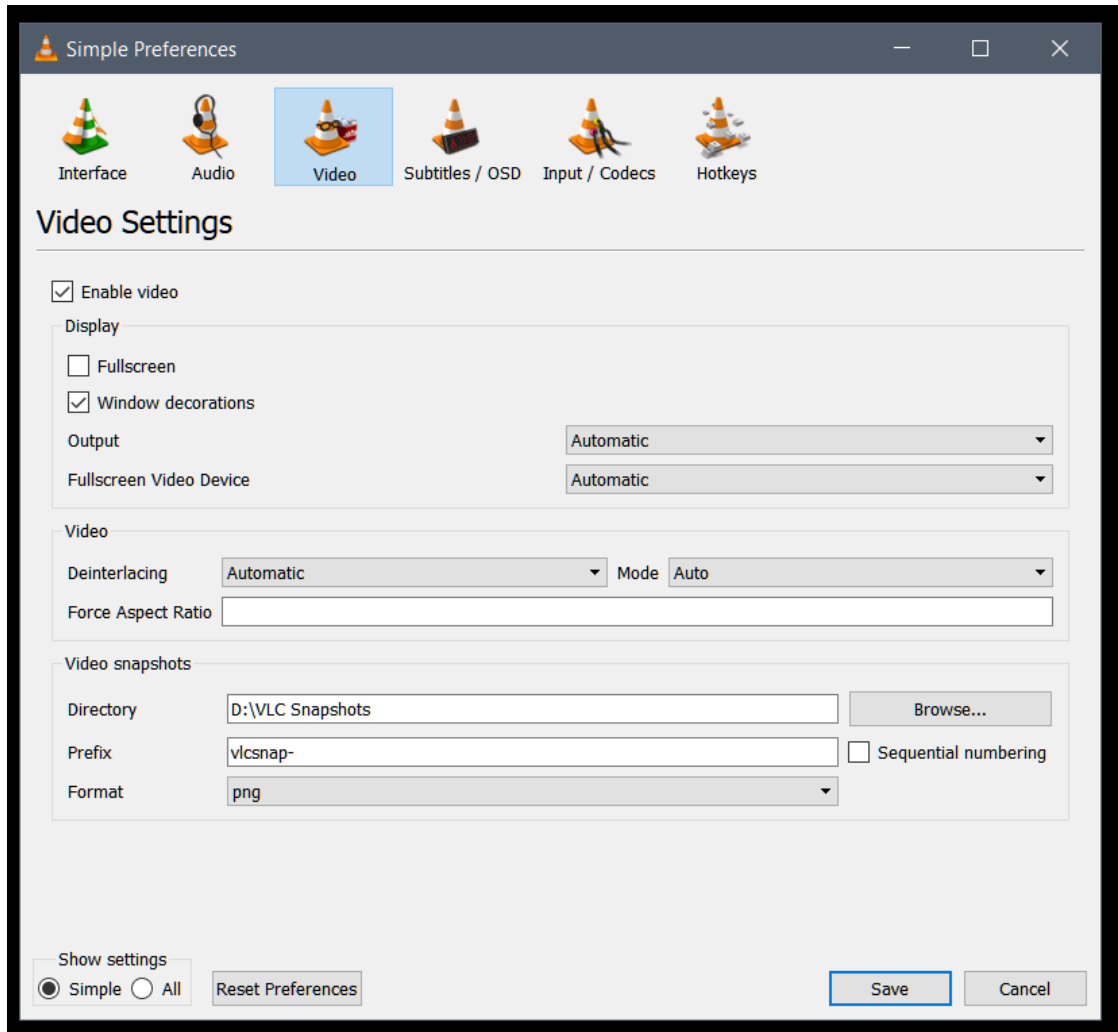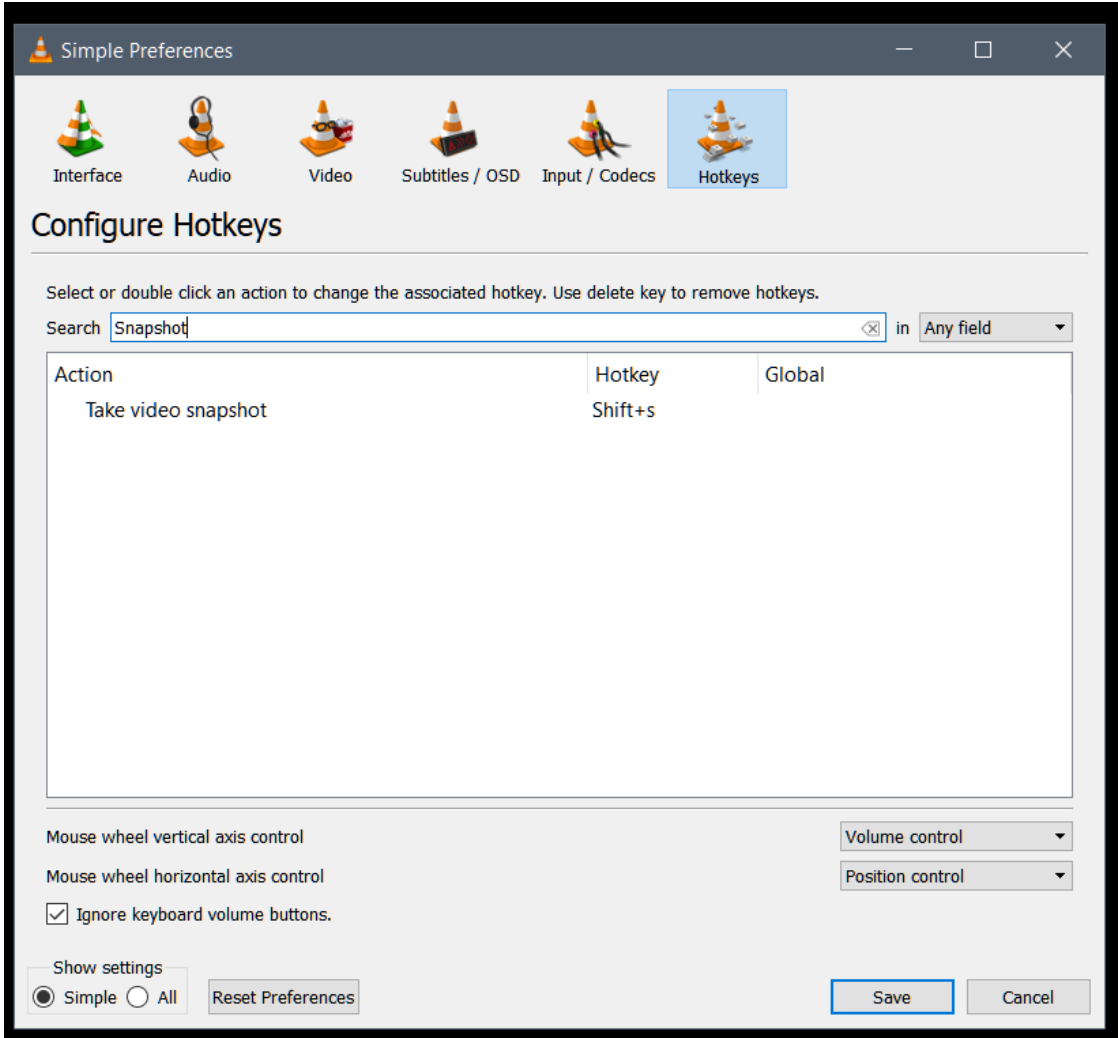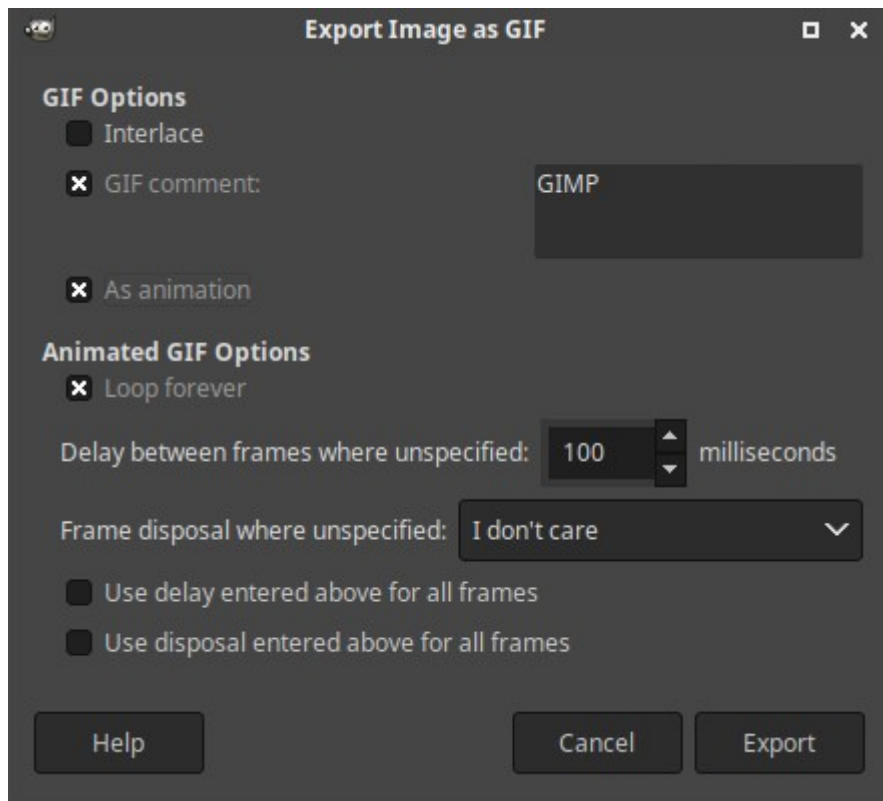VLC has a it's