



THESSALONIKI  
INTERNATIONAL  
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION  
2023  
TiDF25

# UPROOTINGS

a film by Eleni Alexandrakis

16.03.23  
IN CINEMAS

DIRECTED BY ELENI ALEXANDRAKIS, SCRIPT: ELENI ALEXANDRAKIS & JONATHAN ARNOULT, PHOTOGRAPHY: DIONYSIS EFTHIMIOPOULOS, SOUND: NIKOS PAPADIMITRIOU, MUSIC: JONATHAN ARNOULT, EDITING: VANGELIS KATSAROS,  
PARTICIPANTS: MYRTO MANDA, GIANNIS ITZAKAS, SIFIS ZACHARIADIS, MARIA MERCEDES BUENO MORALES, ENRIQUE OLIVERT, JEAN PHILIPPE JEAN MARIE, REZWANA SEKANDARI. PRODUCED BY POMEGRANATE FILMS IN  
CO-PRODUCTION WITH PERSPECTIVE FILMS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE GREEK FILM CENTER (SPECIAL PROGRAM COVID 19), WITH THE KIND SUPPORT OF THE GREEK FILM ARCHIVE



PERSPECTIVE  
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Seven stories of uprootings. Seven confessions.  
A journey in space and time of ruthless politics...

From the Greek civil war to the war in Afghanistan, from the Franco years to the Covid years, from the French Island of Reunion to Siberia, many children have been violently uprooted from their natural environment for political reasons. Through their testimonies, terrible and often unknown aspects of history emerge.

This documentary deals with testimonies of people who, as children, were uprooted from their natural environment in different countries and at different times, from 1940 to 2021. Men and women from Spain, Greece, the former Soviet Union, the French island of Réunion and Afghanistan confide how they found themselves unwillingly uprooted from their homes, their families, and their countries, supposedly for their protection but mainly to be exploited. They tell about how they were displaced and confined, and about the political interests that were served by this violation of their lives. They share the pain of the loss of the life they were originally meant to live and the loss of their identity...

To organize our meetings with most of these witnesses we had to use contemporary online media. But despite the "technological coldness" that these online uses can entail, the sincerity with which those persons spoke and their desire to have their stories heard filled our exchange with warmth and emotion.

Amidst burnt forests, among uprooted trees, through seas and running waters, stories of the past and stories of the present emerge...

MYRTO MANDA, a 12-year-old Greek schoolgirl, uprooted from her every-day life because of the Covid 19 pandemic lock down, appears discretely in between the six following characters creating links and pauses between their stories:

The story of Greek GIANNIS ATZAKAS, son of a rebel, who had to spend six years (1949-1955) in the Greek Child Care Cities that were orphanages created by Queen Fredericka of Greece, during the Greek Civil War to protect children from poverty and war but mainly to indoctrinate them against communism.

The story of Greek SIFIS ZACHARIADIS who lived an exiled life in the former Soviet Union, as his father, after being for 25 years the leader of the Greek Communist Party, was a political convict in Siberia for 17 years, and his mother, also a member of the Greek Communist Party, stayed in prison in Greece for 18 years.

The story of Spanish ENRIQUE OLIVERT who was a stolen baby at his birth, given for illegal adoption, during the Franco era as approximately 200 000 babies during this period.



The story of Spanish MARIA MERCEDES BUENO MORALES, who's baby was stolen at birth, five years after Franco's death, even though democracy and a rule of law was supposedly being restored.

The story of Reunionese JEAN PHILIPPE JEAN MARIE, one of the so called "Creuse Children", who was taken forcefully to mainland France from his native island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean, in 1963 at the age of ten.

The story of Afghani REZWANA SEKANDARI, who ended up, in Greece in 2015 at the age of 14, being an unaccompanied child during the journey she undertook together with her whole family from Afghanistan in order to reach Europe...



DURATION: 98'

**16.03.23**  
IN CINEMAS



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The documentary tells the stories of seven people in different places in Europe who, as children, were uprooted from their families. Did you notice any similarities in their stories?

**ELENI:** Actually, there are six stories of actual uprooting and to these stories we added the story of Myrto, a twelve-year-old girl who lived through the covid-19 crisis and the lockdown in Greece. Her uprooting is "milder" than the others as she was uprooted from her everyday life but remained within the "bubble" of her family. Indeed, her presence also acts as a link between the other stories, which are much harsher. She discovers them and observes them.

All the others, at different ages of their childhood, were taken from their everyday lives to be displaced elsewhere, to unknown families, institutions, or military schools. Somewhere far from home and the warmth of a family that waited for them for years. Even though the poverty and misery of their biological family made their childhood difficult, all our witnesses felt that they were violently ripped from the family cocoon. And as a result lost their sense of identity.

**JONATHAN:** Every time it's a traumatic upheaval for the child and usually, the decision to remove someone from their familiar environment is taken by a government in the context of a very strong political expediency.

