

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF *THE NILE HILTON INCIDENT* AND *BOY FROM HEAVEN*



Fares
FARES

EAGLES OF THE REPUBLIC

A FILM BY **TARIK SALEH**

Lyna KHOUDRI Zineb TRIKI Amr WAKED Cherien DABIS

[illegible]



EAGLES OF THE REPUBLIC

Synopsis

Egypt's most adored actor George Fahmy is pressured to star in a propaganda film commissioned by the highest authorities. He reluctantly accepts the role and finds himself thrown into the inner circle of power.

Like a moth drawn to the flame he begins an affair with the mysterious wife of the general overseeing the film.

Eagles Of The Republic is the third and final film in Tarik Saleh's Cairo trilogy after Sundance Grand Jury prize winner *The Nile Hilton Incident* (2017) and Cannes screenplay winner *Cairo Conspiracy* (aka *Boy from Heaven*, 2022).

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



Tarik Saleh has a background as one of the most influential graffiti artists in Europe in the 80's.

His feature film debut came with *Metropia* (2009), a Dystopian animation with Stellan and Alexander Skarsgård, Juliette Lewis, Vincent Gallo and Udo Kier that premiered at Venice as opening film of the Critics' Week.

The Nile Hilton Incident won The Grand Jury Prize at Sundance (2017). As well as being nominated for the César for Best Foreign Film, the film was a box office hit in France where it registered well over 400,000 admissions.

Saleh won the Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival 2022 for *Cairo Conspiracy* (aka *Boy From Heaven*), Sweden's Oscar entry in 2023, which also received a Best Foreign Film César nomination and passed the 500,000-admission mark in France.

INTERVIEW WITH TARIK SALEH

Can Eagles of the Republic be seen as a love letter to Egyptian cinema, and more specifically to its golden age, from the 1950s to the 1970s, when the country was the world's third-largest film producer?

Absolutely. When I was younger, I used to think that Egypt was all about the pyramids and other relics of Pharaonic times. As I grew up, I realized that cinema also played an important role, and that the country had even been the hub of filmmaking in Africa and the Middle East. The Egyptian film industry – inspired by Hollywood, with its studios and star system – is comparable in size and influence only to that of India, France or the United States. Its rise in the 1950s and 1960s can be explained by the illiteracy of most of the population, who turned to movie theaters for entertainment. Cinema then became a means of cultural expression that allowed people to dream of other possibilities.

Even if it's only suggested, actors are allowed on screen to drink alcohol or have extramarital affairs, things that are impossible to do in larger Egyptian society. My father is a filmmaker, so I can say that films are literally part of my DNA. But I didn't understand how important cinema was to Egyptians until I started studying at the Alexandria University of Fine Arts. Every screening I attended was quite an experience: spectators shouted and reacted physically to what was happening on screen.

How would you describe the relationship between the Egyptian film industry and the government embodied by former general al-Sisi, who became president after a military coup?

I consider that the Egyptian film industry and the Army have a 'peaceful' relationship. There's a certain freedom of movement granted, but it obviously stops where the prerogatives of the censorship office begin – a bit like the Hays Code in Hollywood's day. When al-Sisi came to power, the Army weighed in at 30% of Egypt's GDP, owning under the aegis of the National Service Products Organization [a government agency controlled by the Ministry of Defense] several dozen companies in fields as varied as agribusiness, automobiles and shoe manufacturing. This stranglehold on the local economy was criticized by the IMF and the World Bank, who insisted that the Army divest some of its activities. Of course, the Army did the exact opposite, and has since built up a solid and well-established media empire, with television channels and production companies.

A series recounting al-Sisi's rise to power [*Al-Ikhtiyar* or *The Choice*] was actually financed by one of these companies and, since I was curious as to how the 2013 coup [led by the Egyptian armed forces against Mohamed Morsi until his removal] would be portrayed, I watched it with a certain fascination. Of course, this propagandistic narrative has a relationship with the truth that I would describe as « distant ». After watching it, however, I asked myself a number of questions: if I lived in Egypt today and were offered to direct a fiction film of this kind, how would I react? Would I decline? Would I be able to do it? It's this Cornelian choice that forms the basis of the screenplay for *Eagles of the Republic*. At first, I couldn't wrap my head around the idea – the situation is so far-fetched that it begs for comedy. But I ended up identifying with the character.

In what way?

While I was writing the screenplay for *Eagles of the Republic*, I was approached by two countries with recognized international clout, to direct blockbusters with unlimited resources. Both countries asked for exactly the same thing, promising me total artistic freedom and unprecedented access to privileged information. One was a democracy, the other an authoritarian regime.

