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Into the Galactic Zone

Managing Sexuality in Neoliberal Mexico

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> All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?
>
> —Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

On a warm August day in 2003 Teresa Aleman Che, who worked as a prostitute, was killed by a client. It is said that he stabbed her in the neck, though the story is told differently each time. Those who saw him flee say that Teresa's killer must have been a police officer or a soldier, for he had the telltale crew cut. The murderer was never caught. People were afraid of Teresa's blood, fearful of contracting HIV, although there was no evidence that she was HIV-positive. She died quickly.

The story is not a surprising one. Lurid, almost pornographic, color photographs of dead women, often sex workers who have been murdered, haunt the back pages of local newspapers in urban Mexico, their bodies twisted into unnatural poses only a corpse could maintain. The murders of female sex workers make the papers not because such events are rare or considered important and thus newsworthy. Nor do they elicit public outrage. Their deaths simply make good copy. There is often no investigation, no organizing on the part of mothers or feminist groups—only images in the local papers.

Of interest in this chapter is not how the deaths of Teresa and women like her are treated by the media, law enforcement, and society. The killings of women who work as prostitutes, although sometimes sensationalized, are sadly mundane. What is unusual in this case is where Teresa died. Not hidden away in the back room of an illicit *nightclub.* Not in the street. Not in

a hotel or an *autohotel* (which has covered parking for cars, ensuring total privacy) where sex workers and clients meet.

Teresa was murdered in her room in the *Zona Galáctica*, a legal, supermodern, state-regulated brothel where municipal police search clients before they enter, where sex workers undergo mandatory testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases in the on-site Anti-Venereal Medical Service (SMAV), where sex workers are registered with the municipal government, their highly stigmatized work made legal, though not respectable, by state authorities.[1] The entire complex is surrounded by a high fence, designed in a panoptical fashion, surveillance and discipline being its central architectural features.

Constructed with public funds in 1991, the Galactic Zone is located in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, a city of some five hundred thousand people and the capital of Chiapas, one of Mexico's poorest states best known for impoverishment, ruins, and rebellion. The Galáctica, as it is known by locals, was the dream of Governor Patrocinio González Garrido, a *priista* (or member of the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional], Mexico's long-ruling center-right party) whose political career was characterized by human rights abuses, strict crackdowns on rebellion and dissent, and the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. The creation of the Zona Galáctica may be seen as part of a larger state effort to modernize Chiapas. Just as the state began to cut support for subsistence and small-scale agriculturalists in favor of agribusiness (ravaging rural economies and engendering increased rural to urban migration), it also took a renewed interest in the social and sexual lives of Chiapas's urban working classes. By regulating and controlling prostitutes (long linked to deviance and disorder), the state hoped to discipline and bring into the formal modern market an activity that had previously existed in the margins, beyond state control.

In an era marked by global neoliberalism and its attendant privatization, there has been much discussion about the weakening power of the state (Otero 1996; Teichman 1996). Scholars and popular mythology alike have suggested that economic globalization is engendering a "stateless" world in which federal governments will become all but obsolete.[2] But neoliberalism is less about the withdrawal of the state from public life than about changing arenas of state interest and action. Far from disappearing, under neoliberalism, the state is responsible for creating and maintaining institutions, laws, and a social order that support free markets (Harvey 2004:2). What is seen in the Zona Galáctica is a renewed focus of state energies toward the social and symbolic control of disenfranchised populations, specifically of the sociosexual and economic lives of Tuxtla's working classes.

Accordingly, this chapter questions the ostensible social and public health benefits that accompany the state-regulation of prostitution in southern Mexico. I argue that as the relationship between commercial sex and the state grows ever more intimate in southern Mexico, reports of the death of the state under global neoliberalism have been, to borrow a phrase, greatly exaggerated.

Sexual Commerce and the State in Modern Mexico: A Brief History of a Changing Relationship

Mexico is hardly unique in its politicization, scrutiny, and contestation of gendered and sexual practices and beliefs during periods of politico-economic transformation. Concern with *mujeres publicas* (public women) was intensified in the years before and after the Mexican Revolution (1911–1917). During the regime of dictator Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) the state sought to modernize through economic liberalism (the antecedent to contemporary neoliberalism) and advocated the eradication of vice and the inculcation of values such as family, thrift, and hygiene (French 1992:529).[3] Political strategizing, intimidation, and sometimes force were used to maintain power. The "Porfiriato," as the period came to be known, was heavily influenced by rationalism and science. Not unlike neoliberal Mexico, during the Porfiriato industry and foreign investment grew (aided in part by an 1883 agrarian law that opened rural lands to foreign companies). Not unlike today, a move from subsistence to commercial farming compelled many to seek their fortunes in rapidly industrializing cities. But the costs of modernization (then as now) were steep for many Mexicans who were increasingly impoverished by the brutality and socioeconomic transformation that marked the time.

