



The Nile Hilton Incident

Director: Tarik Saleh

Country: Egypt

Date: 2017

A review by Nick Schager for *Variety*:

Proof that classical genres are always ready to be retrofitted for the modern age, “The Nile Hilton Incident” transplants the dark, cynical heart of film noir to the streets of Cairo in the days leading up to the 2011 revolution that would eventually oust President Hosni Mubarak. Swedish writer-director Tarik Saleh’s crime drama about a cop investigating the murder of a beautiful singer is a paranoid portrait of individual and systemic corruption that leaves none of its characters unscarred. Blending procedural thrills with politicized commentary, this gripping import (based, in part, on a real-life 2008 case) should attract sizable domestic interest following its premiere at this year’s Sundance Film Festival.



Millions of Egyptians began protesting Mubarak’s reign beginning on Jan. 25, 2011 – a date that serves as the climactic setting of “The Nile Hilton Incident.” Saleh’s film commences shortly before that momentous turn of events, with a young Sudanese girl named Salwa (Mari Malek) who, while working as a cleaning lady at the titular hotel, overhears an argument in a room, out of which two men, in relatively brief succession, leave, the second one after having killed a woman. Salwa escapes this assassin, and

tidying up the mess is left to Noredin (Fares Fares), a cop who has few qualms about pilfering cash from the scene of the crime, but who nonetheless is compelled to figure out who’s behind this murder, even though his superiors, including his uncle, Kamal (Yasser Ali Maher), are eager to sweep it under the rug.

Noredin’s inquiry immediately points him toward Shafiq (Ahmed Seleem), a real-estate developer and parliament member. Shafiq denies responsibility for the death of the girl, a local singer and prostitute named Lalena, who it turns out worked with a sleazy pimp named Nagy (Hichem Yacoubi) to take compromising photos of her clients (including Shafiq) that could then be used as blackmail. The film’s intro sequences makes clear that Shafiq had another mystery man (Slimane Daze) actually do away with Lalena. And the fact that these would-be culprits are both in league with – and shielded by – the police and governmental bigwigs is obvious to everyone, including Noredin, who finds himself at every turn stymied by people, and institutions, more concerned with self-interest than the truth.

After chasing numerous avenues that culminate in dead ends (as well as ominous warnings about his own professional and personal safety), Noredin is informed by Shafiq, “There’s no justice here.” That reality is as inescapable as the smog is thick in Cairo, a city the movie presents as a fugue-like dystopian wasteland littered with the bodies of innocents and the broken shards of the laws intended to protect them. Director Saleh’s frequent cutaways to his metro skyline evoke a sense of “Chinatown”-by-way-of-“Blade Runner” bleakness, while his infrequent snippets of TV news footage create anticipation for a forthcoming revolutionary conflagration set to engulf everyone and everything in its path.

Stuck in the center of this cesspool, Noredin proves incapable of affecting anything resembling real change, and Fares’ performance – all world-weary resignation and desperate righteousness – captures a poignant sense of helplessness. That’s especially true when he decides to become involved with Gina



(Hania Amar), a friend of Lalena's who's also engaged in the crooner-cum-working-girl trade. Still grieving over his dead wife, Noredin knows that his behavior will invariably compromise him (and his investigation). Still, he proceeds accordingly, desperate for a sliver of genuine human connection, and buoyed by his knowledge that any indiscretion can be washed away with a bribe.

By the time it arrives at its showdown amid Cairo's burgeoning uprising, "The Nile Hilton Incident" has indulged in so many grim twists that it's hard not to read it, and its downbeat ending, as a stinging commentary on the venality of the Mubarak era, as well as the futility of the forthcoming revolution to hold the nation's actual villains accountable. Like the finest noir, what springs forth from Saleh's film is the dreary belief that the bad sleep well while the rest are left to suffer in the streets.

From: <https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/the-nile-hilton-incident-review-1201962398/>

Windows (UK, 1975, 8 mins)

Peter Greenaway (director of *The Draughtsman's Contract*; *The cook, the thief, his wife and her lover*; and many other films) became interested in the political stories coming from South Africa at the time of apartheid, particularly the frequency at which political prisoners were dying by defenestration. Unable to make a documentary about these events, he devised a metaphor and turned the situation into a mocking documentary.



Greenaway utilised his country home for the key image of the window and created a fictional group of people who would, for professional reasons, be associated with windows and created a number of situations whereby they fall out of windows of this house, in their attempts to fly.

From: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/965107/index.html>