**ELENI:** But, after years of wandering, our witnesses managed to survive, to overcome their problems. None of them wanted to forget, but they all tried to understand the gravity of what they had experienced in order to move on. Some have returned to the homelands from which they were displaced, others have formed associations to denounce what happened, or have written books where they recount their experiences.



**What preceded it? The desire to talk about uprooting in general, or the desire to tell the stories of those you met.**

**ELENI:** I've been working for a long time on a fiction film from the book THOLOS VYTHOS by Giannis Atzakas, who is also one of the witnesses in the documentary. In his book he narrates how after World War II, towards the end of the Greek Civil War, in 1949, he was placed for six years in the "Child Care Cities": these were institutions supposed to protect children from poverty and the atrocities of war, but actually isolated and brain-washed them against communism.

I discovered in his book a piece of Greek history I didn't know and, both for the film and for myself, I began intensive research. I found similar stories all over the world. The children of Creuse, the "stolen babies" of Francoism, the children of England sent to Australia...

**JONATHAN:** In the 20th century, as one of our witnesses says, there was a real virus of uprooting. For the film we have limited our research to European stories, but there are many other similar stories around the world, in the Americas, particularly in Latin America. Eleni had discovered the stories, so it was necessary to meet people who could tell us about their experiences in person. That's when I joined the film.



**The film also relates to the personal stories of the two of you. Did you consider including them?**

**ELENI:** No, that would have been too much. Our stories have enabled us to better understand our witnesses, and we have shared them with them. I think it was thanks to this exchange that they trusted us so much and agreed to tell us their own.

**JONATHAN:** We wanted to stay on the sidelines and leave more space for them. As most of our meetings were online, talking to them at the beginning about our own stories created an initial link, necessary to reach out to them.

**How did writing around a very personal subject work for both of you?**

**ELENI:** Jonathan and I understood each other very quickly, we were in the same frame of mind on the subject. We have a considerable age difference between us, but it worked in a positive way as we complemented each other from a different perspective. Jo also wrote the music for the film, and when he sent it to me, I immediately saw his music complementing the editing of the film!

**JONATHAN:** The writing was based on the meetings we had. Initially we asked very practical questions, because we had to find a way to get to know these people. After a while, the film gradually started to take shape. With each meeting new perspectives were opened and new directions were given, and so the writing and organization of the stories began.

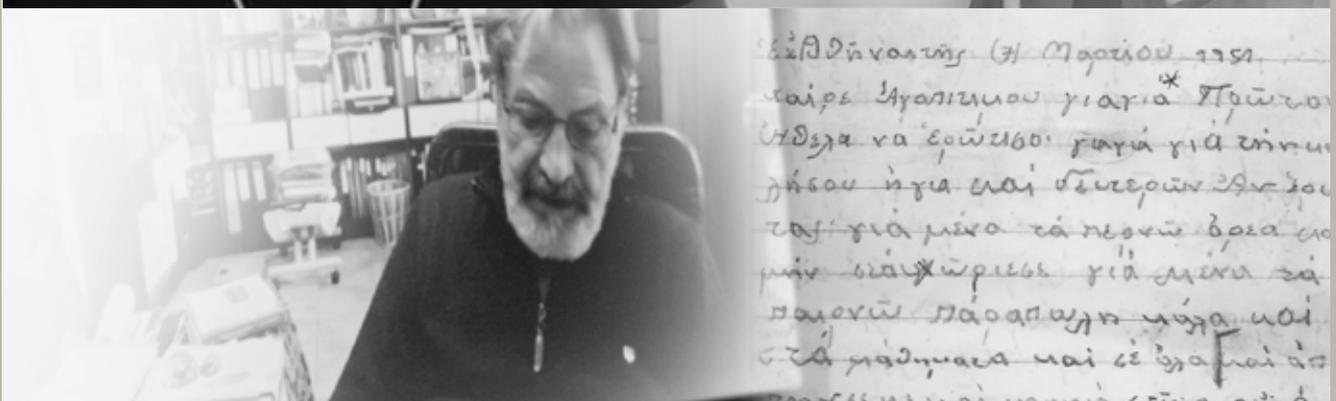
**ELENI:** We always started with the questions we wanted to ask the people we met. The most important point was the events that happened to them. Our goal was to create ONE story out of their seven stories. We find that all these scattered stories have a convergence that is surprising and interesting. Children were abused and politically exploited by regimes, whether dictatorial or democratic.

It's hard to explain why we chose these particular people, but when you watch the documentary, the reason becomes obvious.

