

Greek dancers attempt to set world record

ATHENS - More than 150,000 people held hands and danced on the Greek island of Crete on Saturday to try to set a world record and dispel the gloom of economic austerity. The dancers, some in traditional costumes, formed a human chain along a 200 km (125 mile) highway across Greece's largest island while police halted traffic, event organizers said. Locals and tourists tapped their feet to the sound of folk music for about 15 minutes.

"We feel proud. We believe we've set a new world record," Spyros Prevezanos, head of the organizing group Planet Crete told Reuters. "We sent a message of hope, which is not related to money. We proved that there are more important values."

A Guinness World Records spokesman said no record for the biggest Greek dance had previously been set and organizers of Saturday's event, which initially aimed for 200,000 dancers, said they expected their world record bid to be accepted.

By RENEE MALTEZOU, Reuters

Academy Award Winning Director Psihoyos Shooting in 3D

Louie Psihoyos began as a highly praised photographer and was hired by National Geographic right out of college. He is now an Oscar winning director for his documentary film, *The Cove* that revealed a terrifying ecological truth about the annual killing of dolphins in Japan.



The Cove was his first film and won several awards including; The Academy Award for Best Documentary Film at the 82nd Academy Awards, Audience Awards at Sundance, Newport Beach and Toronto's Hot Docs.

Louie Psihoyos, whose father is from Sparta, told us in an exclusive interview that as a kid he believed his father, "could have been one of the strongmen, from the movie *300*?, is currently shooting his next film in 3D on location in the Gulf of Mexico.

"We're shooting a 3-D film whose working title is *The Singing Planet*," Psihoyos told Alex Maragos in an interview.

"It's a film about the mass extinction of wildlife caused by humanity - I think it's the biggest story out there right now."

The film takes a close look at the issue of extinction and it examines preventative steps that can be taken to stop it.

CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS:

'There's love in this book'

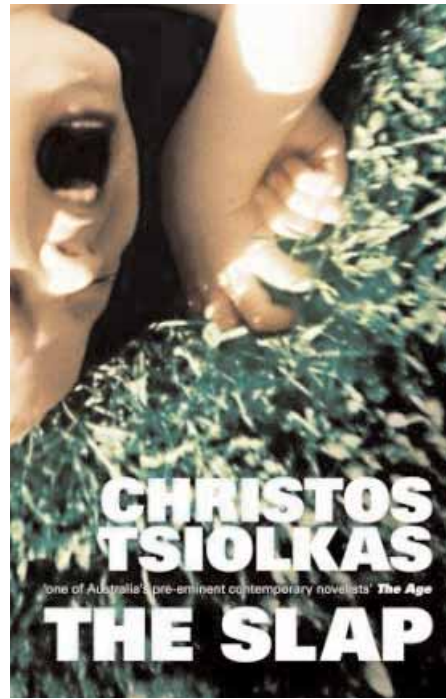
Booker-longlisted novel *The Slap* has been described as a 'modern masterpiece' and 'unbelievably misogynistic'. Christos Tsiolkas is pleased it is making readers angry

For someone who has written what has been called the most divisive Booker-nominated novel in years - partly because it is so angry and bleak, so full of potential, sometimes realised, violence - Christos Tsiolkas seems a gentle man, sweet and eager to please. He bows when we meet - "it's just the way I grew up" - and leads us flustered around the lobby of a luxury hotel on the seafront outside Dublin, where he is doing a reading as part of an extended publicity tour, looking for a quiet corner in which his very quiet voice won't be drowned out by the clatter of breakfast plates.

The Slap begins at a suburban barbecue in Melbourne, where one of the guests administers said slap to a three-year-old brat who is not his own. It then unfolds in seven intense chapters, each from the point of view of one of the guests. An international bestseller well before the Booker judges longlisted it, and the winner of the 2009 Commonwealth writers' prize, *The Slap* has been described as "riveting from beginning to end" (by Jane Smiley in the *Guardian Review*); "powerful", "dazzling", a "modern masterpiece"; "Neighbours as Philip Roth might have written it" (according to the *Sunday Times*), and "reminiscent of Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*" (thus Colm Toibin, rather naughtily, as it is produced here by an imprint he co-runs and who has been friends with Tsiolkas for years). It has also been called offensive and cynical and "unbelievably misogynistic"; "the whole novel has this ludicrous comedy-macho sensibility," objected journalist India Knight. "You get the feeling that if he'd been forced to read 'literary' fiction, Raoul Moat would have gulped it down at one sitting." "There is no joy, no love, no hope, no beauty [in it]," she added, for good measure. "Just hideous people beating each other up, either physically or emotionally."

