

Critique of Anthropology

<http://coa.sagepub.com>

Women's Weaving Cooperatives in Oaxaca: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism

Lynn Stephen

Critique of Anthropology 2005; 25; 253

DOI: 10.1177/0308275X05055215

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://coa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/25/3/253>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Critique of Anthropology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://coa.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://coa.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://coa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/25/3/253>

Women's Weaving Cooperatives in Oaxaca

An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism

Lynn Stephen

University of Oregon, USA

Abstract ■ Fieldwork in the Zapotec textile-producing community of Teotitlán del Valle from 2000 to 2004 suggests that indigenous responses to increased economic globalization and Mexico's neoliberal economic policies do not always involve solutions of individualization, but can also generate collective efforts. From the late 1980s, textile cooperatives were first organized by women and most recently by men and women to such a degree that by the summer of 2004 about 15 percent of the local households were involved in textile cooperatives. In an attempt to bypass local merchant control of the textile industry and to gain political and cultural rights in their community and in the global market as independent artisans, these women pioneered a new era in gender relations.

Keywords ■ cooperatives ■ economic development ■ gender ■ globalization ■ Latin America

Some recent scholarship on globalization and neoliberalism has emphasized the ways in which commodity production has become increasingly characterized by vertically integrated economic relationships that rely on subcontracting and dispersed sites of production and processing. Such production systems are usually characterized as being run by transnational firms in which local labor has little or no autonomy and individual workers are portrayed as disconnected and alienated from the work process (see Wood, 2000a, 2000b). Gendered analyses of the impact of neoliberal policies in places such as Mexico have suggested that women – who usually have responsibility for procuring basic household goods and running household budgets – have often employed what has been called an ‘individual response’ to economic hardship (Benería, 1992; González de la Rocha, 1994). In other words, they confront hardship alone, and work out solitary strategies of belt-tightening to make it through the difficult economic times brought on by the increased economic stratification and high rates of poverty associated with economic neoliberalism in contemporary Mexico.

Fieldwork in the Zapotec textile-producing community of Teotitlán del Valle from 2000 to 2004 suggests that responses to increased economic globalization and Mexico's neoliberal economic policies tied to the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

in the 1990s are more complex. While subcontracting by US-based importers has certainly increased since the 1980s when I first began to work in the community, another equally stunning development has taken place as well. From the late 1980s, textile cooperatives were first organized by women and most recently by men and women to such a degree that by the summer of 2004 about 15 percent of the local households were involved in textile cooperatives. The story of those cooperatives is the subject of this article and is subsequent to the information and analysis I included in *Zapotec Women*, published in 1991.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, weaving women from the middle and poorer sectors of the community began to organize a series of weaving cooperatives in an effort to challenge the increasing class stratification that often relegated them to serving as contracted laborers or pieceworkers for the merchant families of the community – a position they share with many weavers in neighboring Santa Ana (see Cohen, 1999: 54). In an attempt to bypass local merchant control of the textile industry, and to gain political and cultural rights in their community and in the global market as independent artisans, these women pioneered a new era in gender relations in Teotitlán. Several of the founders of the first women's cooperatives were return migrants who had spent time outside of the community and began to question the kinds of restrictions they lived under in accordance with local gendered traditions that limited women's movements, discouraged them from acting independently, and kept them from participating in formal political processes in the community.

The explicit goal of these cooperatives is to undercut the monopoly held by local merchants and US importers over the textile market and to allow producers to sell their goods collectively, so that they can market their textiles directly to consumers. Cooperatives have become a recognized part of community government as well. Their members are formally invited to community assemblies and they have earned the support of local authorities for their activities. This results not only in a greater economic return to the particular weaver who produced a textile, but also makes the work of weavers visible to consumers and generates a sense of recognition and respect for each weaver both within the community and outside. These findings are consistent with the ongoing work of June Nash, which has focused on ways in which indigenous peoples have challenged neoliberalism (2001) and have drawn on both local traditions and new forms of organization to devise innovative structures to preserve their economic and cultural autonomy, including through cooperatives (1993a, 1993b).

Women's craft cooperatives in Latin America

An important literature on women's folk art and craft cooperatives in Latin America and elsewhere emerged in the 1990s, emphasizing cooperatives as

a way for individual artisans to have some power in determining the nature of their participation in global markets; to gain decision-making power and leadership in folk art and craft production, distribution and marketing; and to increase their economic and political importance locally and regionally. While this was not the case for women who formed cooperatives in Teotitlán, often participants in cooperatives in the 1990s were negotiating the transition from producing for use and trade at local levels to producing for sale to national and international buyers (Grimes and Milgram, 2000: 3). Weavers in Teotitlán negotiated this transition in the 1960s and 1970s.

A brief analysis of the literature on women's cooperatives in Latin America provides a useful framework for understanding the women's cooperatives in Teotitlán (see especially Grimes and Milgram, 2000; Kovic and Eber, 2003; Nash, 1993a, 1993b; Tice, 1995). The experience of Teotiteco women in cooperatives is reflective of many of the benefits and difficulties women have gone through elsewhere. A majority of analyses of women's weaving cooperatives tend to offer at least some positive outcomes for their participants, including the following: increased participation in local, regional, and sometimes state-level politics (I. Castro Apreza, 2003: 203–4; Tice, 1995: 107–8); learning new decision-making skills and demonstrating increased leadership and control in production, distribution and marketing – often resulting in some increase in income (I. Castro Apreza, 2003: 199; Eber and Rosenbaum, 1993: 169; Grimes and Milgram, 2000: 5; Nash, 1993b: 147; Tice, 1995: 110–11); developing more direct links to markets, including those of alternative trade organizations or ATOs and short-circuiting merchants (Bartra, 2003; Eber, 2000: 53; Eber and Rosenbaum, 1993; Ehlers, 1993: 190–1; Grimes, 2000; Lynd, 2000; Rosenbaum, 2000: 96–9; Tice, 1995: 112–13); escaping confinement within the domestic sphere and forming solidarity with others (I. Castro Apreza, 2003: 205). Additional documented benefits include training in searching for markets, labeling products for sale, accounting, marketing (Y. Castro Apreza, 2003: 210–11) and learning financial reporting and organizational accountability (Y. Castro Apreza, 2003: 213). Many of these discussions about women's cooperatives provide insights from Chiapas, Mexico and Guatemala.

Detailed and honest discussions of the challenges and difficulties for women in folk art or craft cooperatives are harder to come by, but have been particularly well documented in relation to the long tradition of women's cooperatives in Chiapas (see Eber, 2000; Eber and Rosenbaum, 1993; Eber and Kovic, 2003; Nash, 1993a, 1993b). The most serious negative consequences documented for women in relation to their participation in cooperatives has been murder. June Nash documents the murder of Petrona López, who was president of a cooperative of women potters in Amatenango del Valle, Chiapas for over a decade (1993b). While many theories were floated locally about the cause of Petrona's assassination, Nash concludes that Petrona's challenge to male authority in a community wherein 'women's production was controlled by their fathers or husbands',

and where 'all men in the community were threatened by the autonomy women gained in the cooperative' were factors in her death. Women, too, felt that her sexual conduct – involvement with married men and other lovers – put her beyond the pale of protection accorded to women (1993b: 129). Because cooperative participation often leads women to leave their household and community for meetings or to sell their goods, they are automatically challenging gendered divisions of labor that often require women to remain at home and undertake a wide range of domestic chores. Not being at home or asking others to fill in cooking meals, caring for children, shopping or cleaning can be very threatening to both men and other women who are not in the cooperative. In addition, in many indigenous communities, because there is significant gender segregation in many chores, men question what women are doing when they leave the house, often implying that their participation in cooperatives is merely to pursue romantic liaisons in secret. Nash's ethnography of women's involvement in cooperatives is particularly important because it goes well beyond the internal dynamics of the cooperatives and examines the impact women's participation has at home and in the wider community.