own Snapshot function/hotkey (**Shift-s**) you can use.
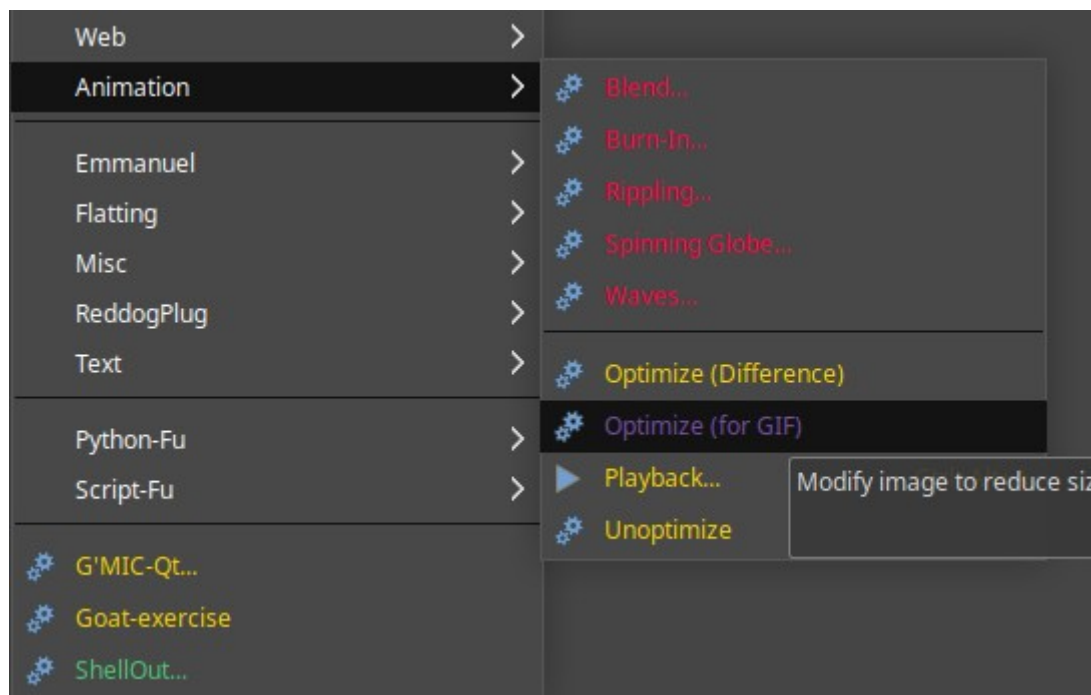
I changed the snapshots to be saved to a different directory, other then the default save location.
I believe by default, the save location is **C:/users/username/pictures**.

