

# '1982': Witnessing a war via the corridors of a school



- Oualid Mouaness' debut feature examines the effects of the 1982 War on children and adults
- The film was submitted as Lebanon's contender for the Best International Feature Film category at the Oscars

CHENNAI: Oualid Mouaness' debut feature, "1982" — which premiered at the recent Toronto International Film Festival and was submitted as Lebanon's contender for the Best International Feature Film category at the Oscars — examines the effects of the 1982 War on children and adults.

Writer-director Mouaness takes his camera to an upmarket school in Beirut, and tells us how the start of the conflict affected the staff, which tried its best to put up a pretense of normality, urging children to continue with an examination.

The film focusses on the story of 11-year-old Wissam (Mohammad Dali) and his affection for his studious classmate, Joanna (Gia Madi). After sending her anonymous romantic notes, he tries to up his confidence to say he loves her. Joanna is smitten by his attention.

But teachers at the school appear distracted and disoriented by the accounts they hear on the radio. Yasmine (Nadine Labaki, whose directorial effort, "Capernaum," was nominated for 2019's Oscars) is worried about her parents and brother, while her teacher-boyfriend, Joseph (Rodrigue Sleiman), stresses over the political questions the conflict will throw up, which puts a deep strain on their relationship.

The intertwined story lines occur in the midst of examinations, bombings in the distance and aerial dog-fights above, with Mouaness weaving into his narrative the loss of innocence and how people become resilient to cope with the destructiveness of war. Take Labaki as Yasmine, who aptly conveys the rising tension as she juggles with her own personal dilemma (disagreements with Joseph, her sick father, nervous mother and rebellious brother) and the children's antics.

However, the absence of drama as the clouds of conflict gather on the horizon leaves the feature wanting. It was an ordinary school day that turned into chaos, but Brian Rigney Hubbard's camera is busy taking in the blue skies and lush greenery. The images of the black smoke at a distance, fighter jets high above and rolling tanks on the ground are not enough to underline the tension. The transformation from something ordinary to something extraordinary only just makes it through. What the film does, though, is show how divisive politics harms human ties, and "1982" demonstrates this in no uncertain terms.

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