

## Abstract

The Zapatista uprising and the radical movement for democracy which it inspired have profoundly affected indigenous women and their families in Chiapas. In this paper I focus on the meanings of this movement for women by contrasting the experiences of two indigenous women from the same township who have different relationships to the Zapatista movement as well as different strategies of obtaining social justice for themselves and their children. Focusing on the two women's experiences with marriage and education I compare ways in which they are dealing with changes in these arenas. I also discuss women's participation in three social movements - Liberation Theology, weaving cooperatives and bases of support for the Zapatistas. I describe how through their personal choices and group projects women are creating the foundations for greater gender equality while preserving their culture's traditional emphases on social responsibility, economic interdependence between spouses and generations, and spiritual strength as a collective rather than an individual achievement.

## About the Author

Christine Eber is a cultural anthropologist in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at New Mexico State University. Her research focuses on women, gender, and religious change among Maya peoples of highland Chiapas, Mexico. In her book *Women and Alcohol in a Highland Maya Town: Water of Hope, Water of Sorrow*, she deals with the subjects of indigenous women's experiences with their own and others' alcohol use and abuse, and women's roles as shamans. Since the rebellion in 1994 Dr. Eber has been studying women's responses to the Zapatista democracy movement, specifically their collective efforts. Since 1987 she has been helping a women's weaving cooperative in Chenalhó obtain fair markets in the United States as well as educating U.S. consumers on the effects of their buying power on indigenous women and their families. In 1995 she began assisting a women's bakery cooperative in a Zapatista support group. Recently Dr. Eber has been researching women's experience with domestic violence in both Chiapas and in New Mexico.

# Seeking Justice, Valuing Community: Two Women's Paths in the Wake of the Zapatista Rebellion

by

Christine E. Eber

Working Paper  
#265  
March 1998

**Women and International Development**

Michigan State University  
202 International Center, East Lansing, MI 48824-1035  
Ph: 517/353-5040, Fax: 517/432-4845  
E-mail: [wid@msu.edu](mailto:wid@msu.edu), Web: <http://www.isp.msu.edu/wid>

## **Dedication**

While I was in the final stages of editing this paper a massacre occurred in Acteal, a hamlet of San Pedro Chenalhó, the township where the women discussed in this paper live. I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of the 45 people who died on December 22, 1997, in Acteal. Thirty-nine of these people were women and children. Fortunately, neither of the two women who are the focus of this paper died in this massacre. I am grateful that they live on and believe that the spirit of the women who died in Acteal live on in them.

## Introduction

This paper discusses how indigenous women in highland Chiapas, Mexico are seeking meaningful ways to obtain greater equality with their kinsmen, a better life for their children, and justice for their communities. I attempt to bring a human face to depictions of indigenous women by contrasting the stories of two women. Antonia, thirty-six and the mother of six, embraces the Zapatista democracy movement as her own. Her involvement in Liberation Theology and a weaving cooperative helped prepare her for this pivotal movement in her nation's history when she was able to take a more active role in civil society. Mónica, also thirty-six and the mother of seven, finds the Zapatista movement compelling, but too radical for her liking. She straddles both indigenous and non-indigenous cultures in her effort to obtain the material benefits and opportunities that she believes non-indigenous culture provides, without losing her connection to valued traditions.

Antonia and Mónica live in the township of San Pedro Chenalhó in two adjacent rural hamlets between forty-two and fifty kilometers from San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the urban center of highland Chiapas. I first met the two women in 1987 when I was conducting research on women's experiences with ritual and problem drinking.<sup>1</sup> My research on this subject revealed the important roles kin bonds and communal traditions play in shaping women's identities. Antonia's and Mónica's stories show contrasts between the community-embedded way of life in rural indigenous communities and the more individual-centered way of life in urban areas.

In the women's biographies I focus on events since the 1994 Zapatista uprising and how the two women have responded to these events. In my commentary I use the women's experiences as lenses through which to view marriage and education, two arenas that reveal key tensions in indigenous communities between elders and youth, men and women, and individuals and their communities. I focus on Antonia's experiences to probe more deeply into women's participation in social movements in Chiapas, specifically Liberation Theology, The Zapatista democracy movement and the weaving cooperative movement. Women's participation in these movements reflects a tendency Mayas of Chiapas have shown to mold diverse influences into a distinctive way of life that preserves fundamental understandings about gender and justice (Nash 1997; Gossen 1996).

Throughout this essay I call attention to sources of strength for indigenous women in their kin bonds and in local knowledge encoded in communal traditions. I show how Antonia and Mónica differ in their relations to many traditions, but are similar in their rejection of the individual rights perspective of Western feminism. Through their lives the two women demonstrate how it can continue to be relevant to work from collective identities in struggles to obtain economic and political justice and how women, like Mónica, can take on aspects of a more individualistic way of life without abandoning aspects of their ancestors' traditions. The women show us how ethnic identity and cultural traditions can be foundations upon which to create social movements that expand rights for women.

Antonia's and Mónica's experiences foreground the agency of individual women whose daily experiences require them to shift their positions in complicated and changing social structures. By telling the two women's stories, I respond to concerns within anthropology that ethnographers shy away from representing the subjectivities of the people we study (Nash 1997; Ortner 1995). However, at the same time as I present the richness of Antonia's and Mónica's individual lives, I argue that the importance of the women as subjects lies as much in the projects they create as in who they are (Ortner 1995: 187). Antonia especially uses the two cooperatives in which she is involved to create and transform both her personal identity and the social universe to which she belongs.

Antonia and Mónica's analyses, ways of surviving, and dreams for the future provide a sense of the alternative ways of being and knowing that are a part of the mosaic of experience in Chiapas. The Zapatista rebellion called attention to this diversity in the national dialogue they initiated on autonomy, indigenous culture, and women's rights. I preface the women's stories and personal views with a brief discussion of three different perspectives on indigenous women and their cultural systems which have come to our attention through this dialogue. By showing how two women situate themselves in relation to these perspectives I argue that indigenous women are finding their own paths to greater equality with men in their societies by building on areas they see as strong within their people's cultural systems. The paths Antonia and Mónica are forging do not privilege individual over collective rights but bind their personal freedom with their communities' liberation, bringing these two conceptions into a more holistic framework.

### **Conceptual frameworks**

The following section presents three perspectives on indigenous women and weaves background information on their cultural systems into these perspectives. The perspectives are: (1) those of indigenous women as filtered through researchers who have interviewed them; (2) those of indigenous and non-indigenous women working in organizations to implement the Zapatista agenda as recorded in their writings; and (3) those of social scientists. By comparing and contrasting these versions of rural indigenous women's experiences I attempt to provide a more nuanced point of view somewhere between the stereotypes of "total oppression" and "harmonic complementation" that writings about indigenous women of Chiapas sometimes reproduce.<sup>2</sup>

### **Indigenous women's views**

The "total oppression" stereotype is common in descriptions young indigenous women soldiers in the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) give when asked to comment on women's rights. Most women rebels came of age in training camps where gender roles and relations differ radically from those of their home communities (Clarke and Ross 1994; El Tiempo 1994; K'inál Anzetik 1995; La Jornada 1994; Rojas 1994; Rovira 1996). Women combatants rarely mention anything positive for women living in more community embedded villages. Comandante Maribel, a Chol-speaking Zapatista soldier, sums up a Maya woman's life (Steinsleger 1994):

[Women] get married when they are fifteen, and after they have children their life is worth nothing. Their role is reduced to taking care of their husbands and children and working.

No one can deny the reality of the previous statement and it is important to take it seriously. As Antonia's and Mónica's stories will illustrate, women do marry early; they have many children and they spend their lives taking care of their families. Yet, quotes such as Maribel's leave us with the impression that indigenous women have no value to their people except as workhorses and baby machines. To a young woman embarking upon the rest of her life and engrossed in a radical movement to restructure her society, this view may be the only real one. However, this conception obscures the ways in which beliefs and practices in communities such as Chenalhó foster a variety of socially meaningful roles for women while keeping their kinsmen in check.

A key feature of indigenous women's oral histories are the rewards women say they receive from doing important and esteemed work in their societies, work which complements their husbands' work (Eber 1995; Jiménez López 1987; Komes Peres 1990; Rosenbaum 1996; 1993; n.d.) Women experience these rewards in their public cargos.<sup>3</sup> The Tzotzil word for cargo is *nichimal abtel* (flowery or sacred work). The concept evokes the responsibility people have to assist powerful spiritual beings to keep the world in flower and in balance so that people can live in harmony with each other and the spiritual beings (Eber 1995: 187). Observing and interviewing female fiesta leaders and shamans in the late 1980s I learned that they see their service to their people as just as important as their husbands' service. To these women cargo service is an occasion of power, beauty, and suffering, a time during which they carry the burden of mediating between the gods and ordinary people (Eber 1995; Rosenbaum 1993). After fulfilling her service in 1987 as *me' alperes* (madam standard bearer) for the Feast of St. Peter, the patron saint of Chenalhó, Angelika explained to me how she felt (Eber 1995: 107):

Ah, I feel content, because now I've done the work of our flowery Lord of the sky. I passed in his feet and in his hands. I carried him and embraced him for a day and a year. Now I've fulfilled my work before him. It's good that I fulfilled my work, because they say it's best to do this. They told me, "Nothing went badly." My husband didn't do anything bad when he drank. He didn't get angry. Our hearts were equal, content... Now we are returning everything we borrowed because of our work for St. Peter. Also, because I want to be in his hands. You see, I am the daughter of St. Peter.