For poor women in urban Mexico, prostitution offered a solution. Constructed as promiscuous deviants beyond redemption, during the Porfiriato women over age fourteen who worked as registered prostitutes were subject to the *Reglamento para el ejercicio de la prostitución en México* (Regulation for the exercise of prostitution in Mexico) which called for medical and legal surveillance. An updated 1898 Reglamento increased the minimum legal age to sixteen (Bliss 2001:32)

Mexico's late-nineteenth-century prostitution policy was intended to protect the citizenry from then debilitating sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea and syphilis, as treatments at the time were not widely available. Women suspected of working as clandestine prostitutes (being out alone on the street at night could be enough to raise suspicion) were subject to arrest

and compulsory medical inspection and registration. Porfirian values of female honor and purity did not extend to the poor women who worked in urban Mexico's bordellos, hotels, and streets. Though predicated on ideas of modernity and hygiene (social and otherwise), the enforcement of the *Reglamento* and the prostitute's presumed moral failings were also marked by religion; Catholicism's strict sexual morality and patriarchal *doble moral* (moral double standard) all but guaranteed the marginalization of women who sold sex (Bliss 2001:29).

The Porfiriato bred both marginalization and rebellion. The ensuing Mexican Revolution that followed left more than one million Mexicans dead; exiled to Europe, Porfirio Díaz survived the upheaval. The revolutionary state that replaced the Porfiriato took a different approach to prostitution and its practitioners; the "modern" and "revolutionary" Mexican society sought an eventual end to state-regulated prostitution, seen as a distasteful remnant of the Porfirian state. Prostitutes were then viewed as victims of poverty, male lust, and Porfirian false modesty; those who, as historian Katherine Bliss writes, could be rehabilitated through revolutionary social change:

> Legislators, public officials, and private citizens alike invoked the "redemption" of "fallen women" as their *cause célèbre*, promoting legislation to ban procuring, to train women to work in alternative occupations, to persuade clients to restrain their tendency toward sexual promiscuity, and to abolish the Reglamento itself. (Bliss 2001:1)

But the revolutionary version of the *Reglamento para el ejercicio de la prostitución* created by the new government in 1926 was still somewhat rooted in beliefs regarding acceptable male promiscuity and enforced female purity (prostitutes withstanding). While the new revolutionary government continued the medical and legal surveillance of female prostitutes in the name of public health, revolutionary reformers also sought to transform *male* sexual promiscuity, reform public women, and reframe sexuality itself as a scientific rather than moral issue, thereby creating what they regarded as a modern nation (Bliss 2001). But revolutionary social reformers, Bliss (2001) writes, "had long deplored prostitution because of what they perceived to be its negative implications for economic development and national progress" (214–215). Continuing debates concerning state-regulated prostitution, along with the activism of both feminists and eugenicists, eventually led to the abolition of the *Reglamento* in 1940. But the temporary suspension of state-regulated prostitution did not, as Bliss notes, put an end to prostitution.

In contemporary Mexico government-regulated prostitution exists in thirteen of the nation's thirty-one states, including Chiapas. The creation of the Galactic Zone in 1991 coincided with a period of rapid economic change, cultural transformation, simmering political hostilities, and the militarization of civil society (not unlike the Liberal period of a century earlier). Unlike the social reformers of revolutionary Mexico, political elites like Governor González Garrido viewed state-regulated prostitution in neoliberal Chiapas as a path *to* modernity and development. Such policies indicate great ambivalence toward sex workers, who are stigmatized by those who seek to control prostitution (and by society at large) and at the same time are viewed as capable of redemption through, as I heard many times, "reintegration into normal society." Prostitution remains a controversial issue in Tuxtla, even within the municipal government itself. During a meeting I attended with political leaders at City Hall one afternoon, the mayor, a gynecologist and a member of the conservative political party Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, whose members are known as *panistas*), described prostitution as an "economic and a moral problem." The mayor's *panista* colleague, the municipal director of public health (also a gynecologist), strongly disagreed, insisting that sex work is purely a socioeconomic issue, outside the moral realm.

