



THE PRICE OF SEX

A film by Mimi Chakarova



2011 SARASOTA FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
DOCUMENTARY FEATURE
COMPETITION



OFFICIAL SELECTION
AFI/DISCOVERY CHANNEL
SILVERDOCS
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
2011



WINNER
Nestor Almendros Award
For Courage in Filmmaking
2011 Human Rights Watch
Film Festival



WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE



SYNOPSIS

THE PRICE OF SEX is a feature-length documentary about young Eastern European women who've been drawn into a netherworld of sex trafficking and abuse. Intimate, harrowing and revealing, it is a story told by the young women who were supposed to be silenced by shame, fear and violence. Photojournalist Mimi Chakarova, who grew up in Bulgaria, takes us on a personal investigative journey, exposing the shadowy world of sex trafficking from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and Western Europe. Filming undercover and gaining extraordinary access, Chakarova illuminates how even though some women escape to tell their stories, sex trafficking thrives.

US – 2010 – 73 minutes – Subtitled (Russian/Turkish/Bulgarian)

WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE



CREDITS

Director/Producer/Writer: Mimi Chakarova

Executive Producer: Stephen Talbot

Cinematography: Adam Keke

Editing: Stephanie Challberg

Music/Sound: Christopher Hedge

Made in association with Cinema for Investigative Reporting



CONTACT

Abby Peck, Marketing Manager

Women Make Movies

apec@wmm.com

212.925.0606, x306

WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

FILM DESCRIPTION



An unprecedented and compelling inquiry into a dark side of immigration so difficult to cover or probe with depth, **THE PRICE OF SEX** sheds light on the underground criminal network of human trafficking and experiences of trafficked Eastern European women forced into prostitution abroad. Photojournalist Mimi Chakarova's feature documentary caps years of painstaking, on-the-ground reporting that aired on Frontline (PBS) and 60 Minutes (CBS) and earned her an Emmy nomination, Magnum photo agency's Inge Morath Award, and a Webby for Internet excellence.

Filming under cover with extraordinary access, even posing as a prostitute to gather her material, Bulgarian-born Chakarova travels from impoverished rural areas in post-Communist Eastern Europe, including her grandmother's village, to Turkey, Greece and Dubai. This dangerous investigative journey brings Chakarova face to face with trafficked women willing to trust her and appear on film undisguised. Their harrowing first-person accounts, as well as interviews with traffickers, clients, and anti-trafficking activists, expose the root causes, complex connections, and stark significance of sexual slavery today.

WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

BACKGROUND



About the Project

Since the collapse of communism in 1989 millions of former Soviet bloc residents have migrated abroad looking for opportunities. These waves of migration breathed life into one of the oldest yet darkest criminal enterprises—the trafficking of human beings into sexual slavery.

Hundreds of thousands of Eastern European women have been sold into prostitution. Photojournalist Mimi Chakarova, a Bulgarian who immigrated to the United States in 1990, has documented their journeys from villages in Moldova and Albania to the streets of Turkey and nightclubs in Dubai—where prostitution is an equation of supply, demand, and desperation.

How Trafficking Works

After the fall of the Soviet Union, millions of young women in Eastern Europe came of age amid economic misery. Their childhood fantasies of a better life in the West became a human trafficker's

WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

golden opportunity. Agents and brokers arrange travel and job placements as waitresses or nannies; young women are escorted to their destinations and delivered to their employers. They quickly find that there is no café or family, but a pimp who puts them to work.

Most women are trafficked by someone they know; a relative, an acquaintance, a boyfriend, or a childhood friend. More than 60% are recruited by other women. Upon reaching the foreign land, they find themselves in coercive and abusive situations from which escape is both difficult and dangerous.

Destination Countries

Currently the top five destinations for sex trafficking of Eastern European women are Russia, Turkey, Greece, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel. Most women expect work as factory workers, waitresses, domestic servants and au pairs. After arriving in the country of destination, their passports, documents, money, and personal belongings are taken away. They become sex slaves, sold and resold to pimps at brothels, hotels, and apartments. Those who manage to escape the traffickers are deported. Back home, they rarely tell their loved ones the truth. The stigmatization of prostitution is every family's deepest shame.

