are no remaining labs in Beirut, they narrowed the choices down to Istanbul, Prague, and Brussels, eventually choosing the latter.

3. For cinematographer, Meedo flew to Beirut during his book signing of A Road to Damascus, and had the good fortune to interview a number of very talented Lebanese directors of photography who had experience shooting on film. He eventually fell in love with the work and vision of Belgian/Lebanese cinematographer Pôl Seif, who cut his teeth on a 16mm camera making guerilla-style short films about gypsy communities.
One thing that he learned on set during production is to always surround oneself with people one can trust. He felt he trusted everyone on his team. He felt that because of this trust, they all worked as one brain. He never felt he had to micromanage the set. He believes that would be a horrible situation.

**POST-PRODUCTION**
Post-production was financed by grant from the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon. The application process was easy but the wait was long. It took eight months to receive the grant so Meedo recommends applying early.
Film processing was in Brussels due to the relationship the DP Pôl Sief had with Studio l’Équipe, the company in Belgium that offered them a very good deal. The picture edit was made by Wesam Nassar, the producer. Sound design began in Lebanon by Elia Haddad but due to logistical reasons, primarily that Meedo was moving, the sound design was finalized by David Raines in Los Angeles at studio Deluxe in Hollywood. This collaboration was made possible by a small grant from UCLA, which came when the project needed it the most

No score was used. Meedo did not want any artifice. This was an early decision to give the film an un-authorial feel.

**DISTRIBUTION**
Screening the film in festivals was the primary goal. Meedo had a separate budget for festivals submissions (around $2000). As of the publication of this case study, the film has screened at numerous festivals.

**MARKETING**
Meedo built a website for the film using Squarespace. [www.theincidentfilm.com](http://www.theincidentfilm.com)

He used social media to market the film at festivals and to keep everyone interested in the film updated. He primarily used Facebook and Twitter.

**ROI**
There was no financial gain, but that was not the goal. The gain was in exposure for Meedo and everyone on his team. The film garnered interest in future projects for both Meedo and Wesam. As a result, Meedo has a feature film in development, including being accepted to the Sundance Institute Screenwriters Intensive and a number of other artist-support programs around the world

Another gain was building a creative family. He believes that he has fostered long-lasting relationships, personal and professional with everyone on the film, such as Wesam Nassar, Pôl Seif and Ghina Abboud.
Another gain is that the film started a conversation and allowed the audience to be part of a dialogue about the questions raised in the film. What are the rights of a Muslim woman in a situation like this? How can we rely on facts and truth and not rumors and misconception? How are women in hijab looked at? How are migrants looked up? The film did what it was intended to do, which is to engage the audience in a conversation.

LAST THOUGHTS

Meedo’s advice to Film Arabi students is to give each project the time it needs. Let the story evolve. Make a film because you have a story you want to tell. Be true to the specifics of your story so that it translates on screen in a genuine way that impacts the audience.
وتأثيرات. ويفضل العملية مثل شخص يسير في نفق مظلم مع مصباح يدوي، ويسير في ضوء المصباح يساعد على اكتشاف
مناظر هذا النفق التي لم تكن مرئية في البداية. بعد هذه العملية، يكتب المسودة الأولى ويشتركتها مع الزملاء الذين يثق بهم.

استنادًا إلى بعض التحليلات التي تلقاها من الزملاء، أدرك أن تحديد القصة في دبي يطلب الكثير من المعرفة المحددة حول
النقاط المختلفة لشخصياته. إذاً، فكر في سبب عدم وضع الفيلم في لبنان. لديه معرفة عميقة بالثقافة هناك. هذا تطورت
شخصياته بسبب امرأة شامية، ألمانية محجبة، وعامل سوري مهاجر. وتغير الوضع إلى أن أراد
توجهًا لبيروتًا واحدًا من ناحية الطاقة. ساهم نقل القصة إلى لبنان في رسم القصة بشكل أكثر وضوحًا. أصبحت النقط
المؤامرة المختلفة أكثر وضوحًا والأفعال أكثر تحديدًا:

الفصل الأول: إعداد الحادث التجريبي في محطة الحافلات
الفصل الثاني: رد الفعل على الحادث وشهادة الشهود عن القال
الفصل الثالث: الحكم على الحادثة، وmanuel هذا الحكم.

