

1) Some scenes of "Shadows", concerning what you call " a genocide" with napalms etc, provoked extremely negative comments by a large proportion of greeks-even the most proegressive ones. I mean, genocide, napalms, and ghosts -victims of bad greeks coming out of the grave?

I am not sure which scenes you are talking about. SHADOWS never mentions Greece, nor a genocide. This is a film about many issues, including getting over the past, personal vs. social responsibility, corruption, family ties (and especially Mediterranean mothers and their sons), doomed love, fear of death, social taboos..., but it is certainly not about Greece. It is curious how some people can recognise themselves in anything.

2) Many people in the past thought that your films, like "Before the rain" constitute a bridge of friendship between the two countries but all they see now (besides the undoubted artistic virtues of the film) is a dangerous provocative statement which comes out in a very tensed period for the two countries.

This film is as much about building bridges of friendship as is any of my other films. It is a heart-felt film about grief and love offering a mirror to people (regardless of whether they are greedy for money, power or land). SHADOWS played on four continents, and no one saw anti-Greek provocation in it. It is a little disappointing to hear this kind of paranoid thinking coming from the country that calls itself the cradle of democracy.

3) Art can be a dangerous weapon at difficult moments. All countries have experienced terrible moments in their history. For example Greeks during Turkish invasion or more recently in Cyprus. It could be very easy for us to make a film showing the atrocities of Turks in Cyprus or 200 years ago. But doing it now, that there is an effort to overpass the negativity constitutes a political statement. Why do you focus on such a controversial matter in such a moment? This could be conceived as a nationalistic approach...

I would remind you once again that SHADOWS does not focus on Greece. The film does

mention in passing (two lines out of a thousand) the enormous suffering of the Aegean

Macedonians, but it is more concerned with other human issues, such as responsibility,

family relations, fear and desire.... Even when mentioning Aegeans, the film is concerned with their suffering, and Greece is never mentioned. But, if you insist on talking about politics in such a self-righteous way, then let me challenge your readers

to think about the damage that this kind of nationalistic hysteria, self-centeredness and manipulative politicians can cause. First of all, people should study independent sources and learn a bit more about their own history. Denial, propaganda and hysterical reactions from a position of power will not change the historical truth.

It is sad that for Greece the ethnic cleansing of Macedonians is not a matter of public record. I would direct you to a number of independent historical data, including the Carnegie Commission Report of 1914, but more importantly I would ask you to talk to the tens of thousands of Macedonian refugees and children of refugees living in Toronto, Melbourne, Tashkent, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic... I am not talking about movie characters, I am talking about real people of flesh and blood who have suffered the pain of real ethnic cleansing. They lost family and were chased away from their own homes in Greece. Yes, some of them under threat of napalm (for the first time used on Gramos, as per eyewitness accounts) or bayonets. I would direct you to look into the fact that in 1923 official Greece published a textbook in Macedonian, in Cyrillic, for first grade Macedonian pupils in Greece, then later withdrew it, destroyed it and denied it. I would direct you to the fact that the Macedonian (what you would call Slavic) toponyms in what was then called by official Greece "the newly conquered territories" have been erased by legal decrees and the language was banned. Even the very word that is seemingly at the center of the current ridiculous argument, "Macedonia" was not in use in Greece until about 20 years ago. Your own Ministry for Macedonia and Thrace was Ministry for North Greece and Thrace until the late 1980s. Both suppressing the use of the word "Macedonia" and then reversing the course by 180 degrees and claiming the exclusive right to use it are two aspects of the same strategy - that of trying to assimilate the land, the culture and the heritage of Macedonia into those of Greece. Yet, Macedonia was never part of Greece until 1912. No amount of political hysteria, denial, nor bullying today will change the fact that the Greek province of Macedonia has been part of Greece for only a blink in historical terms - 95 years.

4) Slavic speaking populations of Macedonia region suffered by Ottomans and Bulgarians as well. However you chose to focus only on the Greeks. Would Bulgaria ever be a co-producer of the film if you showed this aspect too?