Factors

Human trafficking succeeds because of the lack of job opportunities in Eastern Europe, persistent poverty, domestic violence, and the degradation of the family unit since the collapse of communism. Lacking education and often living in villages with no running water and electricity, rural women are eager to escape their grim reality. They are desperate to work abroad to sustain their families back home. More than 30% of those trafficked have 1-2 children and 70%

of them are single mothers. Women leave home because they see no other alternative. With an average income of \$100 a month, mere survival is at the core of why women agree to go abroad.

Do They Know What They're Getting Into?

Most are recruited by people they know. Often a neighbor or family acquaintance acts as the broker by processing the travel documents. Another factor is the level of desperation. She is responsible for a child, an ill parent or an alcoholic husband and feels she has no choice but to find work abroad. "I knew about women forced into prostitution but I never thought it would happen to me," is one of the most common responses.

The age group targeted most by traffickers is young women between 18-24; some are as young as 13. Most women I've interviewed had little sexual experience before they were trafficked. Some were virgins; others had one boyfriend before leaving. The majority are deceived into thinking they will hold legitimate jobs.

Why do they stay?

Usually a young woman is recruited by someone she knows. She is promised a job abroad. The person who recruits her issues the paperwork (passport, travel expenses, visas, etc.) and she agrees to repay the debt within the first several months. She then leaves willingly and follows all instructions until she reaches her final destination. At this point she is sold to another person and her passport is taken away. Along with losing her identity, she loses all personal freedom. She is often raped, beaten, starved, and threatened. After this "break-in" period, the young woman believes that resisting is hopeless. She is told that if she works off her debt (the amount the pimp paid for her plus daily living expenses and other fees) she can return home. Often women are sold multiple times and the cycle of their debt is never broken.

The Women



Cristina was trafficked to Russia at the age of 16. *'The pimps bought me a pair of boots. I wore them every day for three months.'*



A 21-year-old Moldovan girl, trafficked to Turkey, couldn't bear to tell her Mom the truth of how she was sold for sex. *'If my mom finds out what really happened to me, it would kill her,'* she explained.

WMM A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE



Olesea was trafficked to Istanbul at the age of 23. She spent three months in a brothel before a 16-year-old girl managed to call for help. The hotel was raided. After a month in prison, Olesea was deported.



At the age of 14, Rozie was trafficked to Italy by a neighbor. She was forced to work the streets of Naples for three years. When she turned 17, her pimp, the same neighbor boy from her village, took her to Belgium where she sold her for sex for another four years.



Filmmaker Statement

THE PRICE OF SEX is a film about sex trafficking in Eastern Europe. The women I followed over seven years grew up in villages similar to my own. Under Communism, we secretly hungered for opportunities in the West and when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, we finally had a chance to taste raw capitalism. Many in rural villages, however, lacked the skills and education to survive it. Girls, some still teenagers, became a commodity to be sold, exploited and discarded. Some call them foolish and unfortunate; others call them sex slaves, but they share the same story: desperate to leave, they were promised work abroad and instead sold to pimps to work in brothels and sex clubs. Over time I found young women who had survived and for seven years followed their stories to the countries where they were trafficked and back to their villages. This film is a testament to their courage – their willingness to expose the darkest and most haunting inner-workings of sexual slavery.

The women tell their own stories. My hope is that hearing them will bring change. I also found ways to expose the corruption among police, clients and pimps. I spent nearly a decade connecting the dots between the countries of origin – where the girls come from – and the countries of destination in the West and the Middle East – where they end up sold into prostitution against their will.

Sex trafficking is not a sheer equation of supply and demand. Add desperation, poverty, abuse, no access to justice and high levels of corruption and you'll be a step closer in understanding why sex slavery continues to thrive. By breaking down the price of sex to its most human elements, the viewers become witnesses. And the women end their silence.

- *Mimi Chakarova*

Filmmaker Bio

Mimi Chakarova received her BFA in photography from the San Francisco Art Institute and her MA in visual studies from UC Berkeley. She has had numerous solo exhibitions of her documentary projects on South Africa, Jamaica, Cuba, Kashmir and Eastern Europe.