In their households women also experience rewards. While gender roles are flexible and constantly changing, traditionally men work in the milpa raising food for subsistence or in wage labor and women work in and around the house compound caring for children and animals, weaving for household use and sale and carrying out myriad other chores required to maintain the household. Elders in Antonia's and Mónica's communities say that relations between spouses should mirror the complementary, reciprocal, and respectful relations that exist between people and Earth and the other spiritual beings. Elders speak of growing up as making one's soul arrive, i.e. a life-long effort to act humbly and respectfully (Arias 1973; Eber 1995). Humility and ideas about the fragility of souls militate against the bullying and disrespect that can occur when men see women as objects to be used or property to be owned.

Despite continued belief in the "rightness" of a way of life based on reciprocity with spiritual beings, gender complementarity and milpa production, the reality of life in Chiapas often collides with these ideas. In terms of spiritual and gender complementarity, men sometimes drink too much in public rituals and at home destabilizing the balance between themselves, spiritual beings, and loved ones. Men also keep women out of hamlet and township governance by discouraging their participation in public forums. Most women fear that if they speak out in public men will criticize them or make fun of them for assuming a non-traditional role or for being inarticulate. Oratory has been men's art form in indigenous communities, while weaving and pottery-making have been women's.

In relation to milpa production, lack of productive land has forced young people to seek alternatives to make a living as wage laborers or in commerce. In townships such as Zinacantán gains young men have made in economic independence through wage labor have led to their lack of interest in fulfilling bride service and serving cargos (Cancian 1992; Collier 1994:114-116). Both young men and women are caught

between the world of their parents, rooted in cargo service and the milpa, and the urban world of Mestizos with wage labor, educational opportunities, religious diversity, and non-traditional gender roles and relations. Today increasing elopements and women choosing not to marry or to be single mothers reflect young people's rejection of elder's and men's control over their lives as well as the monetization of the economy (Devereaux 1987; Flood 1994; Garza Caligaris & Ruiz Ortiz 1992; Juárez Espinosa and Cruz Cruz 1993; Siverts 1993).

Women's experiences with problem drinking and domestic violence contradict the complementary ideal. Research on domestic violence and maternal death reveals a dark face behind the ideal of gender complementarity. Research on women who died during the course of their pregnancies, childbirth or its aftermath in Chenalhó documents that domestic violence was a factor in several women's deaths (Freyermuth Enciso 1996; Freyermuth Enciso and Pinto 1996; Rovira 1997: 216-220). Researchers, health workers and community activists report that alcoholism and domestic abuse are serious problems in indigenous communities throughout Chiapas (Eber 1995; Rosenbaum 1993; Rovira 1996; K'inál Antzetik 1995).

Anthropologists and others have recorded many narratives of domestic violence over the past decade (Rosenbaum 1993; Eber 1995; Freyermuth Enciso 1996). But the Zapatista uprising and the work of women's organizations have brought to light many more testimonies (IFCO-Pastors for Peace 1996; Rovira 1997). These narratives show a shift from those collected before the rebellion in which women tended to contextualize their stories within the suffering their kinsmen also endure in the normal course of their lives (Eber 1995; personal communication, Rosenbaum, D. Rus and J. Rus). Until recently women may have said they suffered differently from men, but they rarely argued that women suffer more. Even today when describing abuses women tend to focus on those related to poverty and racism that affect their whole communities, for example the lack of health clinics in their communities or social assistance in times of need (Rovira 1997: 216-220). But overall women seem to be developing a more critical perspective on the abuses they suffer as women.

Speaking out about abuse carries risks, further revealing the gap between ideal and real notions of gender complementarity. For example when women choose not to marry, marry outside of traditions, have children without marrying, run for political office, or participate in cooperatives they risk being gossiped about and openly criticized for creating disharmony in gender roles and relations (Garza Caligaris & Ruiz Ortiz 1992; Juárez Espinosa and Cruz Cruz 1993). For example, Petrona de La Cruz Cruz, co-founder with Isabel Juárez Espinosa of LA FOMMA, *Fortaleza de la Mujer Indígena* (Strength of the Mayan Woman) an organization that involves indigenous women in play writing and acting, had to stand up to her family's accusations that she was a prostitute when she first began acting. Ironically, she stated, "It is more acceptable for me to be a servant than an actress (Laughlin 1991: 89)."

Indigenous women who step out of traditional roles have sometimes been the victims of intimidation, physical assaults, and murder. In Amatenango in the 1980s two women were murdered for leading a craft cooperative and running for township president (Nash 1993:127-129). In recent years leaders of weaving cooperatives in San Cristóbal have been physically assaulted or have received anonymous death threats. Rosa Gómez, an indigenous woman from Jitotol, was killed with a machete by her husband who resented her frequent trips to meetings to discuss women's issues, even though she participated with her husband in a peasant organization (Hernández Castillo n.d.) The rape and torture by judicial police of Julieta Flores, a young woman from Angel Albino Corzo whose father was active in peasant organizing, is a tragic case of government agents torturing and defiling a woman to break the will of her family and community (ibid.)

Human rights observers report that indigenous women are especially vulnerable to the social upheaval since the rebellion. Soldiers living on the outskirts of communities create fear and discord. In some towns they draw women into prostitution, unheard of in indigenous communities before the rebellion. Prostitution has begun to have far-reaching implications for women, including increasing family violence and increased confinement of women by fearful kin (La Jornada 1997). Many indigenous and non-indigenous women have also been victims of rape (Eber 1997). Despite efforts by members of civilian organizations in Mexico and throughout the world to bring rape cases to the attention of the Secretary of Governance of Chiapas and appropriate officials at the national level no case has been brought to trial. Recently human rights observers have reported suicide among young indigenous women and men, a rare occurrence before the conflicts (personal communication, Heather Sinclair).

### **Views of organized women**

Experiences women have had with abuse, exclusion, and violence have encouraged them to seek support from other women and to create formal women's organizations. Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa formed LA FOMMA out of experiences of abuse they had suffered and also because it became too difficult for them to continue working with the men at *Sna Jtzi'abajom* (House of the Writer), the oldest of the educationally oriented cooperatives in highland Chiapas.<sup>4</sup> *Sbeik Jchanvunetik* (The Students' Paths) began in 1995 through informal networks of support that indigenous women vendors in San Cristóbal had established with each other through sharing their experiences with poverty and male dominance. With assistance from an anthropologist the women conduct literacy workshops and provide assistance in obtaining education or employment. Some of the members recently formed *Las Camaristas Sbeik*, (The Women Photographers' Paths) a group of women who are learning to document their lives through photography.

*Grupo de Mujeres A.C. COLEM* (The Women's Group A.C. COLEM) located in San Cristóbal formed through a collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous women in 1989 in response to violence toward women. Since its inception the group has focused on educating women about their legal rights, responding to the needs of women migrants from rural areas to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and investigating women's health and welfare issues, such as reproductive health and domestic and political violence (Freyermuth Enciso and Fernández Guerrero 1995; IFCO-Pastors for Peace 1996). Since the rebellion The Women's Group has documented fifty cases of violence toward women in Chiapas linked to political reprisals.

The dissemination in 1994 of the Zapatistas' agenda for women's rights spelled out in "The Revolutionary Women's Law "<sup>5</sup> provided *Grupo de Mujeres* a context in which to join with other organized women in Chiapas to intensify their participation in political spaces. The Zapatista agenda addresses many of the basic gender issues that concern indigenous women, e.g. women having the right to pursue an education, to choose whether to marry, and to be free of physical or emotional abuse. But the agenda goes beyond these basic rights of individuals by broadening notions of citizenship to include the rights of communities, ethnic groups, and interest groups to make claims based on their distinct identities and needs. In this conception of citizenship indigenous women can be at once individuals, women, indigenous, and Mexican.

Immediately after its dissemination the Zapatista agenda raised many hopes that this time a democratic movement would result in full emancipation for women. But the failure of the EZLN to protest

the continued abuse of women, both from within their communities and from the Mexican military, police and paramilitary groups, has diminished many feminists' faith in the EZLN's commitment to confront gender inequality on par with other issues they would reform (Hernández Castillo n.d.)

Spurred on by the contradiction between rhetoric and practice, organized women in Chiapas are pushing the boundaries of the Zapatista agenda for women (Hernández Castillo 1994; n.d.; Rojas 1994; Rovira 1997). In their organizations women are developing a new framework within which indigenous women can incorporate gender into their analyses of oppression. Recent demands women are making in their state organizations, e.g. the *Convencion estatal de mujeres chiapanecas* (State Convention of Chiapanecan Women in 1994) include those directed toward the state as well as toward their communities. Women's demands question the dichotomy of "traditional vs. modern" that the official indigenous state policies promote. They demand the right to hold to distinct cultural traditions while at the same time change aspects of their traditions that oppress or exclude them. In the conventions and workshops at the state and national level indigenous women have taken the concept of autonomy, central to the Zapatistas' demands for control over territories and resources, and are extending it to cover their rights as women. These rights include: (1) political autonomy, defined as the right to basic political rights; (2) physical autonomy, including the right to live without fear of violence; (3) economic autonomy, defined as the right to have equal access and control over the means of production; and (4) social and cultural autonomy, defined as the right to reclaim their specific identities as indigenous women (ibid.)

