

EDEN IS WEST



As in «The Odyssey», the Aegean Sea is the setting when our hero, Elias, sets out on his adventures. On the same waters, under the same sun and the same sky as the dawn of civilization. After countless incidents and accidents, a stopover in paradise and a sojourn in hell, the magical conclusion of his journey takes place in Paris. Paris, the shining city in the deepest dreams, in the most uncertain sleep of wanderers. EDEN IS WEST attempts to echo the path, the journey of those (once our fathers and mothers) who cross through lands, braving oceans and seas of uniforms, looking for a home. Elias' story is not that of Ulysses, nor is it Jean-Claude's or mine. But I see myself in Elias, a foreigner who is not foreign to me.

Costa-Gavras

France's most award-winning director Costa-Gavras takes on a theme with deep personal resonance - EDEN IS WEST is the story of an immigrant's destiny, told with a level of maturity and accuracy only this Greek who has resided in Paris since 1956 could provide.

Where is EDEN IS WEST going to take us?

To Paris. I wanted this film to be like an Odyssey. A little like Ulysses, my character crosses the sea (my own Mediterranean Sea, actually), braving storms and other tribulations. He faces down some rather modern monsters and challenges the myths of our era. Ulysses' was a journey home, whereas Elias wants to found a new home.

Today, many men and women are forced to uproot themselves and then put down roots elsewhere. «To leave is to die a little,» but to immigrate is to die and be reborn in another place. It's a film about taking root, but in no way takes a static view of what that means - the love of one's land, its mountains, the smell of the grass in the morning when you awake.

Elias is faced with a different, unknown world, our world, and, through his eyes, we see it in a fresh and critical way. In the end, we are forced to take a look at ourselves.

The beginning of the film is almost like a documentary or a very realistic news report about a freighter filled with immigrants.

It had to be obvious from the start that these were immigrants - fleeing famine or war, or both, it doesn't matter. Jean-Claude Grumberg and I wanted our



INTERVIEW WITH COSTA-GAVRAS

main character to be emblematic of all those who have to leave in order to survive. Either because they can no longer feed their families, because they face a dark future in their country, because the powers-that-be want to destroy them, or simply because they are driven by the pursuit of a dream.

We invented a language and did everything we could to keep our character from having an identifiable nationality.

In the opening scene, hundreds of illegal immigrants are being crammed into a broken down freighter. They all have one thing in common - they paid to get on that boat because they were promised

Europe, they were promised Eden. Then, suddenly, they are betrayed and abandoned. It's a story common to all immigrants. At a certain point, it's to each his own odyssey, to each according to his dream, his needs and his capabilities.

Elias' dream is Paris.

We didn't just pick Paris out of a hat. The City of Lights is the city of tolerance, of culture, of a certain gentleness. Paris was the place I chose, just as it was the place Jean-Claude Grumberg's parents had chosen a generation before me. Along the way in this odyssey, we meet characters of varying levels of tolerance and

generosity, and it's obvious you paid careful attention to their portrayal.

They all resemble us. They are one side of us, of our society and its contradictions. Immigration is revealing about who we are at a given moment. The way a society treats immigrants, whether it accepts or rejects them, whether it sets up barriers and procedures or not, its prejudices about those from certain countries as opposed to others all this says a lot about the condition of that society itself.