That, during the period of my fieldwork, Tuxtla's mayor and its director of public health were both gynecologists should not go without remark. Being a politician and gynecologist is not unusual in Mexico; in fact, the mayor's father was Tuxtla's first *panista*-gynecologist-mayor in the 1970s. As sociologist Maria Mies (1986) has observed, gynecologists, along with the state, are the "guardians of modern patriarchy" (24–25). When gynecologists run the state, such guardianship is furthered. Doctors and public health specialists have long been involved in political affairs in Mexico—during the revolutionary period, such men (referred to as *higiensistas*), along with criminologists and social workers, were at the forefront of a "social hygiene" movement that sought to control, among other things, female prostitution, sexually transmitted illness, and the "white slave trade" (Bliss 2001:15).

The Birth of the Galactic Zone

In keeping with federal neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s, Chiapas's Governor González Garrido (1988–1993) cut state support such as loans and credit for small-scale agriculture while promoting large-scale agricultural exports and the privatization of state industries. Such policies devastated rural areas, generating both rebellion and increased rural-to-urban

migration in Chiapas. In 1970, 28 percent of all Chiapanecos lived in urban areas; by 1994, 44 percent were city dwellers (Rojas Wiesner, Luz, and Tuñón Pablos 2001:85). At nearly half a million people, Tuxtla Gutiérrez is one of the state's fastest-growing cities; at the time of my research in 1999 the annual population growth rate was 7.3 percent. I often heard the mayor worry aloud about how to handle the large numbers of new arrivals who came seeking escape from rural poverty.

The politically ambitious Governor González Garrido also dreamed of modernizing sexual commerce in Chiapas.[4] As in Porfirian Mexico a century earlier, neoliberal Mexican cities frequently featured economic modernization projects alongside legislation focused upon sex and social order. As the state withdrew from sectors of the economy such as agriculture, it simultaneously sought greater control over commercial sex in Chiapas through the 1989 Zona Rosa Project, which sought to transform prostitution in the state by creating highly regulated government-run brothels. This effort by Governor González Garrido was probably linked to the militarization of the state and was a way to prepare for dealing with the coming Zapatista uprising,[5] along with other social tensions such as uncontrolled population growth in the city. Among the goals of the project were the relocation of existing unregulated brothels to "appropriate" sites "outside the perimeters of the city," far from homes, schools, government offices, and churches; the registration and medical testing of female sex workers; and the supervision of sex workers and clients by municipal authorities in order to prevent alcohol abuse as well as drug use and distribution within the confines of the brothel (*Servicios Coordinados de Salud Pública en el Estado de Chiapas* 1989).

Governor González Garrido played an unusually large role in the creation of the Zona Galáctica, thereby provoking a great deal of gossip about the governor and his sexual habits. As one official in the State Department of Public Health told me, "That guy was *really* interested in prostitution," underscoring the rather unusual level of involvement the governor took in what is ordinarily a matter of municipal rather than state concern. In addition to his activities in the zone, in 1990 Governor González Garrido also passed a "public health" law banning transvestism, although *travestis*, as transgendered or female-identified male sex workers are known, continued to appear in public in defiance of the law.[6] Between 1991 and 1993 fifteen gay men, mostly *travestis*, were murdered in the streets of Tuxtla with high-caliber weapons. Though police arrested a suspect who was sentenced to eight years in prison for homicide, many believe the case remains unsolved and that the man convicted was a scapegoat. According to Amnesty International, Jorge Gamboa

Borraz, the special prosecutor assigned to the case, resigned in 1994 because of "lack of cooperation" from government officials (Amnesty 1997:15–16).

Because these seemingly systematic murders were committed with high-caliber weapons used only by police and military, many residents believed that Governor González Garrido and the state police force were linked to the killings. Local gossip suggested that Governor González Garrido's interest in regulating prostitution stemmed from his own sexual activities with the *travestis* of Tuxtla. Whether true or not, his interest in controlling prostitution was certainly related to his political goal to make Chiapas modern and suppress dissent, whether among prostitutes or agrarian activists. Despite the rumor and discontent surrounding him, Governor González Garrido was rewarded for his work in Chiapas; he was appointed to the powerful position of Secretary of the Interior in the federal government until public pressure in the wake of the Zapatista uprising led to his eventual political downfall and self-imposed exile.