*****

I prefer SMPlayer over VLC on Linux. But it works exactly same way than VLC.
S takes a screenshot, with . and , you can go frame by frame back and forth.
For normal screenshots I use Shutter with a 5 seconds delay. That's because the normal PrintScrn button
does not work if you want to take a desktop screenshot of Gimp user interface with any of the menu
entries open. At least on Xubuntu18 I have this problem, didn't try on Linux Mint.

You create .gif animation in Gimp from File: Export as..., and use .gif extension (or type it after the file
name).

Gif is suitable for small and short animations.
You can also optimize it before exporting from Filters/animation/optimize (for gif)
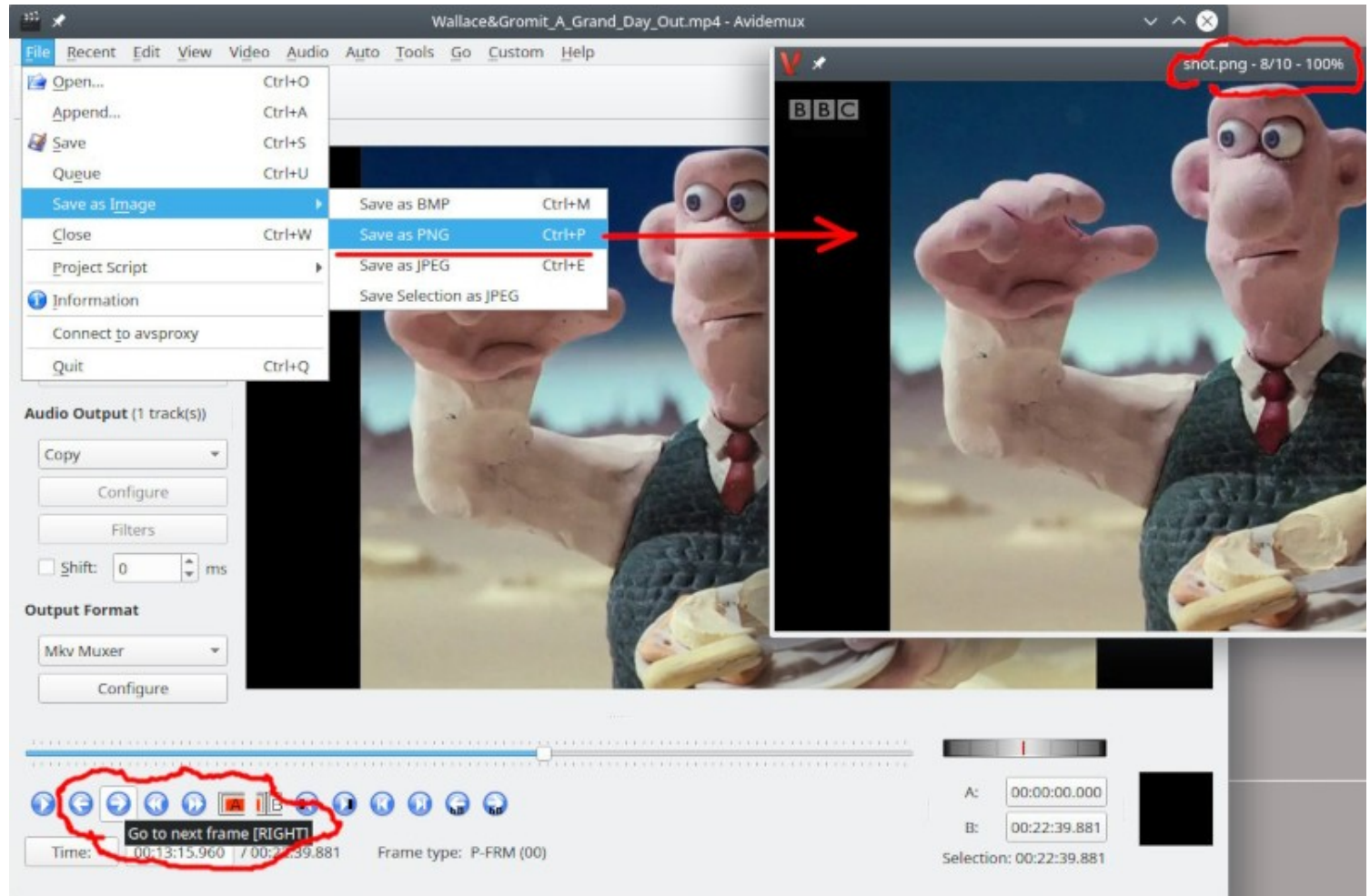
"…I've tried Avidemux, OBS, Camtasia in the Windows vein but none have proven reliable…"

In Windows not too good, However Avidemux is an editor not for video screencapture and If you do start to use linux probably SimpleScreenRecorder (a front-end for ffmpeg) is a good starter.

For extracting a frame as an image VLC is very good and might suffice.
I would not give up on Avidemux. Same as Gimp there is a learning curve, but capturing a frame from a video is very straight forward. This an example with the exported png frame shown.

"…Also, how would I create an animated file (even a .GIF animated) in GIMP?.."

See that line in Avidemux, Save Selection a JPEG. That renders between 'A' and 'B' as separate frames. Usually far too many for a gif but there are ways to easy reduce to a suitable number. Otherwise it is command line and ffmpeg (which you will hate)