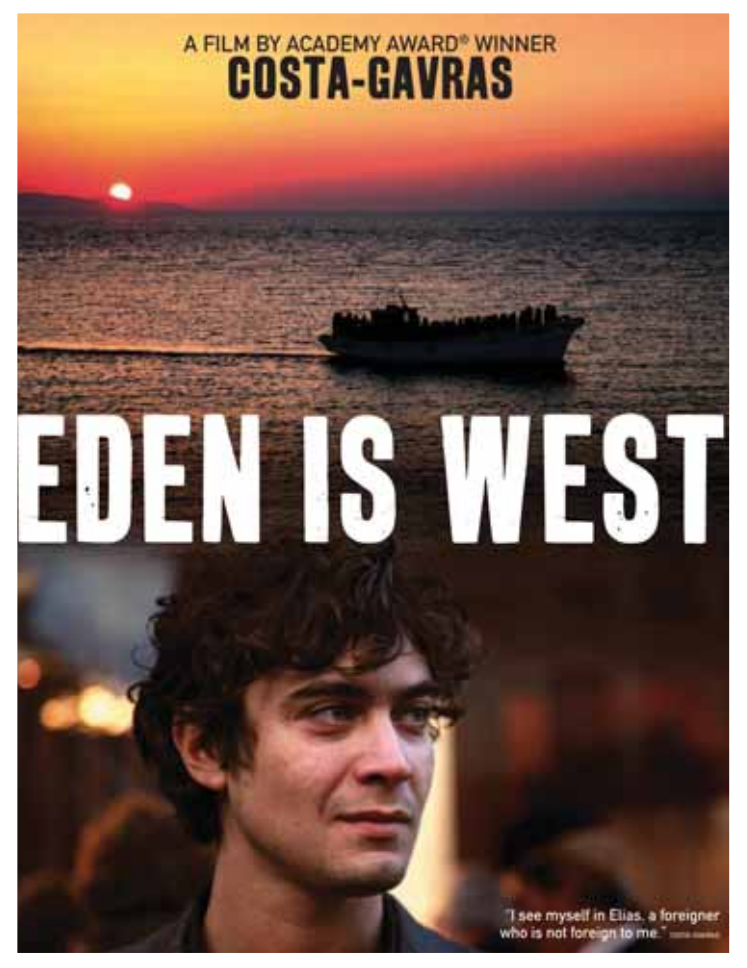
The treatment of Italians and Poles by the French in the 1930s, then of North Africans before and after the Algerian war, of Portuguese during the same period, to say nothing of the preconceptions about Asian immigrants being «lower-profile, harder workers, easier to assimilate,» all these clichés go to who we are.

The immigrant Elias affords us a look at our own society's reaction to a foreign body.

Elias is always running away.

Elias has no trouble settling. His problem is that whenever he does, someone comes after him. He is constantly on the run, hunted.

The immigrant today is never considered beneficial to a country. He is no longer in demand, no longer even a problem - he's a danger.



All kinds of media now portray him, directly or indirectly, as a danger - an invasive danger - for society. But European society as a whole, and French society in particular, needs im-

get by, but also how to interpret and adapt to a set of very different social codes, to say nothing of the language barrier. In the end, it may well be the very best among us who come to join our «Eden.»

Jean-Claude Grumberg and I wanted this film to be a tribute to our fathers, our grandfathers and to those of our generation who came to France in spite of the pitfalls and the storms. Here they are, here we are! As the Americans say, «Here we stand.» I like that very simple expression. There is pride in simply being there, upright. It's probably a holdover from the pioneer spirit, but it says a lot.

February 2009, release of EDEN IS WEST. February 1969, release of «Z» - what has changed in forty years?

When I was doing films like «Z,» I was raising warning flags, exposing injustice and placing things in the context of a world where everything seemed to be moving toward «progress,» working out «for the best.» So it was important to show how this «best» also contained the worst. Today, the general feeling is that things are getting worse across the board. And in particular, the view of the immigrant is one of impending doom. We didn't want to contribute to this overdramatizing about immigrants. By striking a lighter tone and mixing it with some fairly violent stuff, we were trying to let the issue of immigration «breathe» a little, to come at this problematic man» from a different angle.

More of the Interview by Olivier Ravanella in tomorrow's special edition

migrants.

At one point, he is frightened of firemen.

He's afraid of all uniforms. In Modern Times, Charlie Chaplin is terrified when he sees two sailors. He runs away.

Or of policemen who are simply supervising a roller-blade parade through Paris.

Elias is scared, but this time the policemen call him «sir» and protect him, because now he's well dressed.

The film is fairly dark, but there is also a sweet, comic quality that emerges. That gives this new Costa-Gavras film an unexpected dimension. How did that come about?

Probably from the fact that I'm moved by this character, more than by others. The sweetness and kindness of an immigrant is owed to his need to gain acceptance, maybe even be loved. But it also comes from an inferiority complex which flows from the paternalistic eyes and behavior that he encounters. I have enormous respect for a man who immigrates.

To leave your country, to move into the unknown as a terrible ordeal.

It requires both mental courage and physical courage in unlimited quantities. And it requires intelligence as well - intelligence that comes from life. You need to know how to