Indigenous women are also organizing themselves to obtain more autonomy in grassroots artisan, campesino, and religious groups. (I discuss women's involvement in three of these movements in Antonia's biography and my commentary.) Many women who are not as inclined to become involved in collective action have joined Protestant groups as a way to create new social worlds, free of alcohol and often with extensive economic and emotional support. Protestant women and men are making many changes in social relations. Yet, they are carrying out these changes in ways that allow them to retain many aspects of their ethnic identity that give them a sense of history and place (Eber 1995; Sterk 1992; Sullivan 1997).

*Bases de apoyo* (bases of support) for the Zapatistas are another recent collective context for discussions about gender. These are groups of men and women who meet in their local hamlets to discuss the Zapatistas' agenda for change and create local responses to injustices in their communities. Members of Antonia's base are moving slowly in their discussions about injustices women suffer. They continue to subordinate this issue to those affecting communal identity and autonomy. Although the Women's Law is well known in lowland communities where it took shape, members of lowland bases did not carry these demands to highland bases as an integral part of the Zapatista agenda until quite recently. The women in Antonia's base first brought the laws to my attention in the summer of 1997 as part of an expanded version of thirty-four points, "*Propuesta de ampliacion de la ley revolucionaria de mujeres*" (The amplification of the revolutionary women's law). The base's slow pace taking up women's rights seems to be related to women's decision to focus their energies on forming economically-based cooperatives combined with their reluctance to contest men's control of public discourse and township governance (I describe women's work in bases in Antonia's biography and my commentary which follows. See also Eber ms. and Rovira 1996: 179-198.)

## Social Scientists' Views

The work of organized women in Chiapas illustrates the kind of data that have influenced researchers of social movements to shift their theoretical focus from mobilizing resources to sharing a common fate, set of values, and collective identity (Taylor and Whittier 1992). This shift has shed light on participants' social embeddedness, specifically the importance of their social networks based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion (McClurg Mueller 1992). In recent decades a new conceptual framework has emerged to explain why people join social movements. This framework shifts the focus from modernization forces or dependency structures to individual agency, subjectivities, and cultural meanings (Escobar and Alvarez 1992).

Ethnographic research examining the specificity of women's collective experiences in Latin America has been particularly helpful in shaping this new framework for understanding social movements (See Lind 1992; Rivera Cusicanqui 1990; Jelin 1990; Safa 1990; Stephen 1992; 1996; 1997). Findings from studies of women's roles in popular social movements reveal the central roles women play and the need to bring gender to the core of analyses of these movements. Research on women's collective action argues convincingly that women's internalization of specific class and gender identities are primary motivations to participate in social movements (Stephen 1996; 1997). While women in the United States and Europe seek participation in the political arena in a "gender neutral" way (Safa 1990), Latin American women insist upon becoming full participants in social life in ways that affirm their identities as women. It is precisely their inability to fulfill expected roles as mothers and wives that moves them to protest and organize (*ibid.*).

Women's participation in social movements in Latin America also calls into question the usefulness of social science dichotomies. For example, the practical vs. strategic model separates women's organizing into practical movements that help women fulfill their traditional roles and strategic movements that challenge traditional roles. Lynn Stephen's research in Mexico (1996; 1997) and Amy Conger Lind's (1992) in Ecuador show limitations of this model in the context of the political implications that women's organizing can have even when it helps them fulfill traditional roles (Stephen 1996: 169). Especially problematic among social science frameworks for understanding indigenous women's experiences in Chiapas is the domestic/public dichotomy. In the reality of poor women in Latin America public and private abstractions do not represent the complex ways in which personal, political, material, and cultural spheres of their lives merge into a more continuous experience.

Merging social movement theory with other conceptual frameworks on indigenous women's lives necessitates adding the individual/collective dichotomy to the list of problematic dualisms. Women's diverse experiences with the Zapatista rebellion suggest that a more flexible and dynamic conception better represents their experiences with the poles of individualism and collectivity than the notion of opposition (See Safa 1990 and Tiano 1988). As my discussion of Antonia's and Mónica's experiences will illustrate, women adjust their relationships to the ideas represented by dichotomous conceptions depending upon a range of variables, such as their current problems, positions in the life cycle, and changing power relations in their households and communities. Describing shifts the two women have made in their relation to these ideas I suggest that their breaks or detours are "alternative forms of coherence" (Ortner 1995: 186), ways of reflecting on their selves in the world in order to create conceptual frameworks that present alternatives to dualism and opposition.

## Antonia

“I’ve carried the government on my back since I was born. It’s time to throw this burden off.”

Antonia spoke these words to me bending over the fire tending a pot of beans while her toddler slept on her back. Since I’ve known Antonia, the back of her elaborately brocaded blouse has often been covered by a sleeping baby, a jug of water, or a net bag of produce. Antonia carries her burdens with grace and rarely complains. Only now, almost two years after the conflict began in Chiapas, do I hear her complaining about a load that has become too heavy to carry any more.

In 1987 when I lived with Antonia and her husband, Domingo, I spent many hours talking with them about how the state of Chiapas and the Mexican government disregards the needs and rights of indigenous people. I could see the lack of concern with my own eyes in the lack of electricity and sanitation facilities, the scarcity of schools, health clinics, and wells or other sources of clean water. While Chiapas produces over 50% of the nation's electricity, nearly half of the population and most of the indigenous people lack electricity. Collier and Lowery Quaratello liken Chiapas to an "internal colony for the rest of Mexico, providing oil, electricity, timber, cattle, corn, sugar, coffee, and beans, but receiving very little in return (1994: 16)." Many children and adults die of hunger, curable diseases, and lack of clean water.

Adults, like Antonia and Domingo, have suffered the humiliation of being unable to support their families as the government has eliminated credit and subsidies to small farmers in order to pay its creditors and modernize the nation. But Antonia and Domingo have not just watched as their world turned upside down. In the 1980s Domingo made routine trips to Villahermosa and other distant cities when wage labor was available or to buy merchandise to resell back home. Antonia helped organize women in her own and adjacent hamlets into a weaving cooperative to take advantage of sales to tourists in the nearby town of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Together Antonia and Domingo planted coffee in hopes that when their trees matured the price of coffee would be high. They also began to read the Bible and relate it to their lives under the direction of priests, nuns, and catechists (indigenous lay leaders) who were part of "*La Palabra de Dios*" (The Word of God), the Catholic Liberation Theology movement in Chiapas.<sup>6</sup> The focal points of Antonia's life during this time were her family, her crops, her animals, her weaving, her community, God, and the saints.

In the 1980s as the economic crisis deepened in Mexico, men's capacity to support their families decreased and women began to intensify their household production by selling artisan and agricultural products. Some became sole supports of their families when their husbands had to leave for periods of time in search of wage labor.<sup>7</sup> Antonia responded to the economic crisis by continuing her commitment to work with women in the weaving cooperative she helped form. Weaving was the only means Antonia had of helping her family survive which allowed her to continue her household based work within the context of her people's stress on economic interdependence and communal responsibility.

During this same time religious conflict threatened to divide people in Chenalhó and throughout highland Chiapas. In 1987 the first question almost every indigenous person asked me after inquiring about the whereabouts of my husband was "*Me oy areligion?*" / "Do you have religion?" Before pastors and missionaries of various Protestant denominations and the Liberation Theology movement began proselytizing in highland Chiapas in mid-century a category of religious experience had no specific meaning for indigenous people, making spiritual matters indistinguishable from other matters. Today people in Chenalhó still do not

separate spiritual concerns from other concerns, but they now divide themselves into three quite distinct groups - Traditionalists, who continue to practice traditions which merge Catholic with Maya beliefs; Protestants of diverse denominations; and followers of The Word of God. Membership in the above groups has become an important source of identity for the people of Chenalhó and a point of conflict. Until recently Chenaleros had been fairly successful in avoiding the religious violence in neighboring San Miguel Mitontik and San Juan Chamula. In these townships *caciques* (powerful traditional leaders) have expelled approximately 30,000 Protestants and Word of God followers over the past decade in part because these people's refusal to drink rum and serve cargos threatens the leaders' control of community affairs and profits from alcohol sales (Tickell 1991; Sullivan 1997).<sup>8</sup>

Antonia sought solutions to her people's religious and political problems as a participant in discussion groups of The Word of God. Here she learned to connect her personal troubles to social issues by relating understandings from the Bible to her own experiences and ancestral teachings. She co-facilitated discussions with a man, not her husband, when it came her turn, and spoke up in services and public meetings when she had something to say. During this process Antonia developed a more assertive and independent style which threatened some people in her community who felt that this way of being was inappropriate for a young woman. For her progressive ideas and participation in the public arena Antonia faced much criticism. Summing up the conflict she faced during this time, Antonia said,

For example, if I want to put behind me something that's not so good about our traditions, the Traditionalists say, "What she's doing is no good." But if I want to act on something good in the traditions the religious ones will say, "Ah, she's still doing things according to the traditions. She doesn't believe in the Word of God." This way the two ways collide.

When I visited Antonia in 1993 I found her only minimally involved in The Word of God. She explained that increasing childcare and co-op demands were taking all her time and energy. In addition to her increasing workload, the personal risks involved in individuating herself from the community had become too much for Antonia. She told me that she felt alone in her struggle for justice. Although her mother, sisters and some other women agreed with her, they did not speak up. Only Antonia had the courage to voice her convictions.