This vertigo prompted me to question the artist's complex relationship with power and money. But I didn't want to make it the subject of my film.

Eagles of the Republic is about lies and truth. Its main character, George Fahmy [played by Fares Fares], is a pathological liar, both at work and in his private life. It's a talent that has made him rich and famous, and one that could lead to his demise.

Conversely, Dr. Mansour [played by Amr Waked] embodies rectitude: he never lies. I think it's a very *film noir* approach to make the antagonist the more honest of the two characters.

Speaking of *film noir*, are there any other genre elements that may have influenced the genesis of the film?

I feel very close to directors whose careers were affected by the Second World War. As the descendant of a Middle Eastern dissident, I draw my inspiration from my peers, the Jewish filmmakers who left to seek their fortune in America. Eastern European directors

like Billy Wilder and Fritz Lang, who witnessed horrors on the Old Continent and crossed the Atlantic to survive. Once established in this new land, they saw their illusions gradually crumble, overtaken by the hypocrisy and pretense of another crushing machine.

They tried to tell the story from the inside, through genuine genre films. I don't think a masterpiece like *The Big Heat* could be produced in Hollywood today, because no one would dare go so far in criticizing the system and the corruption that corrodes it. *Eagles of the Republic* is pure film noir, as was *The Nile Hilton Incident*. At its heart lies a fundamental, existential question: « Must I bow to this system? »

Do you consider yourself a political filmmaker?

No. For me, making a “political film” implies a calculation that I can't bring myself to make. Politics is all about convincing: you try to convey a strong opinion, and you fight to make sure it gets through to the person you're talking to. Problem is, today's strong opinion is not tomorrow's truth. You can be wrong. With art, you don't have that luxury. You have to find a human truth that goes beyond politics and the obsolescence of opinion.

I feel close to many exiled filmmakers: Asghar Farhadi, Andrei Zviagintsev or Ali Abbasi. We often have discussions about our situation and the role we play: what right do we have to tell the story of places we no longer inhabit? What is our responsibility towards the people who still live there? When Ali Abbasi makes *The Apprentice*, or when I make my films, the gesture we claim as political is to say: I'm going to tell this story whatever the cost, regardless of the anger or satisfaction it may provoke.

During the writing process, I often surround myself with people I trust, who feed the story through long conversations. One of them, Magdi Abdelhadi, is an Egyptian journalist who works in London – among other things, he was an expert for the BBC. I ask him to read my scripts in detail, and in the context of *Eagles of the Republic*, for example, we talked a lot about the president's aura. Al-Sisi has been at the head of the country for over ten years now and, like most heads of state who cling to power for so long, he is no longer really a person in his own right, but an abstract figure, a symbol, an institution.

Why name al-Sisi and not choose the distance of fiction?

We talked a lot about this with my father. He was very reluctant to see me tell this story using al-Sisi's name, repeating that his presence would be the film's weak point. I initially shared his opinion and, during the writing phase, explored various options: changing the era, setting the plot during the reign of Hosni Mubarak [president from 1981 to 2011], imagining a fictitious statesman. But I quickly realized that without al-Sisi, the story would have seemed unclear. And the viewer would have thought I was talking metaphorically about him anyway.

How do you approach the realistic aspect of your directing?

I come from a documentary background, a medium to which I'm still very attached. I started working with fiction because I think it can convey a truth without necessarily having to take into account the opinions of the people involved. I'm talking about very personal things here, like the industry I belong to, what it's like to be an artist, and to be as honest as possible, I have to lie – which is the irony of the thing. I insist, this film is fiction. But if you look closely, it describes events that actually took place in Egypt – as well as in Hollywood.

When I started *Eagles of the Republic*, I was convinced I'd be stopped in my tracks. In the end, I felt supported, not least by the Egyptian actors and actresses in the film. Given the conflicts in the region, I think the country has bigger fish to fry at the moment than my fictional film.

How did you work on the allegorical dimension of Dr. Mansour?

In the shadow of every president, whatever the country, there is a Dr. Mansour. They are the “éminence grise”, the “brain” or the “right-hand man”.

When I was writing this character, I identified with him enormously, because he's a puppeteer and I know this role perfectly well. I know he's trying to see the big picture and keep everything under control. To do that, he has to take his ego out of the equation and be operational: observing the weaknesses of some and identifying the vulnerabilities of others. I had written a whole scene in which a character told Dr Mansour's story. It was great, but I'm glad I took it out in the edit. I'm not sure it would have rung true, and I wanted to keep the mystery alive. Of course, you could say that Dr Mansour is a Faustian character, but for me, he's just the director of everything,

Noredin, the hero of The Nile Hilton Incident and Ibrahim, the colonel in Boy From Heaven, both played by Fares Fares, hated to see Egyptian society evolve. Do you feel that George is resisting more actively?