Borrowing from social theorist Karl Polanyi, who viewed governmental control as essential to market economies, sociologist Gerardo Otero (2004) agrees that "far from minimizing or reducing state intervention in the economy, the self-regulating market requires intervention to create markets and sustain them" (3). The government's decision to withdraw state support from small-scale agricultural producers while at the same time promoting free-trade policies actively creates a situation in which farmers who are unable to compete with cheap imports must enter the labor market on terms favorable to elites. Contemporary prostitution policy similarly creates the infrastructure to control female prostitutes who previously worked independently or informally, while also serving elite interests by creating an orderly urban environment and highly regulated workers and consumers. Regulating and confining prostitution makes prostitutes "legible," allowing the state to see them, administer them, control them (Scott 1998:2).

When it comes to sexual labor, the question of visibility is an important one; official discourse surrounding prostitution focuses not only on public health but also on its spatial regulation. City officials in Tuxtla approach the perceived problems of urban life, such as disorder, social hygiene, and contagious disease, through arrest and confinement. Unregistered prostitutes working outside the legal zone are swept from city streets during raids by municipal police and public health authorities; legal workers remain confined in the Zona Galáctica where they are visible to authorities but not to citizenry. The zone's location at the end of a lonely dirt road five miles from the city center is itself a testament to the status of commercial sex in Mexico:

available yet, ideally, invisible. I attended many government meetings where city officials repeatedly referred to visible street prostitution as "out of context" while discussing the need to place unregulated workers in "appropriate places" like the Galactic Zone.

Thus, in December 1991, Governor González Garrido, along with city officials, inaugurated the Galactic Zone. Such ceremony is commonplace in Mexico, where political officials at all levels, from the president of the republic to the mayor of a small village, preside over the openings of schools, highways, and, in this case, a brothel. Such festivities, which often include the cutting of ribbons, live music, and speeches, are a validation of both government authority and benevolence. They make the power and generosity of the state visible through public spectacle. Smaller government successes, such as the installation of a streetlight or placement of public trash cans, do not go uncelebrated: a new lamppost in a low-income neighborhood in eastern Tuxtla is dwarfed by a large sign advertising the current municipal administration's program for providing lighting. In the Galactic Zone the state's presence is felt everywhere. Trash cans installed years earlier still bear the insignia of the previous *priista* municipal government. On an outside wall between the men's toilets and the Anti-Venereal Medical Service (SMAV) is a large plaque celebrating the state's creation of the Galactic Zone. The entry tickets that clients must purchase at the main gate bear the *panista* administration's slogan, "Tuxtla Needs You. Participate!"

Regulating and Rehabilitating Sex Workers

The official document titled "Regulations for the Control and Vigilance of Prostitution in the Municipality of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas," which dates to 1993, lays out the basic rules of the Galáctica (some of which are arbitrarily enforced). City regulations list the multiple prohibitions and myriad requirements for sex workers in the tolerance zone (unregistered sex workers are free of such restrictions). Workers may not practice if they lack the health certificate given by the city, if they are pregnant, or if they suffer from contagious diseases; each worker must be a Mexican citizen over eighteen years of age, "demonstrate that she is able to discern the risks of the activity," be in "full use of mental faculties and not addicted to drugs," and "carry out her activity in the tolerance zone called Zona Galáctica" (Archivo Municipal de Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Expediente Zona Galáctica, n.d.). Clients of sex workers do not appear in the regulations; their sexual consumption is unimpeded by municipal rules.

The zone is open from nine o'clock in the morning until nine in the evening (there are two nightclubs located outside the main gate that open only at night). The zone's operating hours reflect municipal concerns with social order and maintaining the brothel as a place for contained sexual practice. As sociologist Héctor Carrillo (2002) writes in his study of sexual culture in Guadalajara, the night is a transgressive time, one of danger and sexual diversion. Under cover of the night, anything can happen. The zone's regular and "respectable" business hours lend it a symbolic sense of order and safety. Many zone women prefer to work only during the day; keeping "regular" working hours not only enables women to care for their children when they return home from school but also gives workers the sense that they are operating within cultural norms, despite the stigmatized nature of the work.