Antonia continued her leadership of the weaving cooperative, but it had become a burden and a risk, too. The only reason she did not give it up, she told me, was the commitment she had made to the other women in her group. Antonia seemed despondent during this time over the challenge of providing for five children and another on the way. Poverty and community conflicts dimmed the sparkle that lit Antonia's face with hope in 1987.

On January 3, 1994, three days after the Zapatistas rekindled a spirit of resistance, Antonia gave birth to her sixth child. Despite another mouth to feed and political and religious conflicts, hope seemed to come back into Antonia's life with the birth of a second daughter and new possibilities for indigenous people. During this time I asked Antonia to write me a letter about her perspective on the rebellion. Although she reads and writes in both Spanish and Tzotzil, her native language, Antonia does not find writing a pleasant pastime. But once during this time Antonia wrote me in Spanish:

I am very content that there are people called Zapatistas. Because I didn't know how we could struggle to make the government hear us. For years only the Catholics went to San Cristóbal or Tuxtla [the state capitol] to march. And the government didn't pay any attention to us... It's been two years since I went to Tuxtla to march with thousands of people. We came together in Chiapa de Corzo. Walking by foot from there we arrived in Tuxtla. It was really hot and I was carrying my Zenaida [her two year-old daughter]. But it [the government] only treated us like animals, like flies that fill up the streets... I don't want to complain to the government any more ... it doesn't understand anything... It treats us like animals. But it is more animal than we are...

Antonia told me that when she and Domingo first heard that a group of indigenous rebels calling themselves Zapatistas had seized several towns, they did not know what to think. Although they reported being afraid, they also said they felt excited to think that some indigenous people, not much different from themselves, had found a way to be heard. As the year progressed Antonia and Domingo and others from The Word of God, Traditionalist, and Protestant groups came together to talk about problems in their community. Eventually Zapatista representatives traveled from their bases to help them organize themselves into bases of support. Antonia quickly saw the similarity between these bases and the groups she had helped form through The Word of God. In the latter groups, which meet in chapels or in homes, people discuss their community's problems, how people are experiencing poverty, and how they can orient their actions toward Jesus' teachings in the Bible.

Like priests and nuns, representatives of the EZLN spoke of the importance of hearing everyone's views on community problems and of the need for equality between men and women. EZLN representatives urged bases of support to elect women leaders and stressed that women should be involved in the public affairs of their communities, not just in cooking, weaving, and take childcare. These ideas were not new to Antonia and Domingo. Communicative norms in indigenous townships stress listening respectfully to diverse opinions and leaving issues pending if a consensus cannot be reached. Their ideal gendered division of labor enjoins men and women to cooperate in decision-making and complement each other in economic and spiritual affairs.

Antonia also gained a sense of indigenous people's collective power on the township level from alliances between the Zapatista bases of support and supporters of the PRD (*Partido de La Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution)). Leading up to the rebellion the PRD had been creating a wide base of support in Chenalhó for democratic change. The membership of PRD in Chenalhó is diverse, comprised both of people from Zapatista bases of support and people who call themselves members of *Sociedad Civil* (Civil Society). Members of this latter group share much in common with members of Zapatista bases but for a variety of reasons do not join bases (Moksnes, personal communication; Eber n.d.).<sup>9</sup>

The alliance between the two major divisions of PRD was short lived, however. In the spring of 1995 PRD supporters staged an unusual pre-election for township *presidente* (comparable to mayor) in which their candidate won over the incumbent president who was a member of PRI, *Partido Revolucionaria Institucionalizada* (The Revolutionary Institutional Party, aligned with landed elites and State government officials). But rather than wait until fall the Zapatista sympathizer group within PRD forced the PRI president out of office during the summer and instated the PRD president. In retaliation PRI supporters called in the State and Federal Police, who dislodged the PRD president and reinstated the PRI

president. The Zapatista sympathizers, of which Antonia was a part, responded to this action by separating from the formal political structure and creating an autonomous township government. Supporters of the alternative government maintained that the only way they could free themselves of PRI's control over their lives was to form their own government, one that would represent their needs and interests, rather than those of PRI and leaders in their community who benefited from their alliance with PRI. Antonia explained:

...we want to be clean. It's necessary to be separate, well separated. It's necessary to break away in order to be free to form ourselves, to offer our own opinions that come from within our groups. That's what we are thinking. We don't want to be a part of it [the formal government] anymore.

To help me understand how she and other Zapatista sympathizers felt trying to form a new government, Antonia made the analogy to a new baby who comes into the world without resources or knowledge, but little by little gains strength and experience and is able to stand on its own feet:

Here in the village, well, we have been like babies, like a newborn who doesn't know how to survive yet. A baby doesn't have money yet. It doesn't have a milpa, nor clothes. It doesn't have anything. It's like us, then... It's that we don't know how to work well yet. But later, when we are mature, let's say, perhaps if God wants it, we will have economic resources.

Fearing that people might think she means that her people are like baby birds waiting for their mother or God to drop food in their mouths, Antonia added:

It's not that we stay like a baby, waiting for his food. No. We can look for our own food. We know how to seek it. We are searching. Our mind, our struggle, our imagination, we have these. We know what to do.

Just before I had to return to the U.S. in August 1995, Antonia asked me if I would like to go with her to San Andres Larrainzar where the peace talks are held. I wanted very much to go, especially with Antonia who often traveled there to show her solidarity with the Zapatistas and the peace process. When we arrived in San Andres Antonia took me first to the building where the talks take place. We walked around the building so that I could imagine how she and hundreds of indigenous people from Chiapas townships encircled the building in a *cinturón* (belt or ring of solidarity or security). She told me about how she and other indigenous men and women would cheer when the Zapatistas came out to announce an agreement that had been made and of how they would cover themselves and their children with pieces of plastic when it began to rain. In the schoolyard grounds Antonia showed me where she and fellow supporters in the *cinturón* would sleep after the talks concluded each night. In the yard scattered with scraps of cardboard for protection from the cold and wet earth, Antonia asked me to take her photo to show people in my country how much Zapatista base members will endure for peace with justice. Later back in her kitchen warmed by the fire, I asked Antonia to describe how she felt when she stood with others in San Andres:

At times, well, it feels hard, to stand in the rain, in the cold... But I feel that what I am doing is my work. It's that I want to give my support. It's because I'm in the struggle. It's not just because I went to stand in the *cinturón* to waste my time, to rest, or not to work in the house. It's not that. It's because we are in the struggle. That's why I went there, to struggle well.

### Mónica

I met Mónica when I was conducting a household survey in her hamlet, about five kilometers from Antonia's hamlet. It seemed that in every house I entered conversations eventually came around to Mónica, a woman who could tell me "anything I needed to know." I soon found that Mónica was worldlier than her neighbors, having lived in San Cristóbal when her husband, Bernabé, was training to be a teacher. But Mónica prefers living in the hamlet where she can grow her own corn, raise chickens, and run a small store out of her house.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Bernabé, Mónica did not attend school past 6th grade. Still she speaks and writes Spanish well and keeps her mind sharp through conversations with her husband about his studies and through her curiosity about the world. Mónica speaks more Spanish than Tzotzil with her children, but only Tzotzil with Bernabé. By speaking Spanish Mónica says she is trying to prepare her children to live in the Mestizo world. Following the example of Mestizos, Mónica and Bernabé have constructed a cement blockhouse with a gas stove where their wattle and daub house with an open fire once stood. Mónica pays a great deal of attention to her children's cleanliness and dresses them in clothes made of synthetic fabrics, although she continues to wear indigenous clothes of hand-woven cotton.<sup>11</sup> She also gives her children ample instructions about how to behave, especially when they are among Mestizos. Mónica has a tendency to see Mestizo society as "superior" to her own, but she remains respectful of customs she considers strengthening and meaningful in her ancestors' ways. For example, Monica lives in the same compound with her in-laws who are both shamans. When they are not abusing alcohol she maintains that her in-laws' prayers and herbal remedies work.

When I met Mónica her husband, Bernabé, was teaching in a distant hamlet where he lived during the week. Mónica maintained their house, children, animals and fields until he returned on weekends to help her. In 1994 Bernabé was transferred to the school in their hamlet, to the couple's relief. Bernabé takes his job seriously and respects his students and their parents. This makes him stand out from many indigenous teachers who regard village-based traditions as backward and consider their jobs a sort of exile. When I was conducting research in the late 1980s parents described to me the countless times teachers did not show up for work, came to school drunk, or abused children. I discovered that some men take wives in hamlets, then abandon them when their tenure in the hamlet is over. Others have affairs with married women (Eber 1995: 200-202).<sup>12</sup>

Mónica and Bernabé place a high value on education as the way for their children to succeed. Because schools do not go beyond sixth grade in hamlets, the couple has made the sacrifice to build a house in *La Hormiga* ("The Ant"), a new settlement near San Cristóbal and divide their time between both homes so their eldest daughter can go to *secundaria* (middle school). Their decision did not come easily. Both Mónica and Bernabé prefer living in the hamlet where Bernabé is close to his work and parents. Mónica says she feels as if her body is in *La Hormiga* while her soul stays in the hamlet with the plants and animals. After much discussion and tears on the part of Lucia, their daughter, the couple agreed to let her continue her education. Mónica explains:

I didn't want her to study because I felt very alone. I wanted to have her in the house... [I told her] "Give up your studies, stay in the house. We have to do something, raise chickens, have turkeys and pigs to live." But she didn't want this. She began to cry to the point where she didn't eat for two days because of sadness, because my daughter doesn't want to give up her studies... "Well," her father said, "It's better for you to study. We'll find the money. You are going to study." That's how we came here for her to study. Right now it's necessary to be here, so she can advance in her studies.