No. In *Eagles of the Republic*, the change comes about because the Army decides to start making films. Under Mubarak, you could make jokes about the President of the Republic. You could even make a film poking fun – very soberly – at him. Mubarak gave one speech a year. Al-Sisi, on the other hand, speaks all the time. It's a sign of insecurity. He's not confident in his stature and nobody can criticize him. I think that if George doesn't like al-Sisi, it's not because he's a dictator but because he's small and weak. But George is not a radical. If Egypt were a democracy, it would be an Islamic republic, which would not be good at all for the Coptic minority.

How did you achieve the timelessness of the film and its contemporary identity?

My films usually revolve around a symbolic location: The police station for *The Nile Hilton Incident* and the university courtyard for *Boy From Heaven*. The keystone of *Eagles of the Republic* is the military parade. I designed it as if it were still 2015. I tend to think that Egypt has been stuck in time since the day I was thrown out. I haven't been there for ten years or so, and I feel that in my head I'm still holding on to a fantasy version of it, like those old photos that fade away and leave only vague memories behind. While

shooting, I realized that Cairo, like Hollywood, was frozen in time. Even if the city seems to be evolving, it remains true to itself.

To a state of mind. No matter how hard you try to change it, it always ends up swallowing you up.

In the past, you've said that directing was not your favorite stage...

It's different for this film. I really loved making *Eagles of the Republic* for many reasons, but in particular because I wanted to work with Egyptian actors. They understood the meaning behind every word of the script, which enabled me to go even further than I had originally written. They have a deep knowledge of their characters and the situation they're in, as if the narrative material were flowing through their veins.

You've written some very fine roles for your actresses.

Zineb Triki, who plays the minister's wife, has a breathtaking level of acting. As for Cherien Dabis, I'll always be grateful to her for coming to play when she was in the middle of directing one of her own projects.

It was difficult to play these women, as they are all seen through George's *male gaze*. But they all managed to make their characters their own, adding a great deal of mystery.

I think my favorite scene is the one at dinner when Zineb starts to castrate them all when she contradicts Zehema about this « Arab Shakespeare » tale – I myself, when I was a kid, thought Shakespeare was Arab – it's absolutely thrilling. I was totally impressed by Lyna Khoudri's comic talents too. She's able to keep a straight face like no one else, even though I couldn't stop giggling while watching her. Finally, I'd like to say how much I admire Donia Massoud, who plays George's wife. She's a great actress, but also a wonderful singer. Today, she lives in France as a dissident.

You're working with Fares Fares again. Why was his presence in each of the films in this unofficial trilogy important to you?

Every director has his or her favorite actor or actress, with whom communication seems to flow naturally.

When we're shooting, we have lunch, dinner and weekends together. We never tire of each other. He's my best friend. Before we started our respective families, we were as thick as thieves.

I write for Fares. He has an exceptional capacity for transformation. But he doesn't get any special treatment. Above all, he's one of the greatest actors in the world. And he's never been better than in *Eagles of the Republic*.

You open and conclude the film with images of elderly people betting on horse races while listening to the radio. What do these scenes mean to you?

When Nasser came to power [in 1956], one of his first decisions was to ban horse racing and, consequently, to close the Giza racecourse. Yet every Saturday, these old men

continue to gather, listen to the radio and gamble their money away. For me, these gamblers represent a shattered dream, as if life goes on, but in another dimension. No matter who's plundering the country, they're always there. Invariably, each weekend, they bet on horse races and hope to win.

ABOUT THE CAST

Fares Fares



Fares Fares is a Lebanese-Swedish actor, producer and director, born on April 29, 1973 in Beirut, Lebanon. He moved to Sweden with his family at the age of 14, where he began acting in local theater before studying drama in Gothenburg.

Fares is celebrated for his versatility, intensity, and ability to navigate complex roles across languages and genres. He made his film debut in *Jalla! Jalla!* (2000), directed by his brother Josef Fares, and quickly became a prominent figure in Scandinavian cinema. He gained international recognition through roles in films such as *Easy Money* (2010), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Child 44* (2015), and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016).

He is especially known for his long-standing collaboration with director Tarik Saleh, starring in politically charged thrillers like *The Nile Hilton Incident* (2017), *Boy from Heaven* (2022), and *Eagles of the Republic* (2025). His television work includes acclaimed series such as *Chernobyl*, *Westworld*, and *The Wheel of Time*.