## Eleni, you appear in the film. What is your role?

**ELENI:** Yes, we both appear on the other side of the screen when we talk to people who are far away. Again, it's a way to forge intimacy and support them. I also appear alongside Rezwana. It was necessary, she needed me to be near her. She is young and her story is very recent. Initially, we wanted Rezwana to tell her story in her native language, (dari) Afghan. She was happy about that as she would be able to express herself well, but when she realized that we would need an interpreter, she didn't want another person between us. Our contact was as direct as possible. And despite the difficult stories that everyone tells in the film, we didn't want the film to be pessimistic. It was important that Myrto and Rezwana appear in the documentary live and not online. They are the youngest and give a message of hope, it's a word that recurs in Rezwana's speech.

**JONATHAN:** It's an aspect of the documentary that I tried to emphasize with the music as well. These people survived and lived well. They made the most of their traumas.



**You highlight in the documentary adults who were uprooted as children. Is this a way of redressing injustice?**

**JONATHAN:** We hope so. We wanted these stories to be heard. Most of them are not taught in school and governments have tried to bury them in oblivion. In Spain, after Francoism, they published a "law of oblivion" and in the case of "stolen babies", the practice continued for a while, even after democracy was restored. And the consequences of this are still relevant today, as many parents and children are not reunited and are still looking for each other.

**ELENI:** It's only been a few years, from 2000-2010, that these facts started to immerse, to be heard and acquire historical interest. Also, personally speaking, we wanted to offer these seven people the joy of telling their stories. They all participated willingly and generously. The trust they showed us was very touching. We hope to be able to bring them to Greece for the premiere of the film.

**The production of the film took place during lockdown. How did the idea for such a documentary come about?**

**ELENI:** After my initial research, I wanted to include relevant testimonies in the fiction film I was working on so that I would make a "hybrid" film. After talking to Gaëlle Jones, our French co-producer, we finally decided to make two films. Now that the documentary exists, I feel I can work more freely on my fiction film. When the idea was born, we were in the first confinement of the COVID 19 pandemic, and I never imagined I could separate the film from the crisis we were going through. The interviews were all done via zoom. It might be strange to the viewer at the beginning of the screening that people are talking through a computer screen, but what I find interesting is how the computer becomes both their prison and their window to the world.

**JONATHAN:** We secured the funding that was given to help Greek cinema in the Covid crisis. The film and the way it was shot is intrinsically linked to the pandemic. During the crisis, practical and financial realities tied in with our artistic desires and thus the film was born.

## Credits

Produced by Pomegranate Films in coproduction with Perspective Films

With the support of the Greek Film Center (Special Program Covid 19)

With the kind support of the Greek Film Archive

Directed by Eleni Alexandrakis

**Script:** Eleni Alexandrakis & Jonathan Arnoult

**Photography:** Dionysis Efthimiopoulos

**Sound:** Nikos Papadimitriou

**Music:** Jonathan Arnoult

**Editing:** Vangelis Katsaros

### Participants in order of appearance:

Myrto Manda, Giannis Atzakas, Sifis Zachariadis, Maria Mercedes Bueno

Morales, Enrique Olivert, Jean Philippe Jean Marie, Rezwana Sekandari



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## **Eleni Alexandrakis**

was born in 1957 in Athens. She studied Cinema at the Sorbonne, Paris I, (License 1980) and at the National Film and TV School in England (Graduated in 1985). She created her company in 1986 which subsequently took on the distinctive title of POMEGRANATE FILMS. She writes, directs, and produces fiction and documentary films. Her films have won awards in Greece and abroad.

### **Partial filmography:**

Kostis Papagiorgis, the sweetest misanthrope

Union of Cinema Critics Award / 20th Thessaloniki Doc. Festival 2018,

1st Prize for Greek Doc / Aegean Docs Festival, 2018

Angel and the Weightlifter

Gold Remi Award at WorldFest Houston 2009

The Woman who missed Home

Special Mention Rhodes Eco Film Festival, 2005

Greek State Prize for Music (N.Papazoglou) 2005

The Holly Myrrh 2002

Easter is in the Air" 1999

A Drop in the Ocean

Mionneto Film Award / Forum / Berlin Festival 1996, Best Actress Award

(Amalia Moutoussi) at the 1996 Istanbul and Valladolid Festivals 1996

The Children of Greece

Cinema and Reality Greek Festival Award 1990

## Jonathan Arnoult

After studying cinema and theatre, he started out as a camera operator and an editor, before his origins from Reunion Island and the need to talk about them brought him back to cinema. He is currently developing the short films *TI LAMP TI LAMP*, which he will shoot in 2023 with the G.R.E.C, and *VOLCAN LA PÉTÉ*, produced by François Martin Saint Léon (Barberousse Films), with the support of the Réunion Region. In Paris, he directed the experimental documentary *CRUE / CUIT* in 2019, and collaborates with Olia Verriopoulou on her films.

### Filmography

"Crue / Cuit" (experimental documentary)

Self-produced film, 2019

"Ton cadeau" (fiction)

Nikon Festival, 2017



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