Nash and others document the harassment of women by family members or others for their participation in cooperatives and its possible relationship to domestic violence (Eber, 2000: 56; Nash, 1993a, 1993b). If cooperatives were begun by outside institutions such as the National Indigenous Institute (INI) in Chiapas, state agencies or political parties, initial and subsequent control may remain in the hands of men (see Y. Castro Apreza, 2003: 209). The politics of outside institutions and situations – such as conflicting local alliances between the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), the PRI and other groups in Chiapas – can enter into the life of cooperatives and result in threats and harassment of members. Leaders in J'pas Joloviltik (Women Who Weave), a cooperative of Tzotzil weavers based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, were harassed and seriously threatened on several occasions in the mid-1990s by armed men (see Y. Castro Apreza, 2003: 210, 213–14; Eber, 2000: 54; Stephen, 2000). Such circumstances can also lead to divisions in organizations. Eber documents how, in 1990, women who eventually belonged to a weaving cooperative named Tsobol Antzetik, in San Pedro Chenalho, separated from another cooperative – Sna Jolobil – and began to reform themselves as an independent group (2000: 51). This occurred as a result of local political divisions which permeated the cooperative.

Finally, while almost every account of women's participation in cooperatives documents their ability to at least modestly increase their income, some analysts remind us that we shouldn't assume that cooperatives always help the neediest in each community. Writing on women's weaving cooperatives in the Philippines, Milgram states:

... cooperatives often benefit the more affluent weavers and traders – the 'not so poor,' those already engaged in trade who usually have enough land to feed their families. ... Joining collective production and marketing associations

does not automatically offer power to all women because different women are able to pursue different channels in their efforts to maximize collaborative opportunities. (2000: 112)

Jeffrey Cohen, describing the mediocre success of a weaving cooperative in Santa Ana del Valle, neighbor to Teotitlán, writes that the problem of cooperatives is:

... they tend to assist people who are in a fairly strong economic position, or, in other words, the poorest sectors of the community tend to gain little from such projects. Society members [in Santa Ana del Valle] argued it made little sense to give money to unproven weavers who would not invest wisely or fail to gain any economic advantage. (2000: 141, n. 7)

All authors writing on cooperatives point out the importance of looking at the specific historic, political and local circumstances that cooperatives come out of. Largely unsuccessful efforts to begin a cooperative in Teotitlán by BANFOCO (Banco de Fomento de Cooperativas) in the 1960s led to a later buying program by FONART (Fondo Nacional de Artesanía) in the 1970s where the Oaxaca state FONART office purchased large numbers of weavings. Because this effort in fact incorporated several large merchants it had the opposite effect intended – it did not provide new markets and better prices for pieceworkers and independent weavers. The success of the women's cooperatives in the 1990s is in part related to the lessons learned from earlier efforts by outsiders to organize Teotitecos into groups. It is significant that the first successes in organizing cooperatives came from women and that they had positive experiences in earning income, marketing their textiles directly, and in being actively involved in decision-making about how that would happen. The fact that several of the key women who participated in the first cooperative had lived outside of Teotitlán was also significant. All of these factors point to the importance of historical location as well as local experience in building a context that would result in at least moderate success for the first cooperative so that others would emerge.

Participation in the cooperatives has changed how many women view themselves as artisans, as wives and mothers, and as local citizens. For some, the experience has opened up new possibilities for more egalitarian gender relations at home and in the community. For women who remain outside the cooperatives, such possibilities may come through marriages and relationships formed outside Teotitlán in the process of migration where more independence is possible for women. Once they return to the community, however, their relationships may change again in ways that are less equal. Women who do participate in cooperatives offer alternative gender models for all women. They also reveal for all to see, however, the kind of obstacles, difficulties and challenges women face as they begin to change local gender conventions. Such difficulties can include harassment, domestic violence and fierce gossip. Nevertheless, most women in the

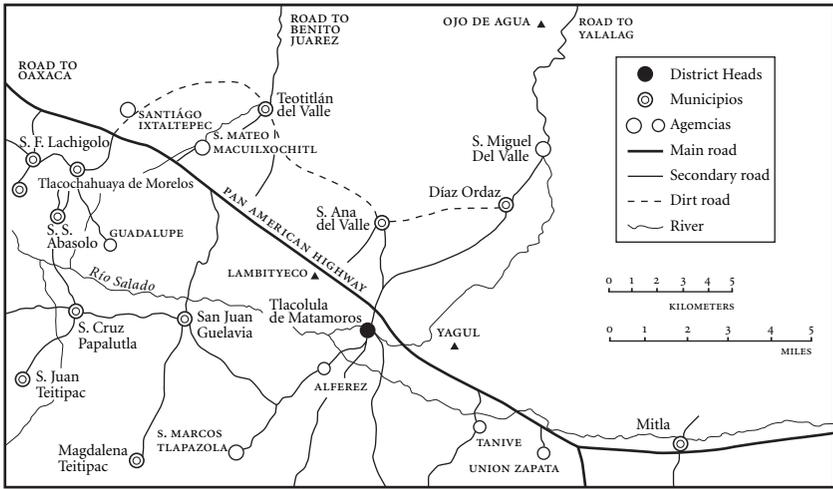


Figure 1. Teotitlán and surrounding communities
Adapted from Welte (1965)

community – whether in cooperatives or not – view them positively. Many cooperative members not only point out the benefits listed above, but the importance of the close friendships and support networks they develop through their work with other women. To understand better the gender context out of which the cooperatives emerge we now turn to a discussion of how gender relations and the division of labor changed as Teotitlano textiles moved from being use objects to become folk art and high art.

Gender relations and the division of labor under commercial production

As tourist and export markets for Zapotec textiles grew rapidly during the 1970s, the availability of weaving labor became a critical factor in the expansion of production. This growing need for weaving labor was met in three primary ways.

First, women and girls began to weave in greater numbers. Now, four generations of women and girls have been socialized as weavers. In 1986, approximately 35–40 percent of the weaving force was female, according to a random stratified survey I carried out of 150 households. The 2000 national census puts the percentage of female weavers at about 27 percent (INEGI, 2000: Empleo 6A). This number seems quite low. Many women weave on and off and may not register their weaving activity on the census as a primary economic activity. In more than 60 households where I interviewed people in 2001, 2002 and 2003, almost all of them had women and

girls who were weaving. Some had 3–4 women and girls who were active weavers. Everyone indicated that almost all girls were learning how to weave. Some young women work in the service sector in Teotitlán, Santa María del Tule, Oaxaca City and nearby communities. They often will weave part time in the evenings after returning from work, despite the fact that they have another major occupation. While 57 percent of men and boys aged 15 or older are noted in the census as 'economically active', only 31 percent of girls and women aged 15 or older are. This difference suggests some serious undercounting of the economic activity of women and girls in terms of weaving and other work as well.

