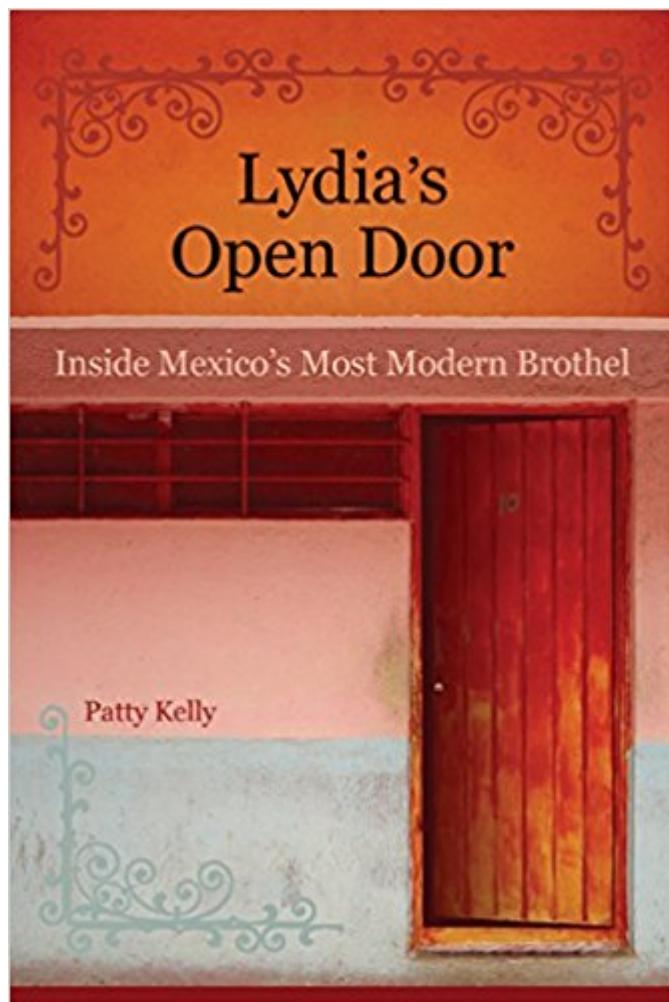


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Lydia's Open Door: Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel



Synopsis

In this groundbreaking ethnographic study, Patty Kelly examines the lives of the women who work in the Zona Galactica, a state-run brothel in Chiapas's capital city. By delving into lives that would otherwise go unremarked, Kelly documents the modernization of the sex industry during the neoliberal era in the city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez and illustrates how state-regulated sex became part of a broader effort by government officials to bring modernity to Chiapas, one of Mexico's poorest and most conflicted states. Kelly's innovative approach locates prostitution in a political-economic context by treating it as work. Most valuably, she conveys her analysis through vivid portraits of the lives of the sex workers themselves and shows how the women involved are neither victims nor heroines.

Book Information

Paperback: 296 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; 1 edition (April 2, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520255364

ISBN-13: 978-0520255364

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #168,042 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #157 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America #160 in Books > History > Americas > Mexico #312 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Sexuality

Customer Reviews

“Effective and insightful.” (Melissa Ditmore Spread Magazine 2009-01-23)

“This exceptional book makes several key contributions to the field and shows how freedom and anxiety, and the market and morality, tensely coexist in the business of sex. . . . Kelly's analysis is conveyed through vivid portraits of the lives of sex workers, showing that the women involved are neither victims nor heroines but something else: actors caught between agency and constraint.” (Roger N. Lancaster, author of *The Trouble with Nature*) In this tour de force of feminist anthropology, Patty Kelly gives her heart to the remarkable women who toil in the bawdy sweatshops of the Zona Galactica, a 'reformed' red-light district in the Chiapas capital of

Tuxtla Gutiérrez. In fact, as Kelly shows, it is just the ultimate low-wage industrial district. Mike Davis, author of *Planet of Slums* and *In Praise of Barbarians*; The clarity of Kelly's perspective is neither apologetic, nor presumptive (as is usually the case); her focus is always on the political context of these women's lives. Patty Kelly writes like a poet and novelist, so much so that this work begs to be a movie. Carol Leigh, a.k.a. *Scarlot Harlot*, author of *Unrepentant Whore*

I bought this as research material for a book I'm writing. The factual background is helpful but oftentimes the author gets too bogged down trying to make her socio-political arguments. It would've been a much better read without all of that mess thrown in. Still, interesting information about a topic that doesn't receive much attention.

There must be a heroine or victory somewhere, but i missed her.

I didn't learn a darn thing from this book. Loved it anyway. Of course, not many readers will be as familiar with Latin America's prostitution ambiente as i am. I've been in 'regulated', sanitized brothels just to visit with the women in one country and i've hired independent street workers to go to dinner with me elsewhere, and eventually i lived in the middle of them for seven months. You might say i've had much the same experience she did, and come to many of the same conclusions. I am giving four stars, though, not five, for the book reads like an incomplete work, too full of speculation that passes for explanation. The author's understanding of the phrase 'free market' is a prime example: she misuses it repeatedly by talking about uncharitable competition in the rat cage of La Zona as a 'free market' or -gag- even applying this to the NAFTA travesty. Yikes! I'm no proponent of capitalism per se, but don't attack it by holding up a paper tiger! Her critique is savvy on the ground, but her language is gibberish on this topic. Of Gender and Power she has little to say and spends many words saying it. What i gathered was that she acknowledges the futility and hypocrisy of binary, antagonistic debates. She is essentially a courageous and good person and therefore cannot fully accept post-feminist tropes. Yet she fails repeatedly to recognize the simple, living, breathing, two-legged proofs of the fact that traditional masculine roles are as insufferable as traditional feminine roles. She comes close, though, when discussing Pepe the partnerless gay man, mandilanes (hen-pecked husbands), and boys unhappy with their introduction to sexuality via prostitutes. In each of these cases her habitual explanations and theorizing fall flat, and she sometimes admits intellectual defeat: a great strength. So in the end, i'm giving it four stars. It is

written from a feminist perspective that fails only in being uninformed by an equally enlightened masculinist perspective. If i had been there to offer content editing, it would be a five star book. ;-)

Prostitution is already a pretty controversial topic in and of itself, but add in the politics neoliberalism along with the idea of a state controlled brothel and prostitution becomes an interesting web of societal issues. In Lydia's Open Door - Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel, author Patty Kelly details her anthropological study of "legalized" prostitution in Tuxtla Gutiérrez the capital of Chiapas, Mexico. Avoiding the cold detachment of a social scientist, Kelly dives into her exploration of Zona Galactica, a state-sponsored brothel, with an emotional zeal that creates a captivating narrative. While, Lydia's Open Door focuses largely on the activity that takes place behind the Zona Galactica (as well as the underlying social factors that force it behind those gates), Kelly takes a holistic look at prostitution, the women of Zona Galactica, the reasons for their role as sex workers, their family life, and the politics of prostitution. The vividness of Kelly's account, which could only be provided by her willingness to maintain close proximity to the worker's of Zona Galactica, provides a level of understanding that may not otherwise be available. I was struck by Kelly's willingness to immerse herself in her work and to understand the nature of sex work not only on a societal or institutional level, but on a personal level. By bringing both the mechanics of prostitution and the personalities of those involved to the table, she provides the background necessary to open up a meaningful discourse about the issues looming in the air regarding sex work. While Lydia's Open Door focuses on the forces that create and maintain prostitution in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, its applicability is much wider as it provides a comprehensive examination into sex work. I would recommend this book to any aspiring social scientist or anyone looking to better understand the dynamics of sex work.

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