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A Film by Michael Glawogger

2011 / Austria-Germany / 119 mins. / Color / 1.85:1 / in English, German, French, Thai, Japanese, Spanish and Bengali w/English subtitles

A Kino Lorber Release
from Kino Lorber, Inc.
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New York, NY 10018

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SYNOPSIS

WHORES' GLORY is a cinematic triptych on prostitution: three countries, three languages, three religions. In Thailand, women wait for clients behind glass panes, staring at reflections of themselves. In Bangladesh, men to a ghetto of love to satisfy their unfulfilled desires on indentured girls. And in Mexico, women pray to a female death to avoid facing their own reality. In worlds where the most intimate act has become a commodity, these women have physically and emotionally experienced everything that can happen between a man and a woman. For this they have always received money, but it has not made their lives rich in anything but stories.

CREDITS

Written and Directed by Michael Glawogger
Cinematography & Light: Wolfgang Thaler
Editing & Artistic Collaboration: Monika Willi
Original Sound: Paul Oberle, Ekkehart Baumung
Sound Mix & Sound Design: Tobias Fleig, Matz Müller, Erik Mischijew
Score: Pappik & Regener
Music Supervision & Clearance: Charlotte Goltermann & Tina Funk
Line Producer: Alfred Deutsch
Producers: Erich Lackner, Tommy Pridnig, Peter Wirthensohn
Producers (Germany): Mirjam Quinte, Pepe Danquart

MICHAEL GLAWOGGER

Michael Glawogger is a director, writer and cinematographer and his work in each of these roles displays a broad spectrum. His recent works range from the literary adaptation KILL DADDY GOODNIGHT (2009) and the quirky comedies SLUGS (2004) and CONTACT HIGH (2009) to his essayist documentaries MEGACITIES (1998) and WORKINGMAN'S DEATH (2005). He not only moves back and forth between cinematic forms and genres, but also between filmmaking, photography and writing – and between gentler and more forceful tones. With WHORES' GLORY he completed his trilogy on the world of work.

MEGACITIES and WORKINGMAN'S DEATH were awarded several prizes, include the Golden Gate Award in San Francisco, the German Film Award, awards in Gijon, London, Copenhagen, Leipzig, Durham and St. Petersburg as well as nominations by the Director's Guild of America and the European Film Prize. His feature films SLUMMING (2006) and KILL DADDY GOOD NIGHT (2009) screened at the Berlinale. In 2009 KILL DADDY GOOD NIGHT received the Grand Diagonale Prize in Graz for Best Film.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2009 Contact High (feature)
- 2009 Kill Daddy Good Night (feature)
- 2006 Slumming (feature)
- 2005 Workingman's Death (documentary)
- 2004 Slugs (feature)
- 2002 State of the Nation (documentary)
- 1999 France, Here We Come! (documentary)
- 1998 Megacities (documentary)
- 1996 Movies in the Mind (documentary)
- 1995 Die Ameisenstrasse (feature)

COMMENTS FROM MICHAEL GLAWOGER

Not Just Sex for Money

The topics in WHORES' GLORY are certainly loaded because everyone believes they know something about prostitution, particularly when he or she has never been to a brothel, or they know about it from the media or simply from second hand narration. I tried to go in with only one expectation: "this is certainly not going to be what I think it is." I have always felt that prostitution isn't only about paying somebody for sex. That would be too simple, because when negotiations are over and the deal is done, it would only be about two naked people doing the most intimate of acts. I wanted to try and explore more: what does it do to the hearts, minds, and souls on both sides?

Men and Women

When I start a film, I always need a premise that can be contradicted or confirmed by reality. For WHORES' GLORY, I chose the theory that the female/male relationship of any given culture can be depicted in prostitution as in everyday life, only dealings move much faster. For example, in Mexico City, there is a back alley where prostitutes parade all day long. Men lean against the walls, standing there watching this parade of the dolled up working girls.

But the rule of the game is that the men are now allowed to openly choose. They can try to make eye contact, or wink at a girl, maybe sometimes give her a little sign. But it is the woman who has to stop and start to talk with the man. Then when they come to an agreement, the man can take her to a nearby hotel room. This ritual is the perfect mirror of how men and women relate to each other in a strict Catholic society. In WHORES' GLORY, you can see similar rituals and situations. The glass separation between the men and women in Thailand; the men in Bangladesh arriving in groups and choosing the girls together; the Mexican men cruising in cars for the women of their choice.

