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9-2012

## Weaving a Future: A Panel in Honor of Elayne Zorn

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Heckman, Andrea M. and Femenías, Blenda, "Weaving a Future: A Panel in Honor of Elayne Zorn" (2012).  
*Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 694.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/694>

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## Weaving a Future: A Panel in Honor of Elayne Zorn

### Introduction

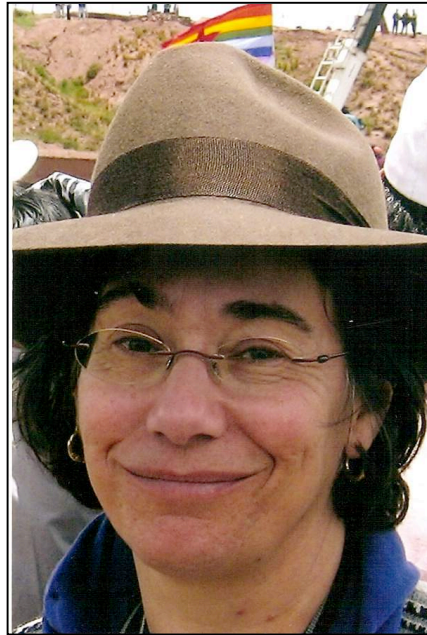
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Our panel honors the work of our dear friend, colleague, and respected textile researcher Elayne Zorn whose long-term research on Taquile Island, Lake Titicaca, Marcusani, Peru and Sacaca, Bolivia will influence generations of textile researchers to come. Elayne believed that fieldwork in a region over many years gives us deeper insight and could help us understand “the tumult of rapid transformations affecting rural indigenous peoples.”

In her book, *Weaving a Future* (2004: University of Iowa Press), she stated that in her first weaving class with Debra Rappaport in 1970, “I fell in love with the brilliantly colored scraps of Peruvian cloth she showed us. Interested in the textile arts since childhood, I realized that I had never seen anything as beautiful.” So began her trips as a backpacker, a weaver, an anthropologist, a scholar, and a friend to many Quechua people. Elayne spoke Quechua and Spanish, and from 1972-2002 returned to the Andes many times. She also helped Taquileans who traveled to New York City and Washington, DC as host, translator and helped them present their cultural traditions in North American museums and cultural events.

Eventually her focus shifted to the impact of tourism on indigenous life. From her perspective 25 years later, she stated, “I still believe that our mutual interest in cloth and weaving bridged many gaps despite

our huge differences. Unlike many anthropologists who have witnessed a steady erosion of quality of life for the indigenous people they work with, I have been privileged to see most Taquileans being able to make the world a better place for themselves.”

A meticulous scholar, through textile studies she considered gender, economics, racism, class, ethnicity and cultural identity. “Cloth is a paramount sign in the representation and construction of identity in manifold forms: individual and social, racial, ethnic, class, and gendered. In this communicative system, the meaning and values of textiles evoke, express, and constitute a coherent whole for their wearers. Not only is cloth an art, but also this most important expressive visual medium is linked to poetry and song. It constitutes wealth, whether displayed in public, stored in their or homes, or inherited. Religion, as well, permeates the process of creation of cloth. In multiple spheres of Andean belief and experience, its political significance is connected to community authorities, who are invested with special textiles and who signal their position through special dress.”

The six presentations on our panel today consider several interrelated political themes: heritage, identity, status, cultural continuity and economic sustainability. The titles and the themes draw inspiration from Elayne’s work. The first three papers address these issues in relationship to Andean societies of the past, using artifacts and archaeological and historical perspectives. The final three papers, while concerned with broadly similar issues, focus on prospects for the future and explore how weavers, and other textile artists, shape their futures in relationship to tourism, education, and national and international politics.

Taken together, our presentations explore ancient and contemporary Andean textiles as contextual messengers and powerful symbols of status and political affinities as well as the ways in which current decisions are affecting the future of textile Andean traditions.

A brief biography of Elayne Zorn appears in the In Memoriam section on page 6 of the TSA Newsletter Fall 2010 at [Newsletters | Textile Society](http://textilesocietyofamerica.org/news/newsletters) <http://textilesocietyofamerica.org/news/newsletters>