Overall, there were 1447 people registered in the 2000 census as industrial manufacturers in the municipality of Teotitlán (which includes the population of Teotitlán and neighboring Santiaguito). Almost all of these people are weavers. This accounts for about 64 percent of the economically active population of 2245, which is consistent with figures from my 1986 survey, indicating that weaving is the primarily income-earning activity for about 68 percent of the population.

Second, the initial demand for more weaving labor in the 1970s was also met by expanding the number of weavers in other communities. The population of Santa Ana del Valle began to weave on a larger scale in the 1970s, when significant numbers of women entered the labor force. The 1990 census stated that there were 379 weavers in Santa Ana, 106 female and 273 male (INEGI, 1992). While this same census notes that only 13 weavers work as '*mano de obra*' or contracted weavers, Jeffrey Cohen suggests in his study that the situation is more complex. He found that weaver understandings of the category 'independent producer' were quite distinct from those of census workers. He states:

... often an informant would describe his or her approach to textile production, saying, 'Of course, I am an independent producer.' The informant would then go on to tell me that he or she worked on a contract with a particular patron in Teotitlán for many years. (1999: 47)

The 2000 census states that there are 368 weavers in Santa Ana, 236 men and 132 women. While 58 are registered as 'employees or workers', 263 identify as independent weavers (INEGI, 2000: empleado 6A, Santa Ana del Valle). These figures suggest that more people in Santa Ana are reporting themselves as contracted weavers than in 1990, but a majority still register as independent weavers. Cohen's discussions with weavers in the mid-1990s suggest that many of those who are registered as 'independent' in fact work for merchants in Teotitlán (Cohen, 1999: 47–8).

The most dramatic increase in weavers came in the neighboring community of San Miguel, which, although it was originally populated by people from Teotitlán, never undertook weaving as a significant economic activity. Helen Clements (1988: 22–3) reported that in the mid-1980s, about 30 percent of the community was weaving, with equal numbers of males

and females participating in the textile boom. The first weavers probably began working in 1974.

The extension of weaving production into San Miguel and its growth in Santa Ana have been dominated by the community of Teotitlán, particularly by key families in the merchant sector who now funnel a majority of the textiles produced to tourist art stores in Mexico and to an ever-expanding group of US importers. While Santa Ana continues to struggle to get out of the shadow of Teotitlán and to establish an autonomous marketing structure, it seems unable to do so. Cohen attributes this as much to geography as to anything else, noting that Teotitlán is the closest weaving community to Oaxaca City (1999: 53). In 1986, the Shan-Dany Museum opened in Santa Ana in order to bring tourists to the village (Cohen, 1988). By the mid-1990s, the museum had developed as one of eleven museums that were a part of the Union of Oaxacan Community Museums (including one that opened in Teotitlán in 1995). Cohen states that the Shan Dany's displays emphasize indigenous art, dance and the Mexican Revolution, aiming to assert the community's credibility as a traditional site for weaving in competition with Teotitlán.

This effort is not sufficient, however, to overcome the dominant marketing position of Teotitlán. Cohen reports that, despite the fact that the museum also promotes local textile production and has sent a touring exhibit of textiles to many cities in Mexico and California, these programs primarily help well-established independent weavers. Contract weavers who produce primarily for Teotitlán cannot afford to wait the long periods of time it takes to get paid by letting their textiles sit in exhibits. 'Many . . . contract workers are unable to contribute to the exhibits and describe the museum as an institution for the wealthy' (1999: 151). In some ways, the current dominance of Teotitlán is reproducing the important commercial and political position that it held as a district capital of a very large administrative territory. In its capacity as an administrative center until after independence, Teotitlán enjoyed more than 200 years of political dominance, acting as an authority and mediator among some 30 communities.

The third way in which the increased demand for weaving labor was met in the 1970s was to increase the quantity of machine-spun yarn used to produce textiles – essentially mechanizing a part of the production process. Increased use of machine-spun yarn also resulted in the freeing of significant amounts of labor, predominantly women and children, who had been dedicated to spinning and carding. Significant numbers of women and elderly men continue to card and spin, but the bulk of weaving production is now done with machine-spun yarn from a local yarn factory in Teotitlán or imported from factories elsewhere in Mexico. Elderly women, probably the most economically marginalized sector in Teotitlán and Santa Ana, continue to card and spin by hand. They say they are not strong enough to weave because of the stress that working the loom would put on their backs and legs. Many also believe they are too old to learn, but there are some

notable exceptions to this. The high end of the textile market in the United States and Europe, which calls for handspun yarn, provides a niche for elderly laborers who earn less than weavers, further differentiating the gendered labor force by age.

Women's weaving cooperatives, 1986 to the present

The founding of the first cooperative

In the mid-1980s, a group of younger women, many of whom sold textiles for their families in the local artisan market, launched a vocal critique of their exclusion from the committee which regulated the market as well as their exclusion from community assemblies. This group of women and their public critique were pivotal in beginning ongoing change in local gender roles in women's political participation in Teotitlán and the kind of organizational spaces they created to be able to market their textiles in the local, regional and international market. In 1986, some of their critique was taken up by several women who had returned to the community after living in places like Mexico City and Oaxaca City, where their roles as women were not so restricted.

While young men often migrated to the US–Mexican border or the USA to work during the 1980s and later, some young women were also leaving Teotitlán in an effort to increase their family's incomes. Some spent time working in the homes of middle-class and upper middle-class families in Mexico City caring for their children, cleaning their houses and cooking. Others went to work for relatives in Tijuana and Rosarito, Mexico in *artesanía* or folk art stores. And some went to the US to live in communities of Teotiteco migrants in the Los Angeles area, such as Santa Ana, Oxnard and Moorepark. In California, women from Teotitlán worked cleaning houses, caring for children, caring for the elderly, in assembly plants, in restaurants and in other service sector jobs. There, their work lives and daily routines often required them to have much greater independence than they did at home. In addition to coming and going on a daily basis to paid jobs outside their homes in the city, they were often required to run errands, shop, obtain medical care, attend school conferences, walk children to and from school, and navigate a wide range of agencies connected to raising their families. Some were able to continue their educations. All of these experiences gave them a different perspective on what their lives were like at home in Teotitlán, where they seldom left the community, were excluded from community political assemblies because of '*costumbre*' or custom, usually needed their husband's or mother-in-law's permission to leave the house, and did not have the possibility of challenging the labor relations of textile production that often relegated them to *mano de obra* or contracted labor.

In 1986, organizing for the first women's weaving cooperative in

Teotitlán got under way, in part driven by the energies of one woman. Aurora Contreras Lazo had returned from living for ten years in Mexico City and was struck by some of the major differences between life for women there and in Teotitlán. She commented in the summer of 2001:

The idea behind the group was to find a way for women and girls to leave their homes and the community if they wanted to. In the city you can leave, do what you like. Even though you have to ask permission, you can go. Here, it was different. A woman alone can't leave the community or go out at all. They say, 'What is she going to do? What is she looking for?' Women didn't have the possibility of leaving this community to sell their textiles. The idea was to look for exhibits and expositions. We started getting women together for a group. We started with about 50 women and girls and we were able to officially constitute ourselves and start to get support. We were called *Te Gunaa Ruinchi Laadi* (Women Who Weave). This group still exists.