“Capitalism, God, And A Good Cigar: Cuba Enters The Twenty-first Century,” published by Duke University Press in 2005, features over 75 of Chakarova's documentary photographs of Cuba.

Chakarova is currently working on two long-term projects that examine the conflict in Kashmir and sex trafficking of women in Eastern Europe. This is her thirteenth year teaching photography at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. Chakarova also taught at Stanford University's African and African American Studies and

Comparative Studies for Race and Ethnicity. She is the recipient of the 2003 Dorothea Lange Fellowship for outstanding work in documentary photography and the 2005 Magnum Photos Inge Morath Award for her work on sex trafficking. In 2007, Chakarova became the series curator of FRONTLINE/World's FlashPoint, featuring the work of established and emerging photographers from around the world.

In 2008, Chakarova's work on sex trafficking was awarded a People's Voice Webby. She was also a 2008 nominee for a News & Documentary Emmy® Award. Chakarova's work has *appeared in National Geographic, The New York Times Sunday Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, Ms., The Sunday Times Magazine, London, CBS News' "60 Minutes," PBS' FRONTLINE/World and the Center for Investigative Reporting among others.*

Reviews



Posted: Mon., Jul. 4, 2011, 6:30pm PT

The Price of Sex

Fearlessly researched and undeniably urgent, pic indefatigably follows the harrowing path of human sex trafficking.

By [Eddie Cockrell](#)

Fearlessly researched and undeniably urgent, "The Price of Sex" overcomes the listless narration of Bulgarian-born photographer-journalist-activist-helmer Mimi Chakarova to indefatigably follow the harrowing path of human sex trafficking, from the poorest corner of Eastern Europe to the flesh pits of Dubai and Istanbul. Pic earned Chakarova the Nestor Almendros Courage in Filmmaking award at the Human Rights Watch fest and placed solidly among the audience favorites at SilverDocs, suggesting U.S. distrib Women Make Movies could reap limited theatrical returns before strong ancillary exposure.

Befriending a handful of women from such countries as Romania and Moldova, Chakarova reveals how false promises of a brighter future can ensnare innocent victims in urban brothels far from home. Putting herself and her project at risk by networking with pimps, johns, activists and authorities of questionable allegiance, the helmer even goes undercover as a hooker for one dodgy evening in a Turkish nightclub. Tech package is tidy, though more polished, urgent narration would pick up the pace dramatically. Pic is the culmination of Chakarova's decade-long work on the subject in the form of a photo exhibit, tube specials and a multimedia Web series.

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117945597>

Reviews (cont.)



Human Rights Watch Int. Film Fest: The Price of Sex - directed by Mimi Chakarova

[The Price of Sex](#) is one of those films that haunt you. I watched it over a week ago and I still cannot get it out of my mind. The film painstakingly depicts the brutal reality of how easily women and girls are trafficked all across the world. This film in particular focuses on girls from Eastern Europe. It shows how lives are devastated, how women are brutalized and battered and dumped when they are finished with. It



shows the decimation of families and towns. And it shows the shattering of hopes and dreams for the future. The trafficking of women and girls is one of the most important human rights issues of our time. If this continues to go unchecked (and condoned by governments) we will lose generations of women all across the world to this abomination.

The film plays today, Saturday and tomorrow, Sunday in NYC at the [Human Rights Watch International Film Festival](#) in NYC. Tickets [here](#).

Director Mimi Chakarova answered some questions by email about her film.

Women and Hollywood: Can you tell us how you came up with the title?

Mimi Chakarova: I wanted a title that isn't one dimensional because the stories of the women in the film are complex and layered. "The Price of Sex" is a title that, in my opinion, gets your attention but also pushes you to think of what it means for women to be exploited as a commodity – the depth of the physical and psychological price they pay for being sold as slaves.

WaH: This film is very hard to watch because it seems hopeless and everyone is conspiring about these women. How did you persevere for so long, and how do you get people to really understand how big a problem this is?