Lyna Khoudri



Lyna Khoudri is an Algeria born actress whose family fled to France when she was two years old, seeking refuge from the Algerian Civil War. Raised near Paris, Khoudri was immersed in a culturally rich environment shaped by her journalist father and violinist mother.

She trained at the Théâtre national de la Colline and began her acting career in French television before gaining international acclaim for her role in *The Blessed* (2017), which earned her the Orizzonti Award for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival. Her breakout performance in *Papicha* (2019), a powerful drama set during Algeria's dark decade, won her the César Award for Most Promising Actress in 2020.

Khoudri has since appeared in Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch* (2021), *November* (2022), and *The Three Musketeers* (2023), showcasing her range across genres and languages. Fluent in French, Arabic, and English, she is also a brand ambassador for Chanel.

Zineb Triki



Zineb Triki is a French-Moroccan actress born in Casablanca, Morocco.

She began her artistic journey studying classical dance and theater before moving to Paris at age 15.

Her acting career took off with roles in short films and television, but she gained widespread recognition for her portrayal of Nadia El Mansour in the acclaimed French spy series *The Bureau* (2015–2020). Her nuanced performances in films such as *De toutes mes forces* (2017), *Les grands esprits* (2017) and *Arthur Rambo* (2021) have earned her praise for emotional depth and quiet intensity.

Fluent in Arabic, French, and English, Triki often plays characters caught between worlds - political, personal, and cultural.

Triki holds degrees in political science from McGill University in Canada and the Sorbonne University in Paris, as well as a master's in audiovisual production.

Amr Waked



Amr Waked is an acclaimed Egyptian actor. Born in Maadi, Cairo, he studied economics and theater at the American University in Cairo where he began his artistic career in local theater companies before transitioning to film and television.

Waked gained international recognition for his role opposite George Clooney in *Syriana* (2005), which opened doors to major global productions. His filmography includes *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* (2011), *Lucy* (2014), *Geostorm* (2017) and *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020). On television, he's appeared in *House of Saddam*, *Marco Polo*, *Ramy*, and *Riviera*, showcasing his versatility across genres and languages.

Known for his intense screen presence and political outspokenness, Waked has faced controversy in Egypt, including an eight-year prison sentence in absentia for criticizing state institutions. He has lived in exile in Spain since 2017.

Cherien Dabis



Cherien Dabis is a Palestinian-American actress, writer, and director. Born in Omaha, Nebraska and raised in Ohio and Jordan, she grew up navigating multiple cultural identities, an experience that deeply informs her creative work. She studied film at Columbia University, where she earned her MFA and began crafting stories that challenge stereotypes and amplify Arab-American voices.

Dabis made her feature debut with *Amreeka* (2009), which premiered at Sundance and won the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize at Cannes. Her second feature, *May in the Summer* (2013), opened the Sundance Film Festival and showcased her talents as both director and lead actress. She has since directed episodes of acclaimed series including *Ramy*, *Ozark*, and *Only Murders in the Building*, earning an Emmy nomination for her work on the latter.

Known for her nuanced storytelling and commitment to authentic representation, Dabis was named a *Variety* “Director to Watch” and honored by the Takreem Foundation for cultural excellence.

EAGLES OF THE REPUBLIC

Director/Screenwriter Tarik Saleh

Director of Photography: Pierre Aïm

Editing: Theis Schmidt

Score: Alexandre Desplat

Production design: Roger Rosenberg

Art direction: Sila Karakaya

Costumes: Virginie Montel

Makeup: Saara Räisänen

Principal cast Lyna Khoudri, Fares Fares, Zineb Triki, Amr Waked, Cherien Dabis

Produced by Linus Stöhr Torell (Unlimited Stories), Linda Mutawi, Johan Lindström, (Apparaten), Alexandre Mallet Guy (Memento Production)

In co-production with SVT, Film i Väst a.o.

Supported by: Swedish Film Institute/Lena Runge

Countries: Sweden, France, Denmark, Germany

Classification: EU (MEDIA)

Original Language: Arabic

Running time appr 129 min

Theatrical premiere: 19 September 2025 (Finland)

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- International sales: Playtime – www.playtime.group

info@playtime.group / +33 1 53 10 33 99

- TIFF International Publicity: Hype Park – Christian De Schutter

christian@hypepark.be / +32 477 475257

Assets: <https://hypefiles.hypepark.be/eagles-of-the-republic>