The impact of NAFTA and neoliberalism in Teotitlán del Valle

Women Who Weave not only aspired to help women be able to sell their own goods, but collectively set out to try to circumvent the strong control that local merchants had and still maintain over the sales of textiles. While everyone in Teotitlán has benefited from the successful commercialization and export of textiles since the late 1970s, some have benefited much more than others. About six or seven extended merchant families still control most business – either by buying finished pieces from independent weavers looking for a place to sell them, or by directly contracting weavers as laborers (*mano de obra*), giving them materials, designs and the dimensions of textiles to produce. The increased ability of people in Teotitlán to export since the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 has primarily benefited these merchant families. They have continued to do well, while others have lost ground since the implementation of NAFTA – as have many others in rural Mexico.

A series of measures aimed at privatization of government enterprises, a loosening of federal regulations to permit and encourage foreign investment and ownership, and the individualization of property and social relations between the state and its citizens found their logical conclusions in the 1990s in the North American Free Trade Agreement. As viewed from Mexico, the purpose of NAFTA was to facilitate the entrance of US capital into the Mexican economy. This was achieved through the privatization of national industry – airlines, telephones, mining, railroads, banks – and the lowering of trade barriers to let US companies into all sectors. In order to allow US products to compete in the Mexican market, Mexico eliminated price supports and subsidies to basic food items. This resulted in a decrease in the value of real wages as people had to pay more for basic goods and their wages remained the same. Overall, NAFTA led to the acceleration of corporate-led economic integration between Mexico and the United States, which benefited a few, but not most.

In Teotitlán del Valle, the 1990s brought considerable hardship for many who were independent weavers and weavers working on a contracted basis. Prices for basic goods went up, and prices for textiles remained stagnant or declined as the neighboring communities of Santa Ana and San Miguel began to produce more and compete more intensely with Teotitlán. US and European textile designers and importers who worked in the community also began to commission knock-offs of Zapotec rugs in other parts of the world such as India, China and Ecuador where labor was cheaper. The bitterness of some of the women who have joined the co-operatives about how little they were paid by merchants for their textiles is an indication of how difficult things were. Most telling is the fact that the number of merchants in the community has decreased since the 1980s, and almost all of those who were merchants in 2003 came from merchant families. In other words, very few new households were able to enter the merchant sector and the new merchants who emerged came from merchant families. In most cases, they were children who received capital, contacts and help from their parents. In addition, probably at least 20–40 smaller merchant enterprises collapsed in the 1990s.

The neoliberal economic model of the 1990s produced results in Teotitlán similar to those elsewhere in Mexico. More highly capitalized merchant households increased and consolidated their wealth and replicated themselves through passing on merchant wealth to children who continued their businesses. Smaller merchant households with little reserve capital were squeezed out of the market and their members returned to being independent weavers or contracted weavers. The weaver majority in the community lost some of their power in labor relations and purchasing power. By August 2002, the Secretary of Social Development reported that 53.7 percent of all Mexicans lived in poverty, defined as an income of less than US \$1.50 per day in the countryside (US \$548 per year) and US \$2.10 per day in urban areas (US \$767 per year). A report from that entity notes that the decade of the 1990s was characterized by 'stagnation in terms of social progress' leading to an increase of 4.7 million people living in extreme poverty. The poverty level was at 52.6 percent in 1992, but rose to 69.6 percent after the 1995 peso crisis (Mexico Solidarity Network, 2002). Loss of income and the diminished possibility for weavers to participate in the market as independents in the 1990s was one factor in the formation of cooperatives.

Cooperative objectives and challenges

The objective of all of the cooperatives formed in Teotitlán from 1986 to the present has been to gain economic, political and cultural rights in the community, in regional artisan associations and in relation to government institutions, and in the global market as independent artisans. The boom in cooperative growth in Teotitlán mirrors a larger trend seen in the state of Oaxaca and elsewhere in Mexico. In the 1990s, a wide range of Mexican institutions including many political parties, independent and

government-linked peasant organizations, as well as NGOs, encouraged the formation of cooperatives – particularly among artisans. In the region of the Valleys of Oaxaca centered around Oaxaca City, there are several large federations of artisans that mix potters, weavers, basketmakers and others. These federations provide shared exhibit space, offer classes on marketing and techniques, and are supposed to be a source of general support for member groups.

Most of the cooperatives in Teotitlán have at one point or another received support from government institutions such as the INI (National Indigenist Institute), FONART (described above), small business support organizations, political parties or non-profit organizations. In the end, however, almost all the cooperatives have cut their ties from such supporting entities after such entities wanted to involve the cooperative in non-weaving activities, recruit them as members of political parties or somehow tried to change the original focus of the group. Most cooperatives now engage in short-term projects with outside agencies geared around specific training activities and work with Oaxaca state agencies to promote their crafts through exhibitions and special stores. Some have joined larger federations of artisans that may group up to 300 people together from 20 or more communities who produce a wide range of crafts and folk art. Working with federations has given individual cooperatives more bargaining power in working with state agencies such as FONART or ARIPO (Artesanías e Industrias Populares del Estado de Oaxaca/Folk Art and Industries of the State of Oaxaca).

Members consistently expressed their long-term goals as: trying to help out their families through earning income, receiving respect and reasonable wages for their work, being able to sell their textiles directly to consumers without merchant intermediaries, providing support for one another in their daily struggles, and working together to promote their work in as many places as possible. Reina, a long-time co-op member, commented about the importance of maintaining her independent status as an artisan.

I decided that I am never going to sell my work again to a *revendedor* (merchant). When I need something, I will think of another way to get money. I never want to be working again as *mano de obra* (contracted labor). My textiles are mine and I will save them so that we can sell them (in the cooperative). . . . I am very proud of this. I never again want to fall into being *mano de obra*.

For women like Reina, being as independent as possible is an important part of her identity as a co-op member. No all cooperative members are able to stay outside contracted labor relations or prevent the necessity of selling their textiles to a merchant for a reduced price, but this is their ideal. Almost all of the 50 women interviewed in 2001–3 who were cooperative members stated that they did earn some income through participating in the cooperatives and that the way they earned it – through direct sales of their signed textiles – was important to them.

The primary activities of the cooperatives include exhibiting their textiles for sale in the city of Oaxaca and elsewhere during key tourist seasons and holidays such as Christmas, Holy Week, during the Guelaguetza celebration in July, and in November for Todos Santos; working together with outside consultants and agencies in workshops on how to learn new dyeing and weaving techniques, how to combine different materials, how to create new designs, how to market their wares and how to work as businesses; regular meetings to plan future activities, evaluate past ones and provide ongoing support to members. A few of the cooperatives rent locations in Oaxaca City either seasonally or on a permanent basis to sell their wares to tourists.

Most groups become more active during the main tourist seasons. In order to set up and staff their exhibits, cooperatives organize their members into teams of two to three people who are responsible for caring for the exhibit, selling textiles and keeping track of all of the sales. They usually sleep in the exhibit overnight, never abandoning the group's merchandise. One person will go to get food for the team, but someone is always present. Often the exhibits are in the context of dozens of other artisans' booths in long rows lining the *zocalo* of Oaxaca City or other parks.

