

KATHRYN A. SLOAN: *Runaway Daughters: Seduction, Elopement, and Honor in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

Kathryn A. Sloan's *Runaway Daughters* is a study of the highly ambiguous crime and social drama of *rapto de seducción* in nineteenth-century Oaxaca, capital city of the southern Mexican state of the same name. Defined in the 1871 Mexican Penal Code as "the abduction of a woman against her will by the use of physical violence, deception, or seduction in order to satisfy 'carnal desires' or to marry" (1), the charge of *rapto* provided ample terrain for the contestation of gender roles, parental authority, sexual and family honor, and the role of the state in defining adulthood and marriage. *Rapto* cases might involve sexual assault and coercion, as the parents of the young women often charged. But they might also be instances of consensual elopement (legally defined as *rapto* if the girl was under 16 years of age) in which minors "employed the drama of *rapto* as a strategy to defy parental authority and sometimes earn legal emancipation to make independent choices about their sexual or conjugal arrangements" (4).

Sloan analyzes 212 court cases in which young men were charged with *rapto*, usually by their partner's mother or father, to explore social understandings of sexuality and honor, intergenerational conflict, and "the relationship of the state and its lower-status citizens" (5), especially young, urban, working-class, indigenous men and women. Spanning 1841 to 1919, most of the cases come from the period of the *Porfiriato* (1876-1911), when the Mexican state was attempting to expand its reach into the everyday lives of its citizens, through the regulation of property rights, civil marriage, education, hygiene, religious practice, and family life. Sloan argues that judges often sided with minors in *rapto* cases, the young people's desire to marry against the wishes of their parents corresponding with the state's interest in promoting civil marriage and the ideals of individual freedom and personal autonomy. In addition to the court records, Sloan artfully mines penny-press chapbooks and broadsheets to explore popular understandings of love and courtship, sexuality and honor, and appropriate gender and familial roles.

The gist of Sloan's argument is that young Oaxaqueños, especially adolescent girls and young women, could use the cultural practice of *rapto*, as well as any legal proceedings that might result, as a source of empowerment, to escape onerous workloads, employment in domestic service, and sexual abuse. Even as girls and women deviated little from patriarchal discourse on gender roles in their court testimony, she contends, they and their partners "recognized their status as individuals with rights and guarantees and could wield these concepts effectively in their dispositions and arguments before the judge" (154). While

Sloan makes a compelling argument that *rapto* could be, and often was, a matter of intergenerational conflict rather than assault or coercion, her selection of cases tends to reinforce her conclusions. Of the 212 cases she considered, only 16 of the young women involved claimed sexual assault, and even these women acknowledged the defendants as their “suitors” (9).

Runaway Daughters provides a well-written and lively account of daily life in nineteenth-century Oaxaca, and especially of the private and public lives of its adolescent residents. It is a welcome contribution to the historiography of gender roles and family relations. Given the clarity of its argument and prose, it will be of interest to generalists and appropriate for adoption in upper-level undergraduate as well as graduate courses.

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PATTY KELLY: *Lydia's Open Door: Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

In the introduction to *Lydia's Open Door*—her brilliant ethnographic study of the *Zona Galáctica*, a modern state-regulated brothel in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Mexico—Patty Kelly notes matter-of-factly that “this is a book about women’s sexual labor in neoliberal Mexico” (2). Although it sounds straightforward enough, the statement foregrounds two contentious debates, one among feminist scholars over prostitution versus sex work and the other among social scientists over the pros and cons of globalization. Kelly’s insightful engagement with these questions not only sheds considerable light on state-sponsored sexual labor in southern Mexico (and on state-sponsored sexual labor in general), it also provides useful correctives to the acrimonious theorizing that has come to characterize these two debates. And Kelly’s potent combination of theoretical engagement, ethnographic richness, careful contextualization, and lively style make *Lydia's Open Door* an important and welcome contribution to scholarship on prostitution/sex work, neoliberal modes of governance, and the feminization of poverty.

The book is comprised of a preface, introduction, seven chapters, conclusion, and epilogue. The preface locates the ethnographer and her project; the epilogue follows up on several of her principal informants. As these short framing sections make clear, *Lydia's Open Door* offers little of the methodological soul searching that has come to characterize so much contemporary ethnography. Although she operates firmly within a distinguished tradition of feminist ethnography, Kelly makes no apologies for her role in the production of knowledge about socially marginalized subjects, nor does she disguise her involvement with and affection