Finding the money for children to study is not easy, even for a father with a salary. Parents must pay for books, supplies, uniforms, and shoes. For children living in hamlets parents must either pay the child's room and board, rent a room, or build a separate house where their children attend school. Most parents, including Bernabé and Mónica, must borrow money to pay these expenses. Although Mónica wants to respect Lucia's desire to study, she explains that her daughter needs to take responsibility for her progress:

The only thing I want is for her to behave herself, be well behaved, and not just spend money. Right now my husband and I are thinking that she should continue, now that she's already started. Well, she should follow it as far as she can go. But if she no longer wants to, it's not our problem any more. It's her problem. Right now we are giving our children freedom to study, now that we have a little house here. That is, if they still feel like it.

One day when I was visiting Mónica and her family, Lucia was preparing to attend a registration session at her prospective school. I watched as Mónica instructed Lucia how to sit modestly in her short Mestiza skirt. Mónica even felt it necessary to tell Lucia how she should behave so as not to invite male teachers to touch her breasts or other parts of her body. Mónica's instructions to her daughter in Spanish about how to deal with Mestizo men were a poignant reminder of the risks Lucia and her parents are taking.

Despite the strange and sometimes abusive world indigenous children must negotiate to go to school, Mónica is concerned that without education her children will have very difficult lives. She encourages other women in her hamlet to send their daughters to school as she is doing. Mónica describes the fate of the girls in her hamlet who do not go to school:

I see young women out there [the hamlet] begin to cry. Really. They would like [to study], too. "I would like to study, like your daughter," they say. "If only you could study," I say. But sadly there's no money. We [our people] can't. That's how it is right now ... That's why the boys and girls stay [at home]. They marry there. Well, they are poor, poor things. If her [a girl's] husband doesn't have money then they are without clothes. Or if he goes to drink rum or look for another woman, then the young wife is left abandoned. That's the way it is. That's sad, no? It's the sadness of poverty.

While on the subject of education, Mónica and I also talked about the pros and cons of marrying according to traditions. Mónica married in the traditional way, with some modifications. Her courtship

began with a series of visits Bernabé made to her mother. (Mónica's father had left her mother for another woman when Mónica was about five years old.) Traditionally, young men have had to work for their in-laws for a period of time agreed upon by the two families. In the past young men often worked in the fields and carrying firewood from one to two years. Since Bernabé was a teacher he gave his mother-in-law a substantial amount of cash instead of performing bride service. During his visits to Mónica and her mother Bernabé brought them meat, bananas, pineapples, oranges, bread, rum or sodas, and *pinole* (a drink made with parched corn, sugar, and water) as required by custom.

Although Mónica says that showing respect for one's in-laws through gifts is important, she is critical of the burden bride service and acquiring a large quantity of gifts places on a young man. She maintains that it prevents the couple from progressing beyond the level that both their sets of parents have attained because the couple must help support one set of parents instead of saving for themselves. She is also concerned that her daughters have the right to delay marriage until they finish studying (at around eighteen or twenty years of age) and to marry a person whom they have chosen for themselves. Mónica explains:

I would like, truly, that all the people do it like this, that they let their children study, that they marry at an older age. Because I see that the ones who marry young have sad lives. Very sad. They don't know how to do anything ... in two or three years they [the girls] are already old women. They aren't good for anything. Thin, sickly...

Despite her critique of the traditions, Mónica does not approve of couples eloping or of the recent practice for boys to pay their in-laws a sum of money in place of gifts, unless like Bernabé they have a job. Even with a job she maintains that at the minimum her prospective sons-in-law must visit her and Bernabé, bring them gifts of food, and ask humbly for their blessing over the marriages.

Mónica seems reluctant to join a religious movement to confront injustice, as Antonia has. Nevertheless, she and Bernabé participated for a while in meetings of The Word of God and have called upon catechists in their hamlet to pray for their children when they were sick. Neither Mónica nor Bernabé have turned to any of the Protestant religions that have been gaining converts in their township, even though they share with many Protestants a focus on private capital accumulation. With an Evangelical temple across the road from her house, Mónica has had ample opportunity to learn about one Protestant religion. She says that she does not want to join this group because she sees that they only help their own people, and she wants to help everyone, irrespective of their religion.<sup>13</sup>

The year after the rebellion Mónica and Bernabé joined others in their township from Civil Society in backing PRD's efforts to seat a more responsive candidate in the township presidency. Like Antonia and Domingo, they were distrustful of past municipal presidents who aligned themselves with PRI. Monica goes along with the Zapatistas' overall goal of greater social justice and unity among poor peasants, but she does not agree with the actions of the Zapatista sympathizer group to which Antonia belongs that forced the PRD candidate into office early, nor with the alternative government in her township which this group established. Mónica repeated many rumors she heard about the radical social changes that the alternative government would make, e.g. demanding that everyone contribute some of their harvest to help support the leaders; that those with more land give to those with less so that everyone has the same amount of land; that teachers, like Bernabé work without pay; and lastly, that people with a lot of children give one or more of

their children to those who don't have any or only a few. Even though Mónica found the last rumor far-fetched, she feared that by separating their township into two parts, the Zapatista sympathizers would destroy the chances for PRD to win future elections and be officially supported by government funds. She feared that divisions could eventually lead PRI, which she equates with the government, to withdraw the material aid (e.g. free food and aluminum sheeting for roofs) that people had come to rely upon, proving their dependence on PRI, and encouraging people to leave PRD for PRI.

Before the rebellion Mónica organized meetings of women in her hamlet to discuss their concerns and problems, particularly around reproductive issues and health and childcare. Mónica took the initiative to get women together after talking with her neighbors about their desire to have fewer children and after a visit from a public health nurse. In their meetings women talked about how difficult it is to care for a lot of children. Mónica has seven children. Although she has taken birth control pills for periods of time, Mónica understands women's fear of birth control methods that come from outside of their people's traditional herbal methods. Some women fear that government representatives who promote sterilization want to limit indigenous people's families in order to dominate them. Women also fear botched abortions by inexperienced doctors who resent having to work with indigenous people in rural outposts. In light of these fears, I was startled to hear Mónica say she knew of many women in her hamlet who were sterilized between 1995 and 1996. Mónica attributed their decision to the failed corn crop that year. According to Mónica, watching their children suffer from hunger drove these women to seek a procedure they feared.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Mónica, whose husband's salary can buy corn, most women have nowhere to turn when their crops fail. Many women already work in the fields alongside their husbands or work for periods of time in wage labor on plantations, when such work is available. Some women who weave well enough to sell their blouses to other women can compensate for not working in the milpa by bringing in cash to buy corn or by paying others to work in the fields for them. Often mothers who have to work in the milpa must leave small children in the care of only slightly older children. Monica admits that she can feed her children, keep them clean, and not depend on their labor beyond household chores because her husband earns a salary and they can buy food, if they cannot raise enough, as well as soap and other household items.

To her disappointment, women stopped coming to the meetings Mónica organized. They said it was not worth their time to spend several hours in meetings to discuss their concerns if they did not come home with something to show for their time. Women's resistance to further meetings seems to come from several factors, including heavy demands on their time and gifts they receive when they attend government sponsored workshops or support PRI officials by attending rallies or voting for them. Mónica says that women rationalize not attending her meetings by arguing that irrespective of what they may learn about contraception or caring for their children, they still get pregnant and most of their children still somehow survive. Mónica argues that if women had no more than three children they could raise these children to be healthy. Although women may say their children still grow, she notes that their children do not grow very big and they have trouble learning. Nevertheless, Mónica seems aware that limiting the number of children women have may not assure prosperity given the unjust economic conditions in which people in indigenous communities live. Mónica describes the suffering poverty brings to women and their children:

At five or seven years of age children have already begun to work with little spades. Yes, girls, boys. All have to work. Yes, the children die from lack of food. They [mothers] feel bad for their children. The children see other children walking with sandals or shoes, or a new skirt or blouse. They also want to have these. But, sadly, the mothers can't buy them. And yes, the mothers or the children begin to cry. They all begin to get sad. That's how we are.

Although they stopped coming to the meetings, many women in Mónica's hamlet look up to her as a model of how to live better. They view her business savvy, salaried husband, facility to speak in Spanish to Mestizos, and knowledge about the world outside the hamlet with a mixture of envy and admiration. Mónica is careful not to lord her knowledge or greater access to resources over other women. Her humble and respectful comportment softens the economic disparity between herself and other women.

### Commentary

The following discussion of commonalities and differences between Antonia and Mónica focuses on marriage and education, key arenas in which Mexicans of diverse backgrounds play out tensions over women's control of their productive and reproductive labor and the relationship between individual and collective rights. I also focus on marriage and education because these are areas of concern in the Zapatista Women's Laws.