In July 2003, the city government of Oaxaca decided to suspend the exhibitions of artisans around the *zocalo* in the city's center during the summer tourist season. City officials met with artisans from Teotitlán as well as other craft-producing communities to inform them that they were going to 'clean up' the *zocalo* and that the artisans would have to relocate their exhibits to the outskirts of the city by the baseball stadium. Fearful of losing the possibility of exhibiting and selling their textiles in Oaxaca City in the future, members of three cooperatives from Teotitlán went along with the change and dutifully tended to their booths for two weeks. It was an economic disaster. Francisca Ruiz García described the move to the stadium in these words:

Well, they said they were going to 'sweep the *zocalo*'. We thought they literally meant clean. But then we saw that they continued to let other people be there, like the teachers and the other merchants who walk around selling *ropa típica* (locally produced cotton clothing with a 'peasant' flavor). So when they were talking about 'cleaning the *zocalo*' we then saw that they meant us. They thought about us like some kind of pest infestation. They really meant they wanted to clean us up . . .

. . . so they sent us to the stadium. They told us not to worry, that they would bring the tourists there in a bus. Well, we were there for two weeks. We didn't sell a thing. The only people who came were those from the nearby poorer *colonias*. It was so bad that even the donuts didn't sell. Never mind the *ropa típica* or our textiles. It was equally terrible for everyone.

Francisca's group then merged with another new cooperative to sell their textiles locally in Teotitlán. Two other groups that were formed that year

did as well. By the end of the summer of 2003, there were 11 cooperatives in Teotitlán that all worked on similar principles when they sold their goods, whether in Teotitlán, Oaxaca City or elsewhere in Mexico.

At the cooperative's exhibit booth, individual textiles are marked with each weaver's name and price. Those staffing the exhibit keep a list of earnings and return money from sales to the weavers whose work was sold. Each group requires its members to pay a monthly fee that is used to pay for space rental, signs, transportation and other costs associated with the exhibits. At different times, groups may also pool their money to buy materials for weaving or to pay for training. Most groups have had a least one or two experiences in producing large orders for export or for sale inside Mexico. Often these experiences have been difficult, with the exporters rejecting some products, not paying the prices agreed upon or changing the conditions of sale.

One member of Women Who Weave who participated in this experience also suggested that the group could learn from the experience.

We didn't hold up our part of the contract either. We didn't turn in everything in the colors they asked for. Then the goods will be rejected by the large businesses that ordered them. We are thinking about that now in a group of us who are working on exporting. They only want one color so we are looking at ways to come up with uniform dyes for the yarn used in the textiles that we export.

While ideally all of the cooperatives would like to find an exporter who would work with them, they have had more positive experiences selling within Mexico or, in two cases, traveling outside the country to the United States to sell their work themselves directly to consumers. By the summer of 2003, five groups were actively working to complete work on a collaborative web page in conjunction with a Oaxacan state agency for marketing their products electronically. They had not worked out the details of how they would actually run an online business, but individual members in several groups were trying to get training in web-based technologies as well as information about exporting license requirements.

Women's cooperatives and changing gender roles

The initial participants in Women Who Weave were pivotal in modeling alternative gender roles for women in Teotitlán in terms of increased mobility within the community and outside (often traveling as far away as Mexico City and other parts of Mexico), renegotiations of household division of labor so that husbands and children took on some domestic responsibilities when women left to go to meetings or exhibitions, establishing a women's presence in community assemblies, and getting the community accustomed to women having a presence at public events as an organized group. Women Who Weave disintegrated over internal disagreements in 1988. However, one part of the initial group formed a second

cooperative that was active from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1992 to the present. Many of the original members of Women Who Weave, who no longer chose to work together because of disagreements in the cooperative by 1990, went on to found other organizations. By the mid-1990s, five women's cooperatives had been founded by women who were all original members of Women Who Weave. This group of women artisans have taken on key leadership roles in Teotitlán, including as the only female *Secretaría* named by municipal presidents to work in the community government, as a representative to the Mexican National Congress, and in a variety of offices linking the community to other parts of the state of Oaxaca and Mexico.

With the active existence of five women's cooperatives in the mid-1990s involving up to 75 women and their families, the presence of the cooperatives and the women in them became much more visible in the community. It was no longer unusual for women unaccompanied by men to go to Oaxaca City and stay overnight to sell the wares of their group in exhibit stalls. Women from the cooperatives marched in the local parades marking national holidays, met on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in one another's homes, and developed extended support networks for one another. They also began to establish a presence in community assemblies in 1989.

For women who managed to stay active in the co-ops for years on end a big area of change was in their relations with their husbands, in-laws and children. Initially, they had to battle constantly to go to meetings, prepare food ahead of time for their families if they left, and were called 'loose women and whores' for selling their wares outside town. As stated by Mariana in the summer of 2002:

It was really hard for us in the community because women never leave. They dedicate themselves to the tasks of the house. It was hard for our children and our husbands to let us leave. We had to get up really early to prepare all the food that was needed that day and get our husband's permission to leave. . . . It was hard for us at home and in the community because there was not a history of organized groups like this. People were jealous. They saw us as 'bad' women who were out on the street in a group.

For widows, single mothers and unmarried women it has always been easier to participate in the cooperatives. For significant numbers of married women in the cooperatives, getting family members to understand and appreciate what they were doing was very important. Marcelina Ruiz, who was a member of the original cooperative and has led another one for the past 10 years, related how getting her husband to help her and the group has been a key gain. She states:

It was a huge battle with our husbands. We had to break our chains with them there in the community. Thanks to all our struggles, now they help us. Our husbands understand us. They understand that what we are doing isn't just for women, but for the whole family. When we first started, it was a huge battle. The fact that we were leaving the community was really looked down upon. . . .

Later when our husbands saw what we were doing, that in fact we sold more than the men who came to Oaxaca did, they let us alone. . . . Now they are happy to help us.

As husbands, sons, mothers-in-law and other relatives who had resisted women's participation in the cooperatives saw that they were moderately successful in terms of selling their wares and beginning to gain a source of independent income, they became more supportive of women's participation. Often, when the women's cooperatives come to exhibit their work in Oaxaca City, their sons and husbands accompany them, helping to set up their displays. Or some men have showed support through staying at home and caring for children and cooking in their wives' absence. Arrangements such as this are usually the work of many years of tension and adjustment between men and women with regard to the domestic division of labor. For women in the cooperatives who came primarily from households that labored as pieceworkers or tried to maintain a precarious existence as independent weavers, the cooperatives offered a limited sphere where they could sell their textiles directly to tourists and keep a higher percentage of the profit. This factor seems to motivate men in their families as well, who are willing to be more flexible in their domestic duties in order to attempt to increase household income.

During the past 12 years, 13 cooperatives of weavers have formed, involving more than 125 households or about 600 people out of a population of 4500. As seen in the list below, these include two men's cooperative as well as several mixed (men and women) cooperatives. The majority of people in cooperatives, however, continue to be women. With about 15 percent of the households in the community participating in cooperatives, the groups have come to constitute a significant presence in the community.

Weaving cooperatives and women's political participation

The cooperatives' impact on the political life of the community and women's place in it has been primarily through their formal recognition as a part of the government structure of the community and the invitation of women from the cooperatives to participate as voting members in community assemblies. Prior to the late 1980s, women never attended community assemblies and rarely assumed civil cargo posts¹ except as part of school and health committees. They never served in roles directly connected to the city council, justice structure or in relation to natural resource custodianship. The primary reason given to me in interviews for women's absence from community assemblies and from civil cargo posts during 2001, 2002 and 2003 (as in the 1980s) was '*costumbre*'. '*Se hizo costumbre*' (it turned into the custom), '*costum shle re*' (it's the custom here). Women who wanted to go to assemblies and felt qualified to hold cargo posts commented that it was not only '*costumbre*', but in fact was also

'*machismo*' (their word) and a lack of confidence in women. The growing number of women in the weaving cooperatives in the late 1980s and 1990s began to establish the presence of women in community politics – both formally and informally understood.

