Women and cooperatives are the first line of defense against taking the land and loss of the land for the campesinos and life for them. It is a distinct location. (Researcher, CIEPAC—Center for Economic and Political Studies on Community Action, MX 2002)

Today, I am happy to be in this land though I am far away from my own country because I see and feel the other women fighting and suffering the consequences of wars which hurt us so very much. It is necessary to join our voices and to recover the strength of our hearts. Receive a warm greeting from all the indigenous women who are fighting in Mexico for a life with justice and dignity. Most of us are weavers and today, we give you the colors of our work to join your dances, songs, and fights to reclaim a better life. (Rosalinda Santiz Diaz World Court of Women against War, Cape Town, South Africa 2001 see Appendix 1)

Introduction: Jolom Mayaetik—Women Who Weave with One Heart

One distinct location of Mayan women’s struggle for rights and economic and political democracy, or the “revolution within the revolution” is within autonomous women’s cooperatives led by indigenous women. In Jolom Mayaetik, indigenous women and their allies are creating solidarity economics and political mobilizations for gender equity, and developing young, new leaders to represent their collective organizing efforts in local and global arenas. This cooperative space allows elected representatives to assert their leadership in the context of the women’s collective vision. As will be discussed later, Jolom’s autonomous identity, collective structure, and participatory democracy produce tension and conflict, internal and external, but also synthesize an indigenous, collective vision of rights, women’s rights, and individual hopes. (For a discussion of the tension which exists between a northern, western individualist, human rights discourse and that enunciated in the Global South see Keck and Sikkink 1999). Such a political stance was born out of the women’s adverse experiences with
exclusion from traditional male leadership in their communities, *ladino* (*mestizo* elite) power within Mexican society, and former government-run cooperatives headed by men and controlled by bureaucrats. For these reasons, the women of Jolom, half who are married with children, made the decision to have an independent cooperative run by women. The decision to be politically independent has also resulted in some serious negative ramifications for Jolom both in Chiapas and in the global north.

The themes of indigenous and women’s autonomy and dignity are linked by the cooperative’s leaders and members and enunciated by the cooperative’s leadership in speeches and at demonstrations and by the members across informal contexts. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, women from the indigenous communities of the mountains are building autonomous, indigenous associations and transnational networks with *mestizas* and Global Northern activists to challenge state—supported, neoliberal policies and to create social justice for indigenous women and their families.

Figure 10  Members of Jolom Mayaetik co-operative in Bautista Chico preparing wool for spinning. Chiapas, Mexico 2005. Photographer: Katherine O’Donnell.