# Zoe Saldaña's historic win at the Oscars sparks controversy over representation



At the 97th Annual Academy Awards, held on Sunday at the Dolby Theatre, Zoe Saldaña [pictured, left, in Emilia Pérez] achieved a historic milestone by winning the Best Supporting Actress award for her performance in the film Emilia Pérez. This victory marks Saldaña as the first American of Dominican descent to receive this honour. However, the night took a contentious turn when Saldaña was confronted by Mexican journalist Cristina Ibañez in the Oscars press room regarding the film's portrayal of Mexican culture and its representation of transgender individuals.

Saldaña's win garnered significant attention, yet it was her subsequent responses to press inquiries that ignited a debate surrounding the film's reception, particularly within marginalized communities. Emilia Pérez, which tells the story of a Mexican lawyer, Rita (portrayed by Saldaña), who grapples with representing a cartel leader undergoing gender-affirming surgery, has been scrutinised for its depiction of both the Mexican and transgender communities.

Ibañez pressed Saldaña on the criticism aimed at the film, particularly questioning why the cast and crew failed to acknowledge Mexico, which is central to the film's narrative, during acceptance speeches this awards season. Additionally, the journalist highlighted concerns over the film's portrayal of Mexican cartels and their victims, to which Saldaña initially responded by expressing regret that the film had offended some audiences. She stated, "First of all, I’m very, very sorry that you and so many Mexicans felt offended. That was never our intention. We spoke, and we came from a place of love and I will stand by that."

However, Saldaña's elaboration on the intent behind the film's narrative led to further criticism. She asserted that for her, "the heart of this movie was not Mexico," claiming that the characters could represent diverse backgrounds and nationalities. This comment suggested a dismissal of the specific cultural contexts that critics believe were glossed over or misrepresented, exacerbating feelings of alienation among both Mexican and transgender communities.

GLAAD, the LGBTQ+ advocacy group, expressed discontent over the film's portrayal of transgender individuals, arguing that outdated stereotypes perpetuated through its narrative do not contribute positively to representation, especially amid increasing socio-political hostility towards these communities. The group emphasised that filmmakers have a responsibility to portray these narratives with sensitivity and awareness, particularly during turbulent times.

In an interview with Vanity Fair, Karla Sofía Gascón [pictured, right], who plays the titular character Emilia Pérez, later responded to criticism about the film's representation of the trans community by suggesting that those unhappy with the film should produce their own works. This comment has also drawn ire for failing to engage constructively with the concerns raised by various communities regarding representation and advocacy.

As the film has faced growing backlash, the disconnect between the cast's intentions and the perceptions of those from the affected communities has become a focal point of discussion. The controversy reflects broader challenges within Hollywood regarding conscious representation and accountability, especially when addressing identities and experiences that are often marginalised. The incomplete acknowledgment of the film's implications has underscored sensitivities surrounding narratives that intersect with issues of race, gender identity, and representation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VigRe0Yrknk> - This URL supports Zoe Saldaña's win for Best Supporting Actress at the 97th Academy Awards for her role in 'Emilia Pérez' and provides a transcript of her acceptance speech.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Culture/zoe-saldana-responds-criticism-emilia-perez-hurtful-mexicans/story?id=119389196> - This article corroborates the criticism 'Emilia Pérez' faced regarding its portrayal of Mexican culture and Zoe Saldaña's response to these criticisms in the press room.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the original article discussing Zoe Saldaña's Oscar win and the controversy surrounding 'Emilia Pérez', including its portrayal of Mexican and transgender communities.
* <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/124094NCJRS.pdf> - Although unrelated to the specific controversy of 'Emilia Pérez', this document from the Office of Justice Programs highlights broader issues of representation and cultural sensitivity in different contexts.