The Women Who Weave cooperative began to attend community assemblies at the invitation of the municipal president in 1989. These women were the first to ever set foot in the all-male assemblies. They remember it as very difficult. Cristina Ruiz commented:

We received a lot of criticism. They said, 'What are you doing? You would be better off going back to your kitchens.' We even got this kind of comment from the men in the *municipio* who were the elected authorities. . . . We had to be really tough to go back.

The women from the cooperative entered the meetings as a group and sat together on a bench in the front of the assembly. Dozens of women I interviewed in 2001, 2002 and 2003 acknowledged the importance of this breakthrough.

When Women Who Weave split and its members stopped being active between 1988 and 1990, their attendance at community assemblies dropped off. It was not until other cooperatives were formed in the 1990s that women began to attend the meetings again in small groups of five to ten. Josefina Jiménez, who is a member of the second incarnation of Gunha Ruinchi Laadti/Mujeres Que Tejen (Women Who Weave), began to go to community assemblies with about eight other women from her cooperative in 1995. She described how difficult this was and how it was not until quite recently (fall of 2001) that women began to go to community assemblies in large numbers. We discussed this topic in August of 2002.

Lynn: Do you think that the fact that there are so many women in weavers' cooperatives now is going to affect their political participation in the community? Do you think if women are going to community assemblies that they will eventually start to take on more of the cargos?

Josefina: Yes, I think this could happen or the more that women participate in the assemblies the more this idea could come true [of women holding civil cargos]. This is the idea, that we go, that we be treated equal to the men, and more than anything that they give us the right to vote, to have an opinion. Because we are human beings and we think the same way as men. We shouldn't be excluded anymore because of our culture. Before, when we went to the first meetings, both women and men shouted at us, 'These women should go home and make their tamales.' They used to stand outside of the meeting in front and say to us, 'These women should go make tamales. They should go make tortillas.' In other words to tell us that we had nothing to do with what went on there, that we should return home to our housework, that is what they told us then. . . .

Lynn: It sounds really hard.

Josefina: It was very hard because they would scream at us. Then the women and girls in the group would say, 'We are not going to go again.' I would tell them,

'Come on, let's participate.' They would reply, 'No, we don't want to because then the men will scream at us.' When there was a new *presidente municipal* [mayor] we went to talk with him. As you know, all the groups go to present themselves to the new mayor. He asked us how much we were going to participate in the assemblies. We said, well first, it was really late at night when the meetings get out, and second, the men are going to scream at us. We told him that the time at night wasn't convenient for us and that we couldn't come because we also had husbands and if we went then that could cause problems with them. The *presidente* and other authorities told us, 'Well, we invite you. Think about it and if you can come, you are very welcome.' So after that we didn't go to the assemblies or only went once in a while.

Lynn: Because of the pressure.

Josefina: Yes, because of the pressure. It was the same way in the parades. They would invite us to march in the parade for 16 September [Mexican Independence Day] and then everyone would shout at us, 'There go the artisan women,' and point.

Lynn: So what happened with this?

Josefina: Well, this ended and now the women are going to the assemblies. For example, the president who was just elected [October 2001] was named by the women because the majority of the votes for him were women's votes . . . the women's groups were there in the meeting.

As described by Josefina and many other women interviewed in 2001, 2002 and 2003, for almost eight years between 1993 and 2001, attendance by women at community assemblies was sporadic. Women in the co-ops decided instead to concentrate their energies on promoting their textiles in the state of Oaxaca and elsewhere in Mexico. The presence and activities of the women's cooperatives, however, seemed to have a subtle impact elsewhere as well. Sometime in the early 1990s, women became a part of the municipal marketing committee and by the mid-1990s began to serve as elected officers of the market committee such as treasurer and vice president. In contrast to the 1980s when the committee was run by their fathers and other male relatives, by 2001 women were well represented on the market committee and were gaining administrative experience on the committee, which may allow them to move on to other cargos as well.

Women in the cooperatives are now specifically invited as groups to attend community assemblies. Written invitations are often delivered before the assemblies to the *presidentas* (presidents) of the different cooperatives or a messenger goes to verbally invite them. All of the committees that are part of the municipal government structure receive invitations to come to the community assemblies. Inclusion of all of the cooperatives in the group of committees invited to attend the assembly is formal recognition of their existence as a valid part of the community governance structure. As such they are being recognized by the *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions) of the town.

During 2001, 2002 and 2003 women's participation in community

assemblies seemed to have increased. In the fall of 2001 at a meeting described above by Josefina where the new *presidente municipal* (mayor) was elected, more than 250 women attended, invited by the outgoing mayor. Some of the women who attended were in cooperative groups. Others were affiliated with government programs such as PROGRESA (Education, Health and Nutrition Program) – now called Oportunidades (Opportunities). The municipal president was referred to by some as '*el presidente que eligieron las mujeres*' (the president elected by the women), since many voted for him. He is greatly respected and is considered to be one of the few remaining elders who has a deep knowledge of local history, customs, language and farming techniques. Women who attended the meeting recalled it as 'impressive' to see that many of those present were women and that they all voted. While attendance at subsequent meetings has not been as high, women have established a consistent presence at community assemblies since that time. In addition, in the politicizing that goes on at the market, at fiestas and other sites, a few women have been actively talked about by men and women as candidates for civil cargo positions in the future – something that I never heard in the 1980s. Nevertheless, while women are making headway in establishing a formal political presence in the community, those who have been pioneers in initiating women's presence at assemblies and who have taken on leadership roles have endured significant levels of harassment from community members and may face battles with their relatives.

At the same time, however, there is a new generation of some younger men who are also supportive of women participating in community political life and who want to participate together with them. In 2003, several of the new cooperatives that were formed involved both men and women working together. The leadership of these cooperatives was often mixed. Men and women who worked together in them talked about their commitment to working together. For some of them, this also meant working together beyond the sphere of the cooperative and moving this cooperation into the sphere of community politics.

The major impact of the cooperatives for women's relationships at home has been to create a space in part of the community where gender conventions for weaver women are being reordered – giving women greater independence as artisans, involving husbands, children and others in domestic work and support work for the cooperatives when women leave, and providing women with a sense of respect and appreciation for their economic contributions and efforts on behalf of their families.