MC: I know that “The Price of Sex” is a heavy film but I disagree about it being hopeless. The sheer presence of the young women who survived, their courageous act of breaking the silence of shame by speaking on camera about their lives, should give viewers a deeper appreciation of their resilience. My perseverance is nothing compared to what they’ve endured. I always thought that my job is to provide an outlet for what they had to say and to do my best to show people how corruption, poverty, a slanted justice system and ongoing complacency drive the sex slavery market. “The Price of Sex” is my hope of changing a system that destroys women. I hope others can follow in my footsteps. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed by the United Nations General Assembly after World War II. More than sixty years later we are witnessing the sale of human beings and the degradation of women’s bodies and minds. It is absolutely unacceptable to stand by and pretend that this doesn’t effect us all.

WaH: This film is another example of how poorly treated women and girls are. If a woman could be sold for the price of a gun or drugs how will we ever get people to treat women as equal citizens?

MC: We start at the very core of it all. The way we bring up our children—how we define “men” and “women.” We start by taking responsibility as witnesses, by believing in the need to change perceptions and elevate the public’s consciousness. And the first step is through information that is credible and lays out, in an accessible way, how the system of trafficking works. This is the very first step, in my opinion. The second step is a social movement that redefines how we treat one another and respects the human rights of women and children.

WaH: When you interviewed the high school girls they seemed to know that trafficking happens but were a bit in denial that it could happen to them. How can girls be educated to know the signs so that they won’t be lured into false promises?

MC: Our hope is to show “The Price of Sex” in schools throughout the villages and towns of Eastern Europe. We would like to partner with NGOs in the region that will use “The Price of Sex” as a prevention tool. But there is a bigger issue at work. As long as the dire economic conditions in developing countries continue to force young women to pack up and leave everything they know, no documentary films or public awareness campaigns will be fully effective. We have to ask ourselves, what’s the alternative that these girls have when there are no jobs or opportunities for them? The level of desperation clouds their judgment and pushes them to take irreversible risks.

WaH: One of the hardest parts of the movie is to realize that some women choose to stay in the sex industry because that is the better choice for them. Do you agree?

MC: Some women stay because they have nothing to return to. Some stay because of shame. Some, because they’re broken and don’t see themselves capable of leading normal lives. Many stay because they don’t want to die. The reasons vary depending on each woman, where she was sold and how she escaped her captors.

WaH: Do you have any thoughts on people who willingly choose to go into the sex industry and what is your position on legalizing prostitution.

MC: I have plenty of thoughts about this but I would rather stay focused on what “The Price of Sex” is about. It is NOT about women who make a choice to sell sex. It’s about slavery and a complete break down of the human spirit.

WaH: Human trafficking seems to be destroying a generation of women. How can this be stopped?

MC: I wish I could be optimistic and say that we can eradicate it. I don’t think we can completely stop human trafficking but I absolutely do believe that we can significantly reduce the numbers. The first step is informing people and starting a discourse that can influence behavior change. The second is providing opportunities for women—through education and work—so they don’t have to leave their communities and risk being trafficked. The third, and by far the least talked about, is reducing the demand by educating young men about the social and devastating consequences of purchased sex.

WaH: What do you want people to get out of the film?

MC: I would like them to learn, think, and take action. I encourage them to see the film and visit priceofsex.org (Note - don’t type in thepriceofsex.org or else you will get a porn site) to find out more about how each one of us can do our part.

WaH: Did making this film change you?

MC: Very much so. I’ve worked and thought about sex trafficking for eight years. It’s impossible for it not to change you. But I also think that the making of the film was my own personal protest against hypocritical and corrupt systems that exploit the most vulnerable. And it’s no longer my own burden to carry around. I am sharing it with others and urging them to join me by doing the same. I have the feeling that a number of people who watch “The Price of Sex” will be changed as well. I don’t think that this is a film that will leave your mind an hour or two after you’ve seen it. It should linger for days, and hopefully even longer.

WaH: What was the hardest part of making this film?

MC: The hardest part... Change comes too slow.

WaH: What advice do you have for other female filmmakers.

MC: Stay focused, respect the importance of your work and be kind and generous to other women, especially young, aspiring artists and storytellers.

See this film if you can.