Locations Depicting the Experience

The most important thing for me was to find places where I could cinematically depict the experience that I want to share with the audience. For example, the Fish Tank in Bangkok separates men and women with a thick piece of glass. Only the men can see the women properly. The mirror-like glass allows the women to only see mostly themselves. By watching the "surface" of this place, you can already detect a lot of details. A place like that makes sense in a cinematographic way. Faridpur's huge prostitution compound, "City of Joy", was also a location that inspired by cinematographically, as well as the dusty roads of Reynosa's La Zona...It was also important for me to show differences in mindsets on the basis of sexuality. The Thailand segment shows a relatively less complex, almost light-footed kind of prostitution that has a certain friendly edge. In Bangladesh, it goes a bit deeper because it's very much rooted in the society, and in Mexico it is actually about death, about an all-dominating desire for death.

Two General Procedures

WHORES' GLORY took four years from start to finish. Pre-production was about two months

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and shooting about 10 days for each segment. Production was very different in each country, but there were two general procedures: getting permission and convincing the working girls. Even once you get all the right permits, however, you don't know yet if a single woman will cooperate. That's when the real work starts. For example, in Faridpur, the "City of Joy" compound had over 600 prostitutes. I had to meet each and every one of them. I had to find out if they were interesting enough for the film. Then I had to build trust with gifts and photographs. All without knowing if they would actually be willing to appear in the film. The more I time I spent there, the more trustworthy I became. But the moment you show up with a camera, everything changes: it brings tension...

In Thailand, it took almost two years to get permission but from then on it was all very smooth and businesslike. The "boss" sets the rules and everyone follows, working girls and filmmakers alike. No discussions. Mexico was somewhat similar to Bangladesh: a mixture of money and trust determined what was allowed and what wasn't.

A Place of Secrecy

All of the working girls were initially reluctant to speak on film. A brothel is THE place where you are most unwelcome with a film camera. It is a place of secrecy and privacy for both workers and customers. So in the beginning nobody wants to be filmed or photographed. Establishing trust is a very long process. It took a lot of time, patience and persistence. I had to promise the women that the film would not be shown in wide theatrical release in their home countries.

With the customers, it was sometimes more difficult because they were not usually the same ones every day. But like the workers, frequent customers opened up once they got the feeling we were not there to condemn what they do. In some cases we couldn't film because not all the customers wanted to be in the film. Then we selected the ones who were willing and for that period of time nobody else could enter the establishment. But there is no situation in the film that would not take place like in the way it is shown.

The Nature of Prostitution

Every prostitute wants to be paid for everything that has remotely anything to do with interpersonal contact. In WHORES' GLORY, there is not a single interview that was not paid for in some form. This was necessary because we were essentially taking away work time from the women. Time is an important factor in a brothel. If you don't let customers in for an hour, that's a very specific loss of earnings. We had to pay for the trust that we had established.

Payment is the nature of prostitution. Even if a prostitute has fun having sex with you, you'll still have to pay for it. And that's why you'll also have to pay for their stories. They don't tell them to you because you have such a sweet face. In a way, it was like being a customer with a camera. You pay; you get service. If they like you, then they might even open up to you. But if you only pay, you get standard answers.

Only A Customer

It is not easy to understand these women because their actual job is about being fake – to fake flirting, to fake lust, to fake interest. But in all this faking, they still deal with real people and they often don't realize that they are not faking it anymore. So they tell you one story today and another story the next day. At the same time, it's not really lying. No day should be the same and no story is so good that it cannot be retold.

So I decided to believe everything they said, no matter how contradictory it might be, because that's where the truth is with these women. The truth is a big fat lie. But that doesn't make it less true. I think that goes as close as understanding goes because I can never really walk in their shoes. The women themselves made sure of defining a certain basic distance. Even as a filmmaker, in the end for them I was always only a customer.