Chronology of women's and other co-ops in Teotitlán

1986–8: Gunah Ruinchi Laadti/Mujeres Que Tejen (Women Who Weave)

1988–90: Gunah Shaguaia/Mujeres de Teotitlán (Women of Teotitlán)

- 1992–present: Gunah Ruinchi Laadti is started up again
- 1993–present: Serapes, Arte y Tradición (Serapes, Art and Tradition), men's group
- 1994–present: Gunah Shagua is restarted with a different group of women
- 1995–present: Consejo para la Integración de la Mujer (Council for the Integration of Women). In 1999 name changed to Galbain Cuay/Nueva Vida (New Life).
- 1996–present: Dgunaa Gulal Ni Ruin Laadti/Mujeres Antiguas Que Hacen Tapetes (Traditional Women Who Weave)
- 2000–present: D'Gunaa Shiguie Nee Sian/Mujeres Unidas de Teotitlán (Women United of Teotitlán)
- 2000–present: Laadti Guedi/Tapete Lavado (Washed Blanket), men's and women's group
- 2000–present: Ben Ruinchi Laadti/Tejedor Zapoteco (Zapotec Weaver), men's group
- 2001–present: Gunaa Ghezbetza/Mujeres Piedra Hermana (Sister Rock Women), women's group with a few men.
- 2003–present: Ghiabetz/Hermano Piedra (Brother Rock), mixed group of men and women
- 2003–present: Yagubiech/Piedra del Sol (Sun Rock), mixed group of men and women

Conclusions

Commercialization of textiles beginning in the 1970s has pushed women into the weaving labor force in significant numbers, not only in Teotitlán but also in surrounding communities such as Santa Ana del Valle and San Miguel del Valle. While women weavers appear to receive equal pay to men for their work and occupational recognition – something that is still lacking for most working women in Mexico – in most cases weaving has added to the number of hours women must work in order to complete all of their daily chores. As some women left the community to work elsewhere (usually those from weaver households) in Mexico or in the United States, they began to see some of the limits imposed on their movements and ability to earn income in Teotitlán as a result of traditional gender norms. In addition, both returning migrant women and others who remained in the community questioned their status as *mano de obra* or contracted piecework labor for local merchants and indirectly for US importers.

The emergence of 13 weaving cooperatives run primarily by women in the past 15 years has begun to change the way in which some weaver women's work is structured and rewarded at home, in the community and the larger textile market. Another effect of the cooperatives has been a limited re-ordering of gender relations in the homes of cooperative participants, particularly when they leave home to go to meetings and exhibitions. Then, husbands, children and others have had to make up for women's absence and help out with domestic chores. In some cases, men have also left their work temporarily to accompany women to Oaxaca City and elsewhere to help set up and maintain exhibit booths. Such an effort

represents a significant change in gender relations between men and women in cooperative member households. A majority of weaver women still remain outside of the cooperatives, however. For them, many of the customs that dictate the gendered division of labor and restrict women's freedom of movement may remain. Where the weaving cooperatives may have had a more direct effect on all women's lives is through their role in opening up formal political participation for women through their formal inclusion in community assemblies.

The overall impact of commercialization on women and on the entire community of Teotitlán has been contradictory. The community's economic success from the 1950s through the 1980s seems clearly tied to a history of independence, particularly with regard to defending Teotitlán's economic claim on textiles. The town first resisted government monitoring of production in the 1930s and 1940s and then avoided heavy participation in craft development projects that put the state in the position of middleman. Because they were successful on their own, Teotitecos avoided participation in government programs. This independent stance emerged again in the 1970s as local merchants began to develop their own links to US importers, and again in the 1980s and 1990s with the formation of cooperatives.

From 1970–85, it seemed that the average level of income had gone up in Teotitlán. All Teotitecos agreed then that their material life improved significantly. Because of the rapid development of a petty capitalist merchant class, however, increases in income were not evenly distributed. People within the community as well as outside it were aware of the heightened differences between merchants and the rest of the population that marked the 1980s. Because most of the town's wealthy merchants in the mid-1980s began as poor farmers and weavers, many people in the community, including young women, believed it was possible to move into the merchant sector. This picture changed in the 1990s.

In Teotitlán, the economic crisis of 1995 was deeply felt. Levels of tourism decreased somewhat in the late 1990s and after 11 September 2001 declined further. Cooperative weavers noted in 2002 and 2003 that they were selling significantly less in the local market and in Oaxaca City markets than they had even in the late 1990s. Thus the marked increase in social stratification brought on throughout Mexico in the 1990s as a result of neoliberal economic policies was also felt in Teotitlán. While the final outcome of such policies on the local economy and gender relations is not clear, one result, in combination with the experience of returning migrants and increasing levels of education among women and men, was the initiation of weaving cooperatives which create new kinds of economic, cultural and political spaces for weavers who were further marginalized in local and global economies of the 1990s.

The fact that the cooperative sector is growing in Teotitlán suggests that the impact of the community's further integration into the global economy under neoliberal economic policy cannot be solely explained 'as

a transnational network of subcontracting relations . . . a truly transnational productive strategy characteristic of the relations of production under late (or post-Fordist) capitalism (especially the “flexible” and “off-shore” varieties)’ (Wood, 2000b: 185). The emergence of cooperatives, the continued presence of six or so powerful merchant families who both work with wholesalers in the US and also run their own businesses with local subcontracting involving their continued work with local weavers bound through kin, ritual kin and other local relations makes me hesitate to characterize the entirety of weaving production in Teotitlán as ‘a proliferation of outsourcing, subcontracting and the creation and maintenance of a low-cost-temporary labor force’, as it is described in the recent research of Wood (2000a: 135).

The coexistence of labor relations structured in some cases by kinship and ritual kinship, in other cases by friendship and family bonds through a cooperative structure, and in still other cases by indirect labor subcontracting relations where there are no direct personal connections tells us that the primary characteristic of contemporary labor relations and of social reproduction in Teotitlán is flexibility, as clearly suggested by David Harvey’s path-breaking analysis of late 20th-century capitalism, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). Harvey argues that the evidence ‘for increased flexibility (sub-contracting, temporary and self-employment, etc.) throughout the capitalist world is simply too overwhelming’ to ignore (1989: 191). At the same time, he also points out that flexible technologies and organizational forms have not become hegemonic everywhere. This is an important observation in relation to the organization of textile production in Teotitlán since the late 1980s where the ethnic and gendered relations of production are influenced by multiple forms of organization that still include kinship and ritual kinship as well as transnational subcontracting. Michael Chibnik (2003) reached similar conclusions in his analysis of the wood-carving industry in the state of Oaxaca, which had a boom in the 1990s. The wood-carving economies Chibnik studied did not break into foreign entrepreneurs and importers running large factory-like workshops through subcontracting. Instead, with the exception of a couple of larger workshops opened temporarily by local carver families in the mid-1990s with 20–35 workers, most production of wood carvings is done by family workshops. A majority of the wood carvings are imported and distributed through several importers, but a wide range of networks, including local sales to tourists, sales through stores and markets in Oaxaca City, and sales on the Internet are a part of the wood-carving distribution network. Many wood carvers continue to earn significant income through migrant remittances and also to depend on subsistence farming.

In an analysis of apparel production in San Cosme Mazatecocho in central Mexico, Frances Rothstein (this issue) documents several different kinds of production workshops ranging from independent workshops that produce for regional markets and produce and market their own products,

to '*maquilas*' workshops where workers sew pre-cut pieces for local or outside brokers who subcontract for domestic retailers and sometimes for export. Women are a significant part of the labor force. Like the current variation found in forms of textile production in Teotitlán, Rothstein (2005: 288) writes:

That the residents of San Cosme have been able to endure the volatile market is due in part to their multiple income strategies and also to their flexibility with regards to production. They change what they produce, how they produce, for whom, and how much they produce very often. Although they cannot control the unstable apparel market, they have adapted to that market to survive its volatility.

The variety of forms of organization of production used in San Cosme as well as the flexibility in what is produced and how is somewhat reminiscent of Teotitlán.