### Marriage

Mónica married at fifteen years of age and Antonia at eighteen. Both women married according to tradition, i.e. they waited for a young man to petition their parents. During the *nupinel*, wedding ceremony, parents and godparents officiated, praying and giving lengthy speeches of advise to each couple. After the speeches everyone ate a feast that the boy and his family provided.

Mónica and Antonia also both began living with their husbands within the context of two extended families. Marriages in traditional cultures function to bind young couples in networks of rights and obligations that extend already existing kin bonds rather than starting new, separate families. Aspects of these extended arrangements can strengthen young women throughout their lives because many people are there to help them and to keep husbands in line if they do not treat their wives with respect and kindness. Traditional marriages also give boys the same support if their wives do not live up to their responsibilities.

Of the two women Antonia seems the most supportive of traditional marriages. Although she did not choose Domingo, Antonia was not a passive respondent to his desires. During the marriage petition process she asserted her wishes with her parents while at the same time placing herself in God's hands.<sup>15</sup> In 1995 when I asked Antonia if she would like her two daughters to choose their own partners Antonia replied that she is not sure. She said she needs time to see how her daughters develop (they were one and three years old at the time) and how the world will be when they are older. I believe that Antonia fears the loss of the safety net of kin if her daughters and sons go their own ways without offering the traditional respect and gifts that unite families in networks of support and obligation. Antonia has also known the deepening of love that has come through sharing her life with Domingo. Her love for Domingo has grown in the context of an economic partnership, rather than in the context of romantic love, although their relationship also shows elements of romantic love in their playful and tender manner with each other.

In keeping with her more individualistic views, Mónica says that her daughters should choose their own husbands. But she is adamant that they should not elope. Mónica laments recent changes in which young men bring money to the girl's parents on one visit only, a sort of payment for the girl that leads to the image of a woman as property, to be bought and sold. She says that this is a disrespectful way to treat women or marriage; that a woman is to be cherished as a person; that money does not bind people together like gifts of food offered over a series of visits and eaten together in a traditional feast.

Antonia and Mónica differ in expected ways on changes in post-marital residence and bride service. Mónica maintains that the young couple should be free to choose where to live, even to build their own house if they wish. She also says that young men should not have to work for their in-laws for a year or more because this way they will stay poor and dependent upon their in-laws. Mónica's more individualistic ideas reflect both economic changes in Chiapas and her own experiences. Since Bernabé was a teacher earning a salary when Mónica married him, he paid his mother-in-law a sum of money in addition to other gifts of food and clothes which exempted him from bride-service. Young men who have jobs, like Bernabé, no longer depend on farming to feed their families and cannot as easily rationalize working in their father's or father-in-law's fields for the right to future lands that they may not be able to use. Mestizo views on independence and her personal experiences may also be shaping Mónica's opinions about residence. Mónica's father left her and her mother to be with another woman when Mónica was five years old. Later when she and Bernabé moved to his parents' land and built a house in their compound, Mónica suffered a good deal from her in-laws' drinking problems. Although she enjoys sharing with neighbors and being surrounded by all her children, Mónica has experienced more of the difficulties than the pleasures of living in extended households (See Eber 1995: 126-127; 142).

Antonia, in contrast, says that she felt comfortable and supported beginning married life under her parents' guidance. Domingo and she lived almost four years with her parents while Domingo fulfilled his bride service working in his father-in-law's fields. Since her parents had no sons and she was the eldest daughter, by marrying Domingo Antonia brought much needed assistance to her parents' household, although Domingo was often sick during his bride service. The same year that her youngest sister married Antonia and Domingo moved to their own house on Domingo's family's land. Antonia told me she cried for many weeks after leaving her natal home to live alone with Domingo. During visits with Antonia to her parents' home and in all the homes I visited (except those torn apart by problem drinking) I saw how kinship bonds and household traditions bind people to each other and their land (Eber 1995).

Antonia and Mónica learned early that no man has the right to touch them or even speak to them unless he shows proper respect to them and their parents. Nevertheless, rape, incest and physical abuse occur in indigenous communities. When they do, however, men pay with shame, fines and jail. Sexual relationships outside of marriage or with another's spouse also happen, but elders say such behavior is as wrong for men as for women. Elders say chastity and virginity are requirements for both women and men, although they hold women to these standards more strongly than men.

No one can deny that the patriarchy in which indigenous women live puts quite a lot of emphasis on controlling them. But around the fire at night in most of the homes I have lived in or visited, wives and husbands negotiate power in a give-and-take more like that between good friends than between unequals.<sup>16</sup>

## Education

In Chenalhó most girls and boys learn to read and write in Spanish, but they rarely go beyond sixth grade. Part of the reason for children leaving school at sixth grade is the lack of a junior high school in their vicinity. But another reason is parents' concern that attending school past sixth grade increases the chances that their children will get involved in relationships with members of the opposite sex. Parents have also refused to let their daughters go further in school out of a legitimate fear that teachers will molest them. To most parents indigenous teachers represent agents of modernization and purveyors of Mestizo gender ideology.

Nevertheless, in highland communities more and more young people are leaving their homes for education and work. Young single women stand at the center of these changes. Their movements outside of their communities make strong statements about social and economic changes in their communities.

In the township headtowns or cities where girls must go to study if they want to continue past sixth grade, they often work as servants in Mestizo households in order to pay for their room, board, and education. To save Lucía from having to live with Mestizos where she would feel lonely and possibly be abused, Mónica and Bernabé sacrificed to build a second house near San Cristóbal.

Lucía and her parents show the determination and sacrifice necessary for indigenous girls to be able to attend school. Mónica seems to have realized how much her daughter will need to depend upon her and Bernabé now that they have separated in many ways from their hamlet and traditional culture. Lucía is more fortunate than most young people whose parents lack the resources to compensate for losing the social and emotional support kin and communities provide. When many young people leave their communities for education or jobs they risk losing the self-esteem that comes through fulfilling community cargos and other meaningful kinds of work for their families and communities. They may also lose a sense of belonging to a larger whole that sustains them and that they in turn sustain, an awareness which comes out of ideas of reciprocity and balance intrinsic to communal traditions, healing practices, and a close relationship with one's household and the land (Eber 1995; Rosenbaum 1993; Eber and Rosenbaum n.d.). Separated from these aspects of their communities, young people often experience physical, emotional and psychological problems they had not before.

Like Lucía, when Antonia was a girl she begged her parents to let her go to secondary school but they would not let her. Antonia took training to be a teacher when she was newly married but with a new baby, the loneliness of being away from her family, and a husband who was threatened by his wife being away from home a lot, she gave up her teacher training. Since then Antonia has sought knowledge about the world outside her township in the relationships she has established with Catholic clergy and several researchers who have studied in her township. But as the number of children increased Antonia's workload also increased, and she did not have time to help outsiders or to pursue her interests. The Zapatistas have awakened in Antonia a desire to study the history of the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and many things about the world. Women rebels report that education is the first activity in which they become involved when they enter a base camp (Comandante Ramona in *La Jornada*, March 7, 1994). First they learn to read and write, if they don't already know how. After that they read about Mexico's history and the liberation struggles of people in other countries. In July 1997 Antonia visited a school being constructed by the EZLN in Oventic, San Andres Larrainzar which will provide bicultural, bilingual education through the middle school years to 400 indigenous girls and boys from surrounding townships. Although Antonia was

not able to go to school past sixth grade, she hopes that those of her children who want to go on in school will have the opportunity. As for herself Antonia has been inspired by the eloquent Zapatista spokesman, Marcos, and other EZLN spokeswomen and men. She, too, wants to express her views eloquently. In 1997 Antonia wrote her first song and poem and performed them with her thirteen-year-old son at an International Women's Day celebration organized by the EZLN in Oventic.

### **The Collective/Individual Continuum**

The stories of women like Antonia and Mónica have encouraged me to view indigenous women's concerns from a perspective that blends aspects of both the Western framework of individual rights and a framework of community and cultural survival. Antonia and Mónica have lived their whole lives in communities where economic interdependence, social responsibility, and gender complementarity keep a cap on personal expression. The recent upheaval caused by economic, religious, and political crises have caused Antonia and Mónica to question the level to which they have had to subordinate their needs and desires. The two women struggle with the tension between caring for their children and other kinfolk while trying to gain some measure of autonomy for themselves as women. But while both women realize that they have been constrained by their society's idea that women must marry and bear children to be true women, they continue to view these roles as honorable and fulfilling.

In their efforts to deal with the tension between their personal desires and family and community responsibilities, neither Antonia nor Mónica leans toward the individual rights focus of Western feminism. Mónica comes closest to this orientation in the way she asserts herself as a businesswoman and in the thrust of her organizing work which encourages women to change themselves, rather than their communities. Nevertheless, Mónica speaks of her work in her store and in the community as her cargo, service for her family and community, the larger wholes within which she expresses herself. She also shows a commitment to her community's emphasis on communal rights through supporting her in-laws work as healers and through her involvement off and on in The Word of God.

Antonia contrasts with Mónica in her passion to transform communities as well as individuals. Antonia has shown a capacity since childhood to make creative syntheses of old and new ideas. For example, although she has not served a cargo for her community as a shaman, midwife, or fiesta leader, Antonia has transplanted these ideas of communal service onto her role as representative of the weaving cooperative as well as in her role as a base member. While she was co-op representative, Antonia often referred to this work as her "cargo." Since resigning from her leadership role in the weaving cooperative, Antonia seems to have redefined her cargo as her commitment to struggle for justice through membership in a Zapatista base, and a bakery cooperative which the base started in 1996. In the three social movements in which she is involved - the Zapatista base, the Word of God, and the weaving cooperative - Antonia has gained leadership skills and knowledge of the world outside her region, as well as a sense of belonging to a community of fellow strugglers who understand her needs and dreams.