Putting Preconceptions Aside

The daily routine rules in a brothel, and that's exactly what it looks like, in all its possible facets, in *WHORES' GLORY*. I am simply showing what I discovered. *WHORES' GLORY* has its violent and sad sides, it depicts human trafficking, drug addiction, a brutal reality that is often very close to what one imagines. I have left nothing out intentionally because I found it to be bad, but I also didn't make it a point to explore prostitution in its criminal form. If you go there thinking prostitution is a crime, you will find crime. If you go there thinking prostitution is glamorous and beautiful, you will find glamour and beauty. If you think it's all about sex, you'll find sex.

But if you go with those preconceptions, the working girls will not relate to you. They only start to really speak when they get the feeling that you are really interested in what it's all about. I had to put preconceptions aside. *WHORES' GLORY* opens up a room where the women can speak, but the room is still my perspective. I think it is obvious that this film was made by a man, a man who looks at working girls and tries to understand how it feels to do this kind of work, day by day.

Judgment Clouds Vision

I consider myself to be non-judgmental. Of course, it gets tough when dealing with people who are outright criminals. The madams in Bangladesh are very brutal in their business procedures. They are also capable of being very warm-hearted mothers. But I experienced that side of them, because I wanted to go deeper. If you start to judge, your vision gets clouded. Taking on a subject like prostitution, I sought to film and offer images that would speak to the audience.

I am aware that everybody has moral, political and often personal issues about prostitution, and that certain images in *WHORES' GLORY* are upsetting. But for me it is not about the good and the bad. Prostitution is not to be condemned nor defended. Prostitution simply is. It is like war. War is. I can cry a million times that war is cruel, bad and inhumane. But war still is. It is much the same with prostitution. It's a dead end to say simply that it's bad. It's way more interesting to ask why it exists, how it works and what it does to all of us. There is not one region on this planet where prostitution does not exist, and even in the face of the death penalty it is still exercised. Because of its longevity, it seems prostitution is a need a deep

human need and I wanted to explore this need.

Challenges

In Thailand, the high risk was mainly if the “boss” got nervous, because then we would be kicked out with nothing but lost time and spent money. There were also very strong restrictions imposed by the manager of the establishment. For example, we weren't allowed to set up any spotlights. However, that ended up creating a very interesting lighting situation, because the glass box was so bright and the client space was so dark.

Bangladesh from the standpoint of a filmmaker is maddening. It's a place that is so alive it simply can't be controlled. You can only hope that after some time people won't care that you're there. One can hardly speak of the logistical problems, because things such as logistics don't even exist there in that sense.

And in Mexico, perhaps the biggest obstacle was the complete dependence of the women on their pimps. When they were told that they weren't allowed to shoot with us, even the women who were our good friends slammed the door in our faces every time.

The Music

The choice of music was very important to me because both the environment and the lives of the women have a lot to do with music. But you're always walking on the edge because music in documentary film often has a very interpretive effect. But I increasingly began to realize that this is not just a film about prostitution, but also about the man-woman relationship. Which then meant for me that there could only love songs and duets. It didn't matter whether the music sounded interpretive. And then my editor and I totally went for it and began listening to really loud, mostly angry love songs and very affectionate, searching duets. One of the songs is a duet that is based on a poem that I wrote while watching the rushes from Bangladesh. Now the soundtrack is a mix of songs, written score and also the music that is heard and played on site, and it establishes a structure to my musical commentary and the reality.

Whores' Glory

The title WHORES' GLORY is meant as a gesture of respect toward the working girls of the world; not to condemn them, not to pity them, not to criminalize them, but to actually honor for them for what they go through doing what they do. The word glory also has a religious suggestion and in the process of making the film that word led me to the decision that the movie should be like a triptych – a painting for an altar. I took closer looks at paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and saw that these touch subjects closely related to my film. So my triptych deals with three cultures, three religions.

Religion and Sex

I think that God's most terrible punishment on man is religion. Women who work as prostitutes are not spared. I found that the tone of the religion set the stakes. In Thailand, the relatively open-minded religious values give room for many ways of thinking. In Bangladesh it keeps people in their places with no room to move. In Mexico at least death offers a solution, but only because death is a woman. As always, contradictions occur. Although it's totally against

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their religion, in Bangladesh, men allow a female-dominated society inside the walls of the brothel compound. Catholicism tends to spice up sexuality with guilt. The quality of sex rises with the quantity of guilt and there is a lot of pleasure in forgiveness. Buddhists don't make such a fuss about it. Sex is like eating and drinking, a necessity and nothing to feel guilty about.