Finally, because most women in Teotitlán have continued to have responsibility for procuring basic household goods, at least partial responsibility for administering household budgets, and for basic healthcare and childcare, the range of strategies they have employed in order to take care of their families – particularly the strategy of forming and joining weaving cooperatives – suggests that what have been called women's 'individual responses' to economic hardship in Mexico may be only one way that women have of coping. Highlighting the pivotal role of the women's cooperatives both as economic strategies but also as political and cultural spaces for expanding women's autonomy and influence in a range of arenas builds on other work which has explored women's and indigenous people's collective responses to poverty and marginalization (see Alvarez, forthcoming; Babb, 2001; Dore, 1997; Jaquette, 1994; Jelin, 1990; Kumar, 2001; Lind, 1992; Nash, 2001; Stephen, 1997). While neoliberalism has certainly resulted in continued economic and social hardship for many indigenous (and other) women in Mexico, it has also generated many creative forms of organization that continue to struggle for indigenous women's integrity and local economic autonomy. In the words of June Nash: 'In the competition between the moral logic of indigenous people and the rational logic of free market globalization, indigenous peoples are the protagonists for change who offer the greatest challenge to the New World Order defined by superpowers' (2001: 25).

Note

- 1 The entire government of Teotitlán is made up of volunteer jobs known as cargo posts: mayor, city counsellors, judges, police, school committees, water resource committees and many more. There are about 250 such positions. Each household in the community is required to fill one of these positions every two or three years. People are elected to these positions in community assemblies.

References

- Alvarez, Sonia (forthcoming) *Contentious Feminisms: Cultural Politics, Policy Advocacy, and Transnational Activism in Latin America*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Babb, Florence (2001) *After Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bartra, Eli (2003) 'Engendering Clay: Women Potters of Mata Ortiz', in Eli Bartra (ed.) *Crafting Gender: Women and Folk Art in Latin America and the Caribbean*, pp. 125–57. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Benería, Lourdes (1992) 'The Mexican Debt Crisis: Restructuring the Economy and the Household', in Lourdes Benería and Shelly Feldman (eds) *Unequal Burden: Economic Crises, Persistent Poverty, and Women's Work*, pp. 83–104. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Castro Apreza, Inés (2003) 'Contemporary Women's Movement in Chiapas', in Christine Eber and Christine Kovic (eds) *Women of Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope*, pp. 197–206. New York and London: Routledge.
- Castro Apreza, Yolanda (2003) 'J'pas Joloviletik-Jolom Mayaetik-K'inál Antzetik: An Organization Experience of Indigenous and Mestiza Women', in Christine Eber and Christine Kovic (eds) *Women of Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope*, pp. 207–18. New York and London: Routledge.
- Chibnik, Michael (2003) *Crafting Tradition: The Making and Marketing of Oaxacan Wood Carvings*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Clements, Helen (1988) 'Buscando la Forma: Self-reorganization in Craft Commercialization', paper presented at the 16th International Congress of Americanists, 4–8 July, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 4–8 July.
- Cohen, Jeffery (1988) 'Zapotec Weaving: Performance Theory, From Verbal to Visual Art', paper presented at the American Ethnological Society Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri, 24–27 March.
- Cohen, Jeffrey (1999) *Cooperation and Community: Economy and Society in Oaxaca*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cohen, Jeffrey (2000) 'Textile Production in Rural Mexico: The Complexities of the Global Market for Handmade Crafts', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 129–42. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Dore, Elizabeth (1997) *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Eber, Christine (2000) '“That They be in the Middle, Lord”: Women, Weaving, and Cultural Survival in Highland Chiapas, Mexico', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 45–64. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Eber, Christine and Brenda Rosenbaum (1993) '“That We May Serve Beneath Your Hands and Feet”: Women Weavers in Highland Chiapas, Mexico', in June Nash (ed.) *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans*, pp. 127–54. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Eber, Christine and Christine Kovic (2003) *Women of Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Ehlers, Tracy Bachrach (1993) 'Belts, Business, and Bloomingdale's: An Alternative Model for Guatemalan Artisan Development', in June Nash (ed.) *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans*, pp. 181–98. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- González de la Rocha, Mercedes (1994) *The Resources of Poverty: Women and Survival in a Mexican City*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Grimes, Kimberly M. (2000) 'Democratizing International Production and Trade: North American Alternative Trading Organizations', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 11–24. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Grimes, Kimberly M. and B. Lynne Milgram (2000) Introduction: Facing the Challenges of Artisan Production in the Global Market', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynn Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 3–10. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Harvey, David (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) (1992) *XI censo general de población y vivienda 1990, estado de Oaxaca*. Aguascalientes: INEGI.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) (2000) *XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000, Oaxaca*. URL (consulted May 2003) <http://www.inego.bog.mx/difusioin/espanol/poblacion/definitivos/oaxa/in dice.html>
- Jaquette, Jane (1994) *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy*, revised edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Jelin, Elizabeth (1990) *Women and Social Change in Latin America*. London: Zed Books.
- Kovic, Christine and Christine Eber (2003) 'Overview: Women Organizing for Social Change', in Christine Eber and Christine Kovic (eds) *Women of Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope*, pp. 193–7. New York: Routledge.
- Kumar, Krishna (2001) *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press.
- Lind, Amy (1992) 'Power, Gender, and Development: Popular Women's Organizations and the Politics of Needs in Ecuador', in Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez (eds) *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, pp. 134–49. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lynd, Martha (2000) 'The International Craft Market: A Double-edged Sword for Guatemalan Maya Women', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 65–84. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Mexico Solidarity Network (2002) *Weekly News and Analysis*, 12–18 August. URL (consulted 19 August 2002) <http://www.mexicosolidarty.org/>
- Milgram, B. Lynne (2000) 'Reorganizing Textile Production for the Global Market: Women's Craft Cooperatives in Ifugad, Upland Philippines', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 107–28. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Nash, June (1993a) 'Introduction: Traditional Arts and Changing Markets in Middle America', in June Nash (ed.) *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans*, pp. 1–24. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nash, June (1993b) 'Maya Household Production in the World Market: The Potters of Amatenango del Valle, Chiapas', in June Nash (ed.) *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans*, pp. 127–54. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nash, June (2001) *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Routledge.

- Rosenbaum, Brenda (2000) 'Of Women, Hope, and Angels: Fair Trade and Artisan Production in a Squatter Settlement in a Guatemala City', in Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, pp. 85–106. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Rothstein, Frances Abrahamer (2005) 'Challenging Consumption Theory: Production and Consumption in Central Mexico', *Critique of Anthropology* 25(3): 279–306.
- Stephen, Lynn (1997) *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power From Below*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stephen, Lynn (2000) 'The Construction of Indigenous Suspects: Militarization and the Gendered and Ethnic Dynamics of Human Rights Abuses in Southern Mexico', *American Ethnologist* 26(4): 822–42.
- Tice, Karin E. (1995) *Kuna Crafts, Gender, and the Global Economy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Wood, William Warner (2000a) 'Flexible Production, Households, and Fieldwork: Multisited Zapotec Weavers in the Era of Late Capitalism', *Ethnology* 39(2): 133–48.
- Wood, William Warner (2000b) 'Stories from the Field: Handicraft Production and Mexican National Patrimony: A Lesson in Translocality from B. Traven', *Ethnology* 39(3): 183–203.

■ **Lynn Stephen**, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oregon, has focused on the intersection of culture and politics. Her two most recent books are *Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (University of California Press, 2002) and *Perspectives on Las Americas: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation* (Blackwell, 2003), co-edited with Matt Gutmann, Felix Matos Rodriguez, and Pat Zavella. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, the National Endowment for Humanities, and the Center for United States–Mexican Studies and research grants from the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Inter-American Foundation. Address: Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403–1218, USA. [email: stephenl@uoregon.edu]