Antonia seems to have found a way to both remain faithful to the traditions she values and yet obtain rights for herself as a woman through her collective work with other women and men in her Zapatista base of support. Bases are a new avenue for women to reshape their people's cultural traditions into forms that give them a greater public role. Zapatista bases bear many similarities to the Base Christian Communities in which Antonia participated during the 1980s as a member of The Word of God. During conversations with Antonia in July 1996 about her involvement in the Zapatista base she explained that this work is an outgrowth of her work in The Word of God:

Well, the struggle in which we are now... we call it a "holy struggle..."<sup>17</sup> For example...one can't give up The Word of God when one gets involved in the struggle. One can continue with the two, because the struggle is connected with the Word of God. Because I know when I entered in The Word of God I always talked about injustice, about the government's exploitation. We talked about this before The Struggle came. That's why when The Struggle arrived, well, then we compared it to when we were in The Word of God. Because the Word was like our flashlight ... it's my flashlight to see my way, where I can walk with my struggles.

Antonia explained that although The Word of God lit the path for her and others seeking justice, a big log lay across their path. The log was the rich people and the government who exploited poor people. Poor people could only go so far because they had no way to cut the log until the Zapatistas showed them how.

In the context of their holy struggle, men and women in Antonia's base and in the Word of God are discussing how to bring their lives into line with how their ancestors lived, how The Word of God says good Christians should live, and how the Zapatistas say indigenous people can bring about peace with justice. During the course of their discussions base members have been articulating a code for a cultural revitalization movement. Evidence for this code is in the thrust of the work in bases to restore balance in social relations, a requirement for health and well-being in indigenous communities. Base members began their work by tackling one of the most pressing imbalances - alcohol abuse. Related concerns include respecting elders and women, redressing gender inequality, and reinvigorating their mother tongue, Tzotzil, with more daily use of its "flowery" or more traditional phrases and tones (Eber and Rosenbaum n.d.).

Incorporating women more fully into political life involved first finding women to fill leadership roles in the base. This step proved to be a painful one. While base members say they must have equal numbers of men and women representatives - four men and four women - among the approximately eighty women belonging to the base only three women could be found who were able to serve. Representing a Zapatista base of support requires women to leave their homes for frequent meetings, often in distant hamlets. Most women with children face many obstacles to attending meetings, even those in their local communities. Obstacles range from providing for childcare, paying for transportation to meetings, exhaustion from adding organizing work to housework, childcare, fieldwork, and weaving or other craft production, and a gender ideology that associates women with proximity to households.

Antonia was a logical choice for one of the four women representatives. But with six children she had to decline the nomination. Antonia reported that base members were loath to accept her decision and she felt sad not to be able to serve the base in this way. But she had no choice. In contrast to her cargo for the weaving cooperative which was integrated into traditional ideas of women's roles and did not require her to leave home often, the cargo for the base would require her to attend many local and regional meetings. Being away from home so much would not allow her to fulfill her roles as mother, wife, and weaver.

The three current women base representatives are two single women and one divorced woman with older children. The women base members decided that only single women should serve as representatives, because it is too difficult for married women to fulfill their responsibilities to both their households and the base. In the case of the representative who is divorced with older children, base members help her and her children at times so she can fulfill her duties for the base, for example by repairing her house or working in her milpa. When I asked Antonia why some man in the base couldn't take over more of his wife's work so

that she could be a representative, she replied that it would be good if some man would do this, but so far the women had not been talking about pushing for such a major change.

Another imbalance in gender complementarity which women have not addressed is that no women elders serve in the elders advisory council that several male elders created in their effort to offer the "heat " or wisdom and experience that their long lives of service had given them. Older women who have served cargos can have just as much heat as men and are less constrained than younger women by domestic duties.

The base has also not done much about addressing domestic violence, except to scold some men who hit their wives while drunk. When drunken men repeatedly abuse members of their families, base members tie the man to a tree for several hours.

At this time the rhetoric and organizational structure of bases that has come from Zapatista directives does not mesh well with the realities of indigenous women's lives. However, women in Antonia's base are building bridges to the Zapatistas' agenda by working from within their household-based roles and traditional gender ideology to create group projects that empower them. One such project, *Mujeres Marginadas* (Marginalized Women) is a bakery cooperative in which base members divide the labor by gender but women have the overall leadership. For example, men collect firewood and assist in other ways as needed while women bake and serve as co-op officers. The bakery project illustrates women's desire to perpetuate their people's complementary division of labor, while drawing attention to their economic marginalization both as women and as indigenous people. Antonia is president of this group. In this group she is able to serve her base in ways that support her ongoing roles and definitions of herself while working together with other women to strengthen their positions in their communities.

*Tzobol Antzetik* (Women United), the weaving cooperative to which Antonia belongs, also shows how women try to resist being incorporated into a way of life that puts profits before people. Although a relatively small number of women have organized into artisan cooperatives in Chiapas, such groups ameliorate the worst effects of economic exploitation and seem to maintain communal values.

In artisan cooperatives women adapt traditional ideas about economic equality to new market relations to try to maintain a sense that they are all progressing together. For example, *Tsobol Antzetik* began a project several years ago to invest monetary donations in buying and fattening calves. Calves were tethered at members' homes on a rotating basis, enabling women who could not weave for various reasons such as illness or pregnancy to feel that by caring for the communal project they were still progressing along with the other members. Eventually the co-op sold the bulls for a profit and reinvested the money in more calves or used it for a loan fund or co-op expenses.

Through their weaving cooperatives women not only communicate traditional social and philosophical concepts but also enrich Maya traditions, keeping them dynamic. To preserve the value of gender complementarity women often bring their husbands into cooperative work as advisors, mediators with outlets, or as "body guards" to protect them while carrying co-op receipts (Rus 1990).

Despite their creative ideas, women in cooperatives tend to continue to bear untenable economic and political risks. In addition to the recent escalation in violence, the number of cooperatives has grown and the supply outstrips the demand. Even when weavers are able to sell their work they often wait as many as eight months to receive payment from fair trade companies that struggle to keep afloat in the competitive global marketplace (Eber n.d.; Eber and Rosenbaum 1993; Nash 1993; Rovira 1997: 179-198). Cooperatives are a poignant reminder of the alternatives to a cash economy that indigenous people used before forced by capitalism to abandon them.

## Conclusion

Antonia's and Mónica's experiences of rapid social change compel us to pay attention to both the strengths and weaknesses of social embeddedness, cultural traditions and collective identity. I believe that it is important to explore the strengths of these aspects of indigenous women's lives because of the ways that indigenous women take on more individualistic ideas or behavior for particular purposes, while imbuing these behaviors with communal values. For example, Antonia and Mónica refer to the leadership roles they have played in their community as their cargos, their service to others in their community. Antonia's reference to her work in the Zapatista base and bakery co-op as "the holy struggle" reveals the spiritual meanings attached to collective work. With this phrase Antonia evokes the complex whole of spiritual, political, and economic meanings that communal service has traditionally embodied for women and men in her community.

Antonia's and Mónica's experiences and those of other indigenous women whom I have known over the past decade have encouraged me to take women's concerns out of an exclusively Western framework of individual rights and put them into their framework which blends aspects of individual rights with a framework of community and cultural survival more appropriate to indigenous peoples' history. The cornerstones of this experiential framework are economic interdependence, social responsibility, gender complementarity, and an understanding of spiritual strength as a collective rather than an individual achievement.

Despite women's efforts to live according to these values, the current social, economic, religious, and political upheaval has increased their suffering. In contexts such as social and biological reproduction women are becoming aware that they pay a heavier price than men. It is no wonder that many women are speaking out and organizing to defend their rights. Both indigenous and non-indigenous women are calling attention to indigenous women's suffering. In doing so they have given a voice to women of all backgrounds in Chiapas who want to have greater freedom in marriage and education and in many other areas of life. But as ethnographic evidence and women's own accounts suggest, while in pursuit of these freedoms many women do not want to lose valued traditions and beliefs that give them a sense of place and purpose in their households and communities.

I contend that social movement researchers and organizers would do well to seek out the views of women like Antonia and Mónica who have been organizing informally in their local communities to meet concrete needs in ways that are culturally meaningful to them, long before the Zapatistas came on the scene. Assessments of changes in social movements in Latin America reveal that successful movements in the 1990s tend to be those of small grassroots organizations with relatively narrow, concrete goals that connect themselves with other similar groups in wider political organizations (Hellman 1997: 18; Peña 1996). Rather than viewing the collective work of women like Antonia and Mónica as pre-political moments in the lives of women whose political consciousness has not yet been raised, I argue that we must view these women's activities as the important work of women with very little political power, but with astute analyses of personal problems and community conflicts that they have developed through a synthesis of cultural wisdom and personal knowledge. Such a view enables us to see alternative possibilities within indigenous rural women's organizing for democratization and sustainable development in the face of the destructive forces of neoliberalism.