During the early years of the Galactic Zone's existence, authorities allowed alcohol consumption there, though this conflicted with Governor González Garrido's original plan. Some workers fondly recall these days, particularly the time following the 1994 Zapatista uprising, when zone workers were always busy with soldiers newly stationed at Tuxtla's nearby military base, and the beer flowed freely. Yet *panista* authorities who later gained control of the city (and therefore the brothel) felt that the consumption of alcohol was excessive, often leading to violence and arguments among and between both workers and clients. Particularly problematic was El Pollo Galáctico (The Galactic Chicken), a restaurant within the zone that authorities felt was selling alcohol in excess and violating the *ley seca* (dry laws that prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages on election day and other national political holidays). Eventually alcohol consumption in the zone was banned entirely by *panista* authorities (although today alcohol is once again available in the Galáctica).

Although the women and men who work as prostitutes in Tuxtla's streets are symbols of social decay (as well as visible reminders of the failures of neoliberalism to provide economic equality), the Galáctica, with its rules, on-site medical testing, and location far from the city center, became a source of pride and a symbol of progress to government officials, a place where suspect individuals could be contained and surveilled.

The government regulation of sex workers in the Galáctica disciplines and individualizes the women, making collective action or revolt challenging. Such disciplinary practices, when combined with the unbridled free market that reigns in the zone, produce a heightened sense of economic competition that further increases isolation and individualization among workers. Workers who undercut others by charging too little are viewed with open hostility. Those who provide "special services" (oral and anal sex) are seen by

colleagues who do not perform such acts as immoral and are judged accordingly. The atmosphere is more divisive than collegial.

Municipal police guard the entry, providing constant surveillance in the zone, even after hours. The front gate serves as both exit and entrance, allowing the movement of both workers and clients to be controlled. The high fence surrounding the zone serves as a subtle form of coercion: unable to exit without the notice of a police officer, individuals are less likely to misbehave within the confines of the zone. Two small jail cells inside the brothel contain those who do. "Discipline," writes Michel Foucault (1977:138), "increases the forces of the body (in terms of economic utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)." The body of the regulated sex worker is then, in part (and only in part), Foucault's "docile body"; like the soldier, the sex worker has been made useful as she sells her services within a modern economy of pleasure.[7]

While medical testing is the main focus of regulation inside the zone, most prostitutes are not considered beyond redemption by municipal authorities. As in revolutionary Mexico City, when the redemption of "fallen women" through vocational training and education became the chosen cause of social reformers, the women of the Galactic Zone are not considered to be lost causes. But some women are considered better choices for "rehabilitation" than others. When it was decided that I would be giving English classes to zone workers, I strolled about the modules with Héctor, a municipal worker stationed in the zone. As we knocked on women's doors to let them know about the classes, Héctor carried with him a list detailing who occupied each room and sometimes led me past a worker's room, claiming she would not be interested because she was too old. Age was considered a major factor in a woman's ability to "rehabilitate." Women who had been working as prostitutes for years and even decades were believed to have fallen too far to ever come back to "normal" society.

Municipal efforts at rehabilitating sex workers in the zone include not only lectures on mental and physical health but also job training workshops in dressmaking and baking. But zone women are not unaware of the realities of the Mexican economy—Viviana took part in cooking courses not because she wished to leave prostitution to work longer hours for lower pay in a bakery. In baking, she found a hobby she enjoyed and could share with her family. State-sponsored vocational training does not provide structural change; rather, it reinforces patterns of gender and class inequality by preparing zone women for jobs that pay less than what they earn as sex workers but that are considered suitable for poor women.

Courses sponsored by the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) held in the Galáctica are, in some ways, a more appropriate response to the marginality of sex workers. Profe (short for Professor), an aging retiree, teaches the classes; he is a frail man with rheumy eyes and a soft and raspy voice that sounds like bare feet walking across a gravel path. His skin hangs down from his thin face like a hound dog's jowls. When he writes on the blackboard, his hand gently shakes, leaving behind a scrawl that looks more like an echocardiogram than words. Bored staying home, he felt there was a need to educate the women of the zone so that they would not be "marginalized from society." Of his eight full-time and eight occasional students, he says they are not *malcriadas* (poorly raised). His class runs smoothly, he says, because, "I respect them and they respect me."