Have you not seen my last film, DUST? In it, among other things, I speak of atrocities committed by the Ottoman army in Macedonia. The Turkish ambassador came to the set of the film, wanting to express his concern about "how Turkey would be portrayed in the film." I told him that all men with guns (whether Turkish, Macedonian, Greek, Albanian or American) are bad guys in my film, and the life-giving women are the good guys. Again, let me state for the record that SHADOWS is not about the Greeks, let alone focusing on them. I have to wonder where this sensitivity comes from. In addition to Bulgaria, our partners were Germany, Italy and

Spain, as well as the film body of the Council of Europe, Eurimages. Are you suggesting they were all a part of some vast international anti-Greek conspiracy?

5) At the end of the film, the hero finally buries the bones of the ghosts. He is now at peace. Is this scene symbolic in terms of how young people should move on in your country ? I mean in relation to the past?

Absolutely. And in your country, too. But, first of all, they should acknowledge the sins of their fathers. There is no moving ahead and forgiveness without acknowledgment of past sins. Australia recently apologized to the Aborigines. Willy Brandt got on his knees and asked forgiveness. Germany acknowledged what it did, accepted responsibility, and is now moving into a better day. As a matter of fact, the people in my country are desperate to move away from the past and towards the future, believing that NATO and EU and global integration are the way to the future, and they struggle very hard to achieve that. It is the Greek politicians whipping up nationalistic hysteria for their own political gain at home while trying to cover up the crimes of the past who are blocking our integration. Let's face it, the issue with the name is ridiculous. It is like something out of Becket or Ionesco. It's an excuse to impose a blockade on this dirt-poor country (crushing its economy) and to destabilize it by vetoing its ascent into the international community. This selfish behavior is dangerous. The claim that tiny Macedonia with its 8,000 soldiers can be an irredentist threat to mighty NATO-member Greece with its 240,000 soldiers, planes and equipment is hillarious. The Macho elephant afraid of the mouse? The more important question is of pure decency. What gives you the right to come up to me and tell me what I can and cannot call myself? Don't you think that is terribly rude?

6) Did you have personal experience with the ones you call "Macedonians of Aegean"?

I have Macedonian friends born in Uzbekistan and Czechoslovakia because their parents had to flee for their lives across the border as children. Their parents grew up in orphanages. I have a friend in Cologne (Germany) whose grandmother died in the snow while they were crossing the Greek border. I know people who are heart-broken that they cannot go back and see their parents graves or the house they were born in, as it has been confiscated, and they are not given a visa to re-enter. As a student, trying to get a Greek visa, I had to show my parents' birth certificates at the Greek Consulate in Skopje, just to prove that my parents were not born in Greece; otherwise i would not be able to obtain a tourist visa. I know a friend from America who was not allowed to enter Greece because he had spoken about the ethnic cleansing issue in the past. I have a friend whose grandfather was executed in Greece.

7) If you fight for your right to be called Macedonians, what about our Macedonians?

The ones who showed your film in the capital of greek region Macedonia, Thessaloniki, and embraced it with enthusiasm?

I am glad they liked my film. I wish those same viewers and intellectuals were in touch with those Greek officials who tried to suppress BEFORE THE RAIN at the Festival in Venice and at the Academy Awards in 1995 on their behalf, even though the film had nothing to do with Greece. As far as the issue of Macedonians, I'm afraid you are confusing two different things. The people in Greece you call Macedonians are Greeks who live in Macedonia. Their ethnicity is Greek. The way a Greek in Thrace would call himself a Greek Thracian. On the other hand, most of the people who live in the Republic of Macedonia are of Macedonian ethnicity. That's how I feel, that's how my father felt, and that is how my grandfather felt. At the turn of the 20th century there were immigrants coming to America from the Ottoman Empire, declaring themselves of Macedonian ethnicity. Those are facts that will not go away, no matter how many childish tantrums Greek politicians throw nor how many embargoes or vetoes Greece imposes. This might be a difficult concept to explain to the citizens of Greece, as it is perhaps the last country in Europe that does not recognize the concept of ethnic minorities (nor their rights), and has been reprimanded for that by numerous international institutions. But this is a matter of identity and dignity, essential to any human being, and it is deeply offensive when someone tries to play with it.