



THE PRICE OF SEX

A film by Mimi Chakarova

WINNER OF THE 2011 Nestor Almendros Award
Human Rights Watch Film Festival

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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)

WORLD PREMIERE

Sarasota Film Festival

In competition: Best Documentary Feature

Saturday, April 9, 5:15 pm

Friday, April 15, 7:15 pm



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

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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.

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

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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.



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.*