One-third of zone workers cannot read or write. This figure is about equal to the number of Chiapas residents over the age of fifteen who are also illiterate (30%) but is far greater than the 10 percent of residents of Tuxtla over the age of fifteen who cannot read or write (Centro de Informacíon y Análysis de Chiapas [CIACH] et al. 1997:35–36). Literacy statistics starkly highlight women's tenuous position in Mexican society—illiterate women outnumber illiterate men in Chiapas by two to one (ibid.:36). Some students have learned to read in Profe's class. When Roxana arrived at the zone, she could not read at all. Now she sat in class, struggling but proudly reading aloud: "I . . . live . . . with . . . my husband." Primary- and secondary-school classes do not give women the means to find well-paid employment elsewhere. Though poverty and a lack of education frequently bring women to the zone, educating sex workers does not necessarily cause women to leave prostitution; sex work offers even educated women more money than they can earn using their training because of the nature of the Mexican economy, depressed wages, and their gender. What education *does* do is provide workers with a sense of community and self-worth. Though located within the zone, the makeshift classroom was a space apart, where prostitutes otherwise engaged in an economic and sometimes moral competition against one another became fellow students learning together. The classroom provided a safe space for workers to show their vulnerabilities and experience their strengths.

Medical testing is the primary form of regulation found in the zone. The Sanitary Control Card that workers must purchase before working at the zone not only declares a woman's health status but also strips the woman of the anonymity associated with illegal street prostitution.[8] The card declares the woman a prostitute as a matter of public record. Workers must purchase a new card every three months for 50 pesos (U.S.$5.90). On the back of the

card is a calendar in which a zone health inspector marks the date of the medical visit; the worker's photograph, name, room, building number, and landlord appear on the front of the card. Attached to the lower-left-hand corner of the card is an HIV-negative certificate, which also bears the woman's name and photograph. This card, too, must be purchased.

The worker's weekly visit to the municipal Anti-Venereal Medical Service is the centerpiece of medical control. Each morning, with the exception of Sundays and holidays, a group of workers enters the SMAV. Some arrive ready to work, fully dressed and made up; others are in street clothes, long nightshirts, and plastic sandals. Those who wear complicated high-heeled shoes that must be tied usually stroll in with the laces undone, so they may easily slip the shoes off when their turn comes. They wait, holding their control cards, standing or sitting in the white plastic chairs in the hall that leads to the examination room.

The weekly vaginal examination includes a swabbing for illnesses such as vaginosis, yeast, and other types of infections, as well as gonorrhea. During the exam, a worker may be tested for syphilis (every three months), HIV (every four), and receives a Pap smear twice a year. Twice a month a worker receives a free box of one hundred condoms. Workers themselves must pay all laboratory fees. If a worker tests positive for a transmissible illness, she is suspended until cured. If a worker is HIV-positive, she is suspended permanently. A worker who tests positive for illness is said to be *ponchada*, or punctured, a word often used to refer to flat tires. Like a car with a flat tire, a zone worker who is *ponchada* is of little use.

On Prostitution, Public Health, and the State

The stated goal of the regulationist system of prostitution is to protect public health. Regulating prostitution and subjecting female sex workers to mandatory testing scapegoats prostitutes, implying that they are a major vector of disease and that testing will prevent transmission (McClintock 1993). Yet the incidence of sexually transmitted illness in Mexican states and other countries that regulate prostitution is no different than in places that do not (Uribe et al. 1998:184). That regulation does not stop sexually transmitted illness should be an old lesson; in revolutionary Mexico City, where prostitution was regulated, it was found in the late 1930s that men who had contracted gonorrhea reportedly did so from both sex workers and from women who were not prostitutes (Bliss 2001:204) The regu-

lationist system (and the *Reglamento*) was eventually abandoned shortly thereafter.

Furthermore, compulsory HIV testing for sex workers is not an effective way to prevent the spread of the illness, given that workers in the Galactic Zone may serve up to two hundred clients each month and that there is a three- to six-month window of time between initial infection and seroconversion (the formation of antibodies to the virus that would indicate a positive diagnosis). Also, a narrowly focused prevention effort targeting a small sector of society (such as female registered prostitutes) is not likely to have a tremendous impact upon HIV transmission in Mexico or anywhere else (McClintock 1993); prostitutes themselves are not the primary or sole source of HIV in Chiapas. In addition, the incidence of HIV infection in female Mexican prostitutes is relatively low (various studies put the percentage at between 0.5% and 2.2%) (Rivera, Vicente-Ralde, and Lucero 1992; Uribe et al. 1998.). The lack of intravenous drug use among female Mexican sex workers (far more common in Europe and the United States) contributes, in part, to this relatively low rate of HIV infection (ibid.). Also contributing to the low prevalence of infection is that many prostitutes are informed about HIV risk and adopt preventative measures. In fact, sex workers may be more likely to know how to protect themselves than other sexually active populations such as teenage girls engaging in noncommercial sex and housewives who have little negotiating power to insist upon condom use with their husbands (Delacoste and Alexander 1987). Sex workers have a powerful interest in staying disease-free, both personal and professional; as Lorena told me, "It's like a secretary with her typewriter. I've got to keep my machine clean."