Trilogy

WHORES' GLORY is also a triptych inside a sort of trilogy, along with two of my previous documentaries – MEGACITIES and WORKINGMAN'S DEATH. I think all three films are simply about life on earth. You can certainly watch these movies as three parts of a bigger scheme. My observation of three different themes; the kind of observation that undertakes not to go out into the world to see if it is as you think it might be, but rather to clean the slate and erase the disk before you go out and look at how it really is. And a trilogy can be continued. Douglas Adams proved it; he called his novel "Mostly Harmless" the fourth part of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy trilogy.

THAILAND

The Fish Tank

The Fish Tank is a very traditional place run by Thai Chinese. It is a form of prostitution that is deeply rooted in Thai society and there are hundreds of similar places throughout the city. Since prostitution is prohibited and the King says it doesn't even exist, these places started out as actual massage parlors with the color of the girls' numbers referring to the kind of massage they give. The establishment shown in WHORES' GLORY is fairly upper middle class and it is in a district with many similar places. It's the type of place where local businessmen also go to have a drink or eat something. Massage parlor culture has nothing to do with the so-called sex tourism that Thailand is infamous for.

Supporting the Family

In a Bangkok establishment like the one featured in WHORES' GLORY, the workers come from all backgrounds, from model-actress types to illiterate country girls. It's good money for the right young and pretty types. They can make a decent living and support their family. That is a very important reason for prostitution in Thailand. It is expected of these girls to help support their families. However, they tend to never admit at home what they do in their job.

Dogs Fuck in Front of Brothel

It was one of those moments that you can call real documentary. Those dogs started to hump one another in front of the "High Class" massage parlor. All those dogs had been around while we were shooting there. So it was a magical moment. I think of that scene more like a painting entitled, "Dogs fuck in front of brothel." There is no metaphor behind it. As Samuel Beckett said: "No symbols where none intended".

BANGLADESH

City of Joy

Prostitution was legalized in 2000 in Faridpur (governed by Islamic law). The economy in Faridpur is almost entirely dependent on prostitution and hotels. Faridpur's "City of Joy" is a huge, multi-story brothel where 600-800 prostitutes live and work in confined spaces. In Bangladesh, there are higher and lower establishments, but it would be very hard for a Western eye to detect the difference. I can after having spent many months researching various places there. But they are all ghetto compounds. They are places where the girls work and live, and are sometimes even born there. They are usually sold to those places. They eventually become "mothers", and then they buy their own girls, get old, and die. Up until a decade ago, they were not allowed to go outside. They were not even allowed to wear shoes so that everybody could recognize them as prostitutes.

A Functioning Social Structure

Regardless of age, girls must start working when they get their first menstrual period. There is of course a law on Bangladesh against underage prostitution, but in compounds like the one seen in WHORES' GLORY, a girl's working age has been decided that way for more than a century. It is very hard to get it out of the mothers' heads that this shouldn't be. For them, a girl is a woman old enough as soon as she has her first period. In these ghettos, a woman usually works until she is 35-40. She is expected to save enough money to buy her own girls and become a madam. If she doesn't do that, then she will struggle as an older prostitute and eventually become a cook or maid in the ghetto at age 55-60. The aged are not expelled from the functioning social structure. The elderly will at least get food and a mat to sleep on.

Sold by Anybody

Girls in Bangladesh can be sold by pretty much anybody. There are scouts at bus stations in every city looking for lost or unaccompanied young girls. They pretend to help them, then sell them. Any man can sell his girlfriend, especially if he has had pre-marital sex with her. Women usually sell their stepdaughters as soon as they have the chance. But for a mother it is still better to have her own daughter inside the brothel, and then she doesn't have to buy one. They sometimes make the effort to educate their daughters outside to become part of society, but if money runs low, they call them back inside.

MEXICO

The Sex Scene

Originally, I wanted to make a film about prostitution where you don't see or know what's actually going on behind the closed doors. But to exclude a sex scene from WHORES' GLORY would have meant excluding a major topic. It was clear that I wouldn't be able to film secretly or without the consent of all parties. I shot a sex scene only in Mexico for practical reasons. The girls in Thailand probably would not have minded by the local censorship bureau would have, and in Bangladesh, this would be out of the question...What's interesting about the sex scene is that everything between the flirtatious worker and the customer changes the second the door is closed. Their exchange becomes immediately businesslike without being harsh or brutal. Even when the time is up, she's strict but remains friendly: "Goodbye, come back when you have more money...sweetheart."