## Notes

1. For thirteen months from 1987-88 I lived with Antonia and her husband and three small children. When I returned for another six months of fieldwork in the fall of 1988 I often stayed with Mónica and her family for several days at a time. Antonia's and Mónica's hamlets are adjacent to each other and in 1990 had populations of 570 and 256 respectively. Their communities join with the ninety-six other communities of San Pedro Chenalhó to make up a total township population of 30, 680 inhabitants (Viquera 1995: 25).

I am grateful to Antonia and Mónica (not their real names) for their continued friendship and generosity in allowing me to share their stories with others. Many others in Chiapas and in the United States have helped me with the ideas I present in this paper. I am especially grateful to Robert Dentan and Elizabeth Kennedy whose guidance during my initial research in Chiapas resonates in this current work. I would also like to thank Maria Victoria Quiroz-Becerra, Jennifer Dugan-Abbassi, Lisa Bond-Maupin, Elaine Chamberlain, Graciela Freyermuth Enciso, Carol Jean McGreevy, Heidi Moksnes, June Nash, Robin O'Brian, Milagros Peña, Brenda Rosenbaum, Diane Rus, Jan Rus, Heather Sinclair, Cookie Stephan and the reviewers and editorial board of the Women and International Development Working Paper Series.
2. I am grateful to Heidi Moksnes for making this distinction and also for her assistance in analyzing factional distinctions people make between themselves in Chenalhó.
3. Cargos for women are traditional roles of service including shaman, fiesta leader, and midwife. Women fulfill these roles for their communities without cash payments and usually receive the call to perform them in dreams. While women who serve as shamans and midwives do so alone, in fiestas women and men must serve as couples. No man or woman can serve a cargo as a fiesta leader without his or her spouse serving a complementary cargo, preferably with his or her whole heart.
4. Petrona de La Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa struggled to make the men of Sna Jtzi'bajom treat them as their equals. After many years of the men not respecting their ideas nor letting them participate in decision-making the women left the organization.
5. According to a Jan. 26, 1994 EZLN communiqué, during the year leading up to the rebellion Zapatista women went out to dozens of communities to ask women how their lives could be improved. The day in March 1994 that the EZLN general command met to vote on the Revolutionary Laws, one woman, Susanna, presented the women's demands. Although she spoke through much tension, the men accepted the laws which were eventually incorporated into the overall Zapatista agenda. The Women's Law states (EZLN 1994):
  1. Women have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and degree that their will and ability determines, irrespective of their race, creed, color, or political affiliation.
  2. Women have the right to work and receive a fair wage.
  3. Women have the right to decide the number of children they can have and care for.
  4. Women have the right to participate in community issues and have cargos if they are freely and democratically elected.

5. Women and their children have the right to priority attention in health and nutrition.
  6. Women have the right to education.
  7. Women have the right to choose their partner and not be forced to enter into a marriage contract.
  8. No woman should be hit or physically or mentally mistreated either by family members or by strangers. Perpetrators of such crimes will be severely punished.
  9. Women should be able to fill offices of direction in the organization and have military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
  10. Women will have all the rights and obligations that are represented by the revolutionary laws and rules.
6. The Work of God movement began in 1960 when Bishop Samuel Ruiz García arrived in Chiapas. Under his guidance priests and nuns began to respond to the democratic changes in the Catholic Church following Vatican II and conferences in Medellín, Colombia, and Puebla, Mexico. Under the direction of Bishop Ruiz, groups of indigenous women and men have become empowered to take on more leadership of the church. Catequistas or catechists, as these lay leaders are called, have played important roles in raising awareness among their own people of the social injustices which indigenous people endure in Chiapas.
7. See Collier and Lowery Quaratiello 1994; Harvey 1994; and Rus 1995 for discussions of the roots of economic and political conditions in Chiapas. See Barrios and Pons Bonal 1993; Eber and Rosenbaum 1993; O'Brian 1997; Rus 1990 and Sullivan 1995 for changes in indigenous women's work in recent decades.
8. Protestants make up 19.69% of the population over five years of age in Chenalhó, consistent with the average percentage in the highlands of Chiapas and almost five times the national average (Viqueria 1995: 233). Many Protestant *expulsados* (expelled people) have resettled in a broad band of colonies around the northern edge of San Cristóbal (Sterk 1992; Sullivan 1997). Others have migrated to the lowlands (Calvo et. al. 1989; Garza Caligaris et al. 1993; Nash 1995) where some have become supporters of the Zapatistas. Catholics have also been expelled from their communities; many have also settled in colonies around San Cristóbal and are members of bases of support (Kovic 1995). Confrontations and expulsions continue throughout Chiapas (*Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas* 1996:21-24).
9. Bases of support differ from Civil Society in that they are groups that people join to work together to address community problems within the context of the EZLN's agenda. Members of Civil Society have also formed grassroots groups in Chenalhó but these groups differ from Zapatista bases by being unconnected to the EZLN and by not electing women leaders.
- The 45 people killed in the December 1997 massacre in Acteal, a hamlet of Chenalhó, were members of Civil Society. They were killed by paramilitary troops in retaliation for their resistance to taking up arms against members of Zapatista bases.

10. Stores in indigenous hamlets consist of a room in a home or a room added on where a family will typically sell a range of household items, including sodas, rice, macaroni, cookies, cooking oil, candies, ribbons for women's hair, and threads for weaving. Mónica sold all of these at different times depending upon the cost of the items in San Cristóbal where she purchased them for resale.
11. Abandoning traditional dress may indicate that people are distancing themselves from their culture but there are other reasons which do not involve rejecting one's culture. By dressing her children in non-traditional synthetic clothes that Mestizos wear Mónica responds to several issues. In part she tries to help her children identify with and fit into Mestizo culture to increase their social mobility. But Mónica continues to wear traditional clothing herself and is proud to show off the traditional clothing her children own. Practical reasons also enter into the choices Mónica makes to dress her children primarily in non-indigenous clothes. With the rise in cost of threads it is sometimes cheaper to buy new or used Western style clothes, especially since Mónica does not weave and must pay for the labor of women who do. Also, young children dirty clothes quickly and need more changes of clothing than adults or older children. Even indigenous women weavers who identify strongly with their culture's central symbols and forms dress their children at times in Western style clothes because they cannot weave enough traditional clothes for their children. Similarly, indigenous men who are proud to be milpa farmers but want to protect their legs while working, often wear pants instead of their traditional skirt-like tunics.
12. Teachers create tensions in gender and class relations. While gender relations in indigenous communities are rapidly changing, elders continue to distinguish their gender ideology from that of Mestizos by emphasizing men's responsibility for nurturing children and both spouses being virginal and chaste. In contrast, machismo and marianismo, the poles of Mestizo gender ideology, give men license to have extramarital affairs and often excuse them from responsibility for their children, while holding women accountable for sustaining families and upholding society's morals.

In terms of class, rural indigenous people have always been uneasy with the inequality between themselves and their salaried brothers. Men and women who leave their communities to become teachers separate themselves dramatically from their people. Working with books instead of hoes and weaving looms, they become promoters of modernization, symbols of Mestizo culture, and often political allies of powerful caciques. Speaking Spanish they are purveyors of non-indigenous symbols and beliefs. When they comport themselves respectfully most villagers tolerate and sometimes welcome teachers' presence. But when they don't behave well teachers can quickly become a symbol of threats to village autonomy and traditional culture. For a discussion of the challenges facing bilingual teachers from Chenalhó see Arias 1973: 91. For community members' views see Eber 1995: 200-205. For indigenous women's experiences and the views of indigenous women teachers, see Rippberger 1996.
13. Despite Mónica's opinions of Protestants, in recent years many observers of religious change in Chiapas have shifted from focusing on Protestant missionaries as destroyers of indigenous traditions to concerning themselves with converts to Protestant religions as creative actors in a complex and often dangerous social drama. It seems that many indigenous people are imbuing Protestantism with a Maya ethos, much as they have done and continue to do with Catholicism. (Sterk 1992; and Sullivan 1997 for Protestant communities in highland Chiapas.)

14. Research on reproductive health suggests that women may also fear risks to their own health or lives when pregnant. The rate at which women die in Chenalhó related to pregnancy and childbirth is high and correlated with their overall low status and marginalization (Freyermuth Enciso 1996; Freyermuth Enciso and Delmi Marcela Pinto 1996; Freyermuth Enciso, Garza and Torres 1997).
15. Indigenous beliefs about fate connect both individual and collective fates. Antonia's understanding of destiny combines aspects of her faith in the Christian God with the concept of soul in indigenous communities which recognizes multiple forms, including the existence of a soul or spirit companion in the form of an animal. In traditional beliefs when a child is born her fate is tied to her animal spirit's fate. Dreams play an important role in the fate of one's soul, which is also symbolized by a candle that burns in the sky, going out when one's predetermined lifespan is over (Eber 1995: 156; Gossen 1994: 563).
16. For an appreciation of changes in marriage in highland Chiapas see Collier 1968; Eber 1995; Flood 1994; Garza Caligaris & Ruiz Ortiz 1992; Haviland 1978; Laughlin 1963; Nash 1973; Rosenbaum 1993; and Siverts 1993.
17. When I asked Antonia and Domingo how to say "*la lucha*" (the struggle) in Tzotzil they gave me: *Ta jpastik sk'op ta sventa sunul México xiuck sunul banamil* (We are struggling to unite all Mexico and the whole world).

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