In modern Mexico, then, state-regulated prostitution went from "modern" under the Porfiriato to antiquated following the Revolution and, once again in neoliberal Tuxtla, to "modern." Through the case of the Zona Galáctica, we see a neoliberal state that is not withdrawing but that is shifting its energies more deeply toward other arenas of interest. Along with the privatization of state industries, the reduction of social welfare spending, the withdrawal of state support for small farmers, during the neoliberal era there also exists the reassertion of the state's presence in the lives of sex workers, individuals suspected of selling sex, and, to a lesser degree, consumers of commercial sex.

Yet if regulating prostitution does not protect public health, why regulate it? Walking down the cobblestone streets of San Cristóbal's historic district, I pause to read graffiti on the wall of an old building that, in part, answers the question: *Nos quieren domesticar* (They want to tame us).

NOTES

1. For further discussion of how legalization does not necessarily lessen stigmatization and how the medical management of sex workers in the Galactic Zone is infused with beliefs about the sexual and gender inequality of women in general and sex workers in particular, see Kelly 2008.

2. For a further discussion of debates about the meanings and impact of globalization, see Held et al. 1999.

3. It should be noted here that the Liberal tradition in Mexico is different and in some ways in opposition to a U.S. understanding of the term "liberal." In the Mexican context, Liberalism in general, and economic liberalism in particular, are associated with policies such as free trade, privatization, and social conservatism.

4. González Garrido's interest in matters of sexuality were not strictly limited to prostitution. During his governorship, abortion was decriminalized in Chiapas in December 1990. The new legislation, which allowed for abortion as a means of family planning, had a life of only twenty-two days, when, following pressure from the Catholic Church, it was suspended. Abortion was recriminalized with a few exceptions, such as when the pregnant woman is HIV-positive. Abortion following rape is legal in all Mexican states but is often actively discouraged by government and medical authorities. For more on this topic, see Human Rights Watch, *The Second Assault: Obstructing Access to Legal Abortion after Rape in Mexico,* available at http://hrw.org/reports/2006/mexico0306.

5. In 1994 a group of peasant farmers known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) staged an uprising against the neoliberal government; though the fighting subsided after a week, the Zapatista struggle continues and may be characterized as a low-intensity conflict marked by community building, occasional skirmishes, and paramilitary violence.

6. Similar acts that target *travestis* continue to be passed in Tuxtla and elsewhere in Mexico. In 2002 government officials in Tecate, Baja California, amended the city's "Police and Good Governance Act," criminalizing and punishing "men who dress as women and move around public places, causing perturbation" (see Gay Mexico News and Reports, "Action Called Against Tecate Council Discrimination," n.d.; available at http://www.globalgayz.com/mexico-news00-03.html, accessed April 6, 2005). In 2004 a headline in the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* posed the question: "Vestidas under house arrest?" The article that followed detailed the efforts of Tuxtla's new mayor, a *panista* and the first female to occupy the office of municipal president, to wipe *travestis* completely from the urban environment. In contrast to her *panista* predecessors with whom I worked who framed the prostitution issue as a problem of public health and order, and who were relatively mild in their social conservatism, the administration of Mayor Vicki Rincón proclaimed that the arrest of any *travesti* in the street at any time was part of a broader municipal program to halt "moral offenses."

7. The idea of the prostitute as a docile body can only be taken so far. I have written elsewhere (Kelly 2008) about resistance among the women of the Galactic Zone, including a 1996 strike in which they held the administrator of the zone hostage.

8. In Tijuana, Baja California, city officials recently revamped local prostitution laws and issued high-tech identification cards (resembling credit cards) to sex workers that bear the woman's photograph and a magnetic strip that, when scanned, instantly reveals a worker's medical status. See McKinley 2005.