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La Zona De La Tolerancia

Everybody in La Zona of Reynosa (900,000-inhabitant city near the Texas border) does drugs, especially crack. It's a place controlled by an organization called Las Zetas, loosely related to the Camorra. They are in the middle of a bitter drug war with the Mexican military. Access to drugs is very easy in this somewhat lawless zone. Locally, it is known as "La Zona de le tolerancia". Many of the working girls go there not only to work as prostitutes, they often try to escape the law for every reason imaginable. One of them being heavy drug use. As long as they stay inside nobody will bother them. The entrance to La Zona is protected by barriers and is constantly monitored by the police.

Beauty in the Most Tragic Moments

In La Zona, it's not a question of hope or hopelessness, because everybody hopes for something different. The world will never be a better place because people do only good things to each other. There is beauty in the most tragic moments and there is aggression and boredom in the ordinary. There is hope in war and war in hope. Films that offer resolutions are nothing but bad art, because they cannot truly explore the diversity of the human soul.

MUSIC

"Taxi"

performed by Tricky

written by Adrian Nicholas Matthew Thaws

(c) Island Music Ltd.

(P) 1998 - Island Records Ltd.

Courtesy of Universal Music Publishing GmbH and Universal Music International Division - a division of Universal Music GmbH

"Miracle"

performed by CocoRosie

written by Bianca Casady and Sierra Casady

(c) 2007 Touch And Go Records, Inc.

"Honey Or Tar"

performed by CocoRosie

written by Bianca Casady and Sierra Casady

(c) 2005 Touch And Go Records, Inc.

"Army Of Lovers"

performed by Bunny Lake

lyrics: C. Fuchs, music: T. Rotschopf, B. Heinrauch

(P) 2009 - Universal Music GmbH, Austria

Courtesy of Edition Stumm/Mute Song International Ltd. and Universal Music International Division - a division of Universal Music GmbH

"Beautiful Boyz"

performed by CocoRosie
written by Bianca Casady and Sierra Casady
(c) 2005 Touch And Go Records, Inc.

"Where We Meet"

performed by Maike Rosa Vogel with Konstantin Gropper
Music: Maike Rosa Vogel,
Lyrics: Michael Glawogger
Courtesy of Edition Stumm/Mute Song International Ltd. and Vogel Musik GbR

"Kobita Porar Prohor"

performed by Samina Chowdhury
produced by World Music
(c) World Music
Courtesy of World Music

"Piece Of Glass"

performed by Maike Rosa Vogel
written by Maike Rosa Vogel
Courtesy of Edition Stumm/Mute Song International Ltd. and Vogel Musik GbR

"Dear Darkness"

performed by PJ Harvey
written by Polly Jean Harvey
(c) Hot Head Music Ltd.
(P) 2007 - Universal Island Records Ltd.
Courtesy of Universal Music Publishing GmbH and Universal Music International Division - a division of Universal Music GmbH

"Machacalo"

performed by El grupo musical del "Sembrador, A Ritmo de Mi Violin"
performed by Nelson Kanzela
written by Nelson Cancela Gacia
(c) Artecuba
Courtesy of Universal Music Publishing GmbH and Nelson Kanzela

"Snake"

performed by PJ Harvey
written by Polly Jean Harvey
(c) Hot Head Music Ltd.
(P) 1993 - Island Records Ltd.
Courtesy of Universal Music International
Division - a division of Universal Music GmbH

"Gema"

performed by El Quinteto de la Zona

written by L. Cisneros Alvear

(c) by Promotora Hispano Americana de Musica S.A., Mexico

(c) by Peer International Corp., USA

Courtesy of Peermusic (Germany) GmbH, Hamburg

"The Whore's Hustle And The Hustler's Whore"

performed by PJ Harvey

written by Polly Jean Harvey

(c) 1999 Hot Head Music Ltd. / (P) 2000 - Universal Island Records Ltd.

Courtesy of EMI Music Publishing Germany GmbH and Universal Music International Division

a division of Universal Music GmbH

"Las Mananitas"

performed by El Quinteto de la Zona

Mexican Traditional