الإنتاج

استغرق ما قبل الإنتاج والاستعداد للتصوير ستة أشهر. تضمن ذلك تأمين التمويل اللازم والاستثمار للمواقع في لبنان،
والحصول على التصاريح اللازمة.

خلال هذه الفترة، قام أيضًا بإعداد رسوم للمشاهير وكيف تخيّلها. وقد ساعد ذلك في تصوير القصة ليس فقط من حيث نوع
النقاط التي يجب استخدامها. ساعد قسمه المصورة في رؤية البرنامج النصي ليس فقط ككلمات على الصفحة، ولكن صور
على الشاشة. ساعدت الرسوم في اكتشاف أسلوب الفيلم وأهمية الصمت في القصة.

كانت ميزانية الفيلم ثلاثين ألف دولار. جزء صغير من المال جاء من جامعة كاليفورنيا في لوس أنجلوس، كسب القيمة نفسه
عن طريق التدريس. كانت الميزانية جيدة. على الرغم من أن هذا فيلمًا صغيرًا، إلا أن ميود أراد أن يرعى كل من عمل
في الفيلم، وهذا ما حدث، لا أحد يعمل مجانًا.

وجد مخرج وسام نصص الفيلم مصري، بعد مشاهدة فيلمه القصير "الخليط". في حين اعتبارت لوس أنجلوس مكانًا بديلاً
لبيروت، أدرك كل من ميود وحسن أنه يجب تصوير القصة في لبنان.

استغرق تصوير الفيلم ثلاثة أيام، من 6 إلى 8 سبتمبر 2016.

قرر ميود تصوير الفيلم 16 ملم. بعد سهولة هذا الاختيار إلى تجربته خلال الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية، عندما كان مصدر الترفيه
الحدي للعائلات المحصورة في مازالها هو التلفزيون. أثناء ذلك تم تصوير الكثير من البرامج على 16 ملم، والقصة التي كان
يكتبها يمكن أن تحدث في أي وقت، قد تكون في الماضي، الآن أو يمكن أن تكون في المستقبل.

تعمّل أثناء الإعداد أن يحتوي نفس دائمًا بالناس الذين يمكن أن يثق بهم. شعر بأنه يثق في كل فرد في فريقه. لقد شعر أنه بسبب
هذه القصة، عملوا جميعًا كعقل واحد.
التسويق

قام بإنشاء موقع على الإنترنت للفيلم باستخدام موقع "السكوير ساينس" واستخدم وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية لتسويق الفيلم في المهرجانات. استخدم في المقام الأول الفيسبوك والتوتير.

لم يكن هناك مكسب مالي، ولكن هذا لم يكن الهدف. حصل الفيلم على اهتمام بالمشاريع المستقبلية لكل من ميدو ووسام. نتيجة لذلك، وتمتلك فيلمًا مميزًا في التدوير، بما في ذلك قبوله في معهد صاندز لكتابة السيناريو المكّف وعدد من برامج دعم الفنانين الأخرى حول العالم.

مكسب آخر هو بناء عائلة خلاقة. وهو يعتقد أنه عزّ علاقات طويلة الأمد، شخصية ومهنية مع الجميع في الفيلم، مثل وسام نصّار وويل سيف وغينا عيدو.

مكسب آخر هو أن الفيلم صار حديث الجمهور، حيث بدأ الجمهور يطرح عداً من الأسئلة:

- حقوق المرأة المسلمة في وضع كهذا؟
- كيف يمكننا الاعتماد على الحقائق والحقيقة وليس الشائعات والفهم الخاطئ؟
- كيف تبدو النساء في الحجاب؟ كيف ينظر إلى المهاجرين؟

خواطر أخرى

نصيحته للطلاب العرب هي إعطاء كل مشروع الوقت الذي يحتاجه. دع القصة تتطور. اصنع فيلماً لأن لديك قصة تريد إخبارها. كن صادقًا مع تفاصيل قصتك بحيث يتم ترجمتها على الشاشة بطريقة حقيقية تؤثر على الجمهور.