The idea for the novel came from a real slap, at a real barbecue, where Tsiolkas's mother, who emigrated from rural Greece in the 1960s, cuffed, lightly, a three-year-old who was getting under her feet - whereupon the child put his hands on his hips and announced: "Nobody has the right to put their hands on my body without my permission." Everyone laughed, and there were no repercussions (in the novel the child's parents, white Australians, charge Harry, a second-generation Greek-Australian, with assault). Tsiolkas was set thinking about how the different groups and generations in modern-day multicultural Australia co-exist.

Tsiolkas's parents emigrated from Greece, post-second world war, post-



civil war (Tsiolkas is, en passant, scathing about modern-day Greeks who seem unable to empathise with people now coming to their own country for exactly the same reason). Both parents were factory workers who slotted straight into an already strong Greek community in Melbourne. Christos didn't speak English until he went to school. "I thought Australians spoke Greek. I was shocked to find that there was this other language I had to learn." Every week, on payday, his father would stop by a bookshop and buy him two books. "He can't read English. So sometimes it would be *Great Expectations*, sometimes it would be *Mills and Boon*, sometimes it would be *Jaws*. He once got me *Henry Miller*." It was a convivial and argumentative household, politically engaged - his mother, unlike the highly conservative Greek mother in his book, who pounds the floor until her hands bleed when her son Hector marries an Indian woman - is very left wing.

Tsiolkas, now 44, realised fairly early on that he was gay, and that the only way to ensure that he grew up on his own terms was to rebel against his traditional, patriarchal background and leave home - for university (where he fell in love with his room-mate, Shane, a cartographer; they are still together 25 years later) and thus the middle-classes; for writing, and a part-time job, until recently, as a veterinary assistant. (In *The Slap* one of the characters is a nurse with her own practice.)

But Tsiolkas makes sure to add that while there were many fractious, difficult years with his family, the lines of communication were never shut down. Still being in contact was not the same, however, as not rebelling at all, which "I think explains some of the infantilism of the men in the book. Because a lot of people of my generation and experience

haven't made the break." These men tend to persist within narrow parameters of masculinity, defined by the "great patriarchy" of traditional Greek culture, and also by the "sports-obsessed hyper-masculinity of Australian culture generally. But also the other thing, *Aida*" - Tsiolkas has a disconcerting habit of dropping your name into the conversation - "is that just because I'm gay it doesn't mean I escape how masculinity works in my own consciousness."

For a long time he made a point of keeping all his worlds separate. "So this was my wog world - "Your what? Though I really shouldn't be shocked, since *The Slap* is peppered with similarly brutal words, about both race and sex. "My wog world." He laughs, as big and loud as his speaking voice is soft. "Then there was my familial world. Then there was the world of school. And then there was the world of sexuality. So I was a particular kind of person with what we call our skip friends - "OK, OK, before we go any further, define your terms. Another big, longer laugh. "A skip would be people whose heritage is English, Welsh, Irish or Scottish. People from this part of the world. And for a long time wog was anyone else." He does see that words like this carry a charge here however casually they might be used in Australia - though, he says, there has also been a move there, as in hip-hop in the US, or with the word queer, to claim derogatory words back.

And his use of these racial words is very deliberate, because for Tsiolkas the real centre of *The Slap* is not the initial slap, but an incident in which Rosie, the beautiful blonde Australian mother of the slapped child, is told by Bilal, an aboriginal who has converted to Islam, to stay away from his family forever. That's "the biggest slap in the book, that he's saying to a white woman who's kind of our idea of Australia - a Home and Away idea - he's saying, 'You're the bad one. You're bad for my family. You're bad for me.'" Racial intolerance - and the sexual, and class-based ramifications of racial intolerance - is the biggest wound in the book, and in Tsiolkas's opinion the great unsaid in modern multiculturalism. "These things are so difficult to negotiate - and it would be simple for me to say that I step outside these worlds, that I'm not prey to these prejudices, to this bigotry, to these contradictions and hypocrisies - well I am. Trying to understand the complexity of multicultural society is something that is ongoing. And there's a kind of safety to the contemporary English language novel - a timidity and fear about how we approach the reality of our consciousness and of the world we live in."