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We: Women in a Traditional (Zapotec) World

Ida Day
Marshall University, dayi@marshall.edu

Chapter 6

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Juchitán in Mexico has a reputation of being a matriarchal community, known for assertive and independent women. This image has been reported by writers, artists, and scholars, who travelled to the region to explore its local traditions.The following works offer an appropriate example of this tendency: Graciela Iturbide's "Nuestra Señora de las Iguanas/Our Lady of the Iguanas" (1979); Elena Poniatowska's "Juchitán de las mujeres" (1994); Juanita Darling's "The Women Who Run Juchitan" (1995); and Howard Campbell and Susanne Green's "A History of Representations of Isthmus Zapotec Women" (1996).[1] In these representations (writings, visual arts, and ethnographies), the portrayal of womanhood is unique, since it resists a stereotype of the submissive indigenous woman, embodied in the two Mexican archetypes: La Virgen de Guadalupe, a giving and nurturing mother; and La Malinche, a victimized lover.[2] However, the above mentioned depictions of Juchitán as a place ruled by liberated, powerful, and controlling women are also exaggerated visions of a society rather than realistic ones. In recent decades, the indigenous authors of Mexico have offered more nuanced and authentic perspectives as well as insights to their cultures, which help to understand gender relations, family, and community life.[3] One of the most recognized authors who carries out this mission is Natalia Toledo Paz, a poet from Juchitán and the first woman to publish in the indigenous language of Zapotec (figure 6.1).

This chapter focuses on the female roles and relationships in Natalia Toledo Paz's bilingual collection of poems, *Ca gunaa gubidxa, ca gunaa guiiba' risaca*/*Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro* (2002). The author sets her poems in a world, where all the themes and plots are performed by women.

Natalia is the daughter of Francisco Toledo, a prominent Mexican painter, sculptor, and graphic artist, and Olga de Paz, a Zapotec weaver and hammock maker. In 2004, she was awarded a prestigious Nezahualcóyotl Prize for Indigenous-Language Literature. Her bilingual works (Zapotec/Spanish) have been recognized in numerous anthologies all over the world and translated into various languages. Toledo Paz has lived in various places, including Oaxaca City and Mexico City, dedicating her time not only to poetry, but also to the culinary arts of gourmet food and to jewelry design. Her literary and artistic production makes an intercultural bridge between her native roots and the Western world.

Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro takes the reader to Juchitán, a city on the Isthmus of Tehuentepec, where "los pasos femeninos dejan huella en el camino"[4] (the feminine steps leave footprints on the road). Toledo Paz pays tribute to the women that have influenced her worldview and shaped her literary and artistic identity. By reviving these ordinary and "invisible" women, the poet emphasizes their centrality in her life, and celebrates her indigenous origin. This chapter foregrounds indigenous women's personal agency and autonomy unveiled in *Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*. The variety of women included in this collection reflect the poet's empathy, universal consciousness, and artistic sensibility: "Natalia las comprende y todas las mujeres de este mundo pueden aspirar a hallarse en sus poemas"[5] (Natalia understands them and all the women of this world could aspire to find themselves in her poems). She creates an authentic picture of a Zapotec community, based on her own personal experiences and relationships.

The town of Juchitán in the Zapotec region of Oaxaca in southern Mexico is a trade center, situated near two large saltwater lagoons and surrounded by coastal plain of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Its residents dedicate themselves to tillage, animal husbandry, and fishing. Natalia Toledo Paz lived in her childhood home in Juchitán until the age of seven, where she was surrounded and raised by women in her multi-generational maternal family. She expressed the intimate relationship with them in an interview: "Ellas son muy importantes en mi vida y les debo muchísimo"[6] (They are very important in my life and I owe them a lot). The poet admires these role models, who transmit the wisdom of life, offer support, and provide a sense of community, extended family, and belonging. She also emphasizes their ethnic pride, individuality, and respect for tradition—like in any traditional society, these women gather and work together, away from the realm of masculine activities; however, they are not victims of male domination and oppression, as often presented in contemporary indigenous literature on deconstruction of patriarchy.[7] The protagonists here are complex individuals, whom Toledo Paz respects for their passions, talents, self-sufficiency, economic power, and devotion to their professions.

Figure 6.1 Natalia Toledo Paz. ***Photograph by Isabel Briseño***

Toledo Paz recognizes the strength and the pride of Juchitec women, but, simultaneously, questions the conventional representations of her culture as a matriarchy: "I decided to give my version of who we really are, without falling into the familiar stereotypes: that Juchitán is a matriarchal society, that we dominate our men."[8] By doing so, she opposes the literary, artistic, and media approaches to Isthmus Zapotec culture that conceive matriarchy as "a simple inversion of patriarchal domination, painting a picture of Isthmus Zapotec women as bawdy Amazons who lord it over meek and subservient men."[9] Toledo Paz rejects this idea, and instead presents a traditional social order in which men and women have their respective roles, passions, and activities (farming and fishing being the male domain exclusively *versus* trade and service the female one). These traditional gender-specific tasks are equally important and valuable within society. In consonance with Toledo Paz's perspective, the idea of historical matriarchy, as a political rule by women, has been demystified by contemporary scholars. Camille Paglia, one of the most outspoken contemporary social and cultural critics, challenges the hypothesis of matriarchy, as a once existing system, overthrown by patriarchal society: "Not a shred of evidence supports the existence of matriarchy anywhere in the world at any time [however] the matriarchy hypothesis, revived by American feminists, continues to flourish outside the university."[10] This matriarchal utopia is a generalized image of idealized past, which lacks the sensitivity for the historical processes and for complex human relationships. The author further explains that the respect and worship of women in traditional societies (due to

their power of reproduction/creation) was not equivalent with their superior social or political status. Similarly, Felipe Hernández de la Cruz observes that in traditional societies (the pre-Hispanic times) women were respected, but they did not hold the same positions as men. Then, in the colonial period, they were dispossessed of some of their social roles: "*Ellas tenían dominancia en las organizaciones comunitarias que de pronto sufrieron una ruptura*"[11] (They had power in communal organizations that suddenly were broken up). Therefore, the colonial period made the position of indigenous women more vulnerable. The portrayal of Juchitán in Toledo Paz's book demonstrates that the traditions are still alive in this place in a sense that men and women have their distinct roles, and their respective relationships are fostered through shared activities, common missions, and mutual support. The author's vision reconfigures the myths as well as transcends clichés and ideologies—"[ella] nombra lo verdadero y palpable de su mundo"[12] (she names the real and tangible of her world). Without engaging in speculations on matriarchy or patriarchy, the poet focuses on universal human emotions and personal connections.

Toledo Paz offers a realistic and, at the same time, poetic panorama of her hometown: "En su libro vibra Juchitán, huele y sabe a mujeres hermosas, fuertes, sensuales"[13] (in her book, Juchitan vibrates, smells and tastes of beautiful, strong, and sensual women). Throughout the history of poetry, most commonly women have been portrayed as mistresses—objects of love and desire, but rarely they appeared as workers and professionals—mistresses of their own realm. Here we meet homemakers, cooks, singers, teachers, hammock weavers, healers, bartenders, and street vendors. Toledo Paz has a special relationship with each of them. Some are the poet's intimate friends and blood relatives, whereas the bonds with others can be understood in a broader context—they form a community of common values, support, and solidarity. The latter is a significant social bond shared by women in traditional societies, which Toledo Paz revives and celebrates. The collection includes poems dedicated to a local healer, Doña Marcelina, a teacher and singer; Doña Florinda, a fish vendor; Doña Berta Beninu; and a vivacious, exuberant alcohol-server, Doña Manuela León, among others. To demonstrate her belonging to this *milieu* and its impact on her personal formation, the author includes poems about herself in the collection, "Cielo min (niña comerciante)" and "Natalia (poeta y cocinera)." By doing so, she expresses her emotional connection as well as identification with the Juchitec women and communicates that she is one of them.

Toledo Paz opens her book with a passage: "*El zapoteco siempre fue el único hombre de la casa*" (the Zapotec was always the only man in the house). This statement reflects the significant role of the author's maternal language and depicts the family structure of her community, where women dominated the domestic space and men worked outside. The poet elaborated

on this opening quote in the following words: "*de todos los niños que vivíamos en esa casa no tuvimos una figura paterna, de alguna manera sí, pero todos los hombres estaban fuera, creo que por eso puse al zapoteco como padre*"[14] (we did not have a paternal figure at home, in a way yes, but all the men were outside, that is why I put the Zapotec as a father). The absence of a man or a father in the house does not indicate any disorder here; on the contrary, it exemplifies the traditional social model where genders play different roles and complement each other. As Camille Paglia stated, "there was simple logic, not injustice [in the polarization of sex roles]," and "the link between father and child was a late development."[15] The author explains the polarization of sex roles in the context of human life connected to the natural world: "Primitive life, far from peaceable, was submerged in the turbulence of nature. Man's superior strength provided protection to women, particularly in the incapacitating final stages of pregnancy. [. . .] Men roamed and hunted, while women in their gathering forays ventured no farther from the campsite than they could carry their nursing infants."[16] Natalia Toledo Paz was growing up surrounded and taught by her mother, grandmother, aunts, and family friends—the experience which was formative in her future life. She recalls these memories in "First House": "As a child I slept in my grandmother's arms like the moon in the heart of the sky."[17] The poem focuses on the connection between people, celebrating the extended multi-generational family and female bonds based on mutual support: "food was prepared with the joy of rain upon the earth, we whipped chocolate, and in a huge *jícara* we were served the dawn."[18]

In another poem, "Oración" (Prayer), the author expresses her deepest emotions and memories of things related to her childhood: "Por la silla de ruedas de mi abuela, por los mangos verdes de mi amiga Cándida"[19] (For the wheelchair of my grandmother, for the green mangos of my friend Cándida). Cándida has been Natalia's friend since they were both children. As a little girl, Cándida was selling mangos, corn, and other produce at a local market. The poet still has a special emotional bond with this person: "La quiero y respeto mucho, es de las pocas personas que realmente me conocen"[20] (I love and respect her very much, she is one of the few people that truly know me). This confession reflects the importance of common roots and shared history in human relationships. Toledo Paz highly values the old friendship with Cándida; even though their life paths went in different directions, their origins and past experiences have made their connection last.

Another friend—Florinda, who already passed away, is commemorated in *Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*. She studied ethnolinguistics and taught Zapotec in an elementary school. She was also a singer, whose musical talent was passed on to her children and grandchildren. Natalia Toledo

Paz remembers her beautiful voice in a poem, "Doña Florinda (maestra y cantante)":

> Your song
> opens the almond seed,
> translucent, hurts the night heart
> like a bird that escapes to the sky.[21]

Apart from deep admiration for Florinda's artistic skills, the author expresses her affection and friendly feelings: "Maestra Florinda fue una muy buena amiga mía, fue muy generosa conmigo y fue muy linda, y por eso le escribí ese poema "[22] (Ms. Florinda was a very good friend of mine, she was very generous with me, and very nice; that's why I wrote this poem for her).

The presence of women in the poet's childhood environment contributed to her intimate and lasting relationships as well as a sensible feminist perspective that promotes women's independence but equally respects both sexes. The author esteems the traditional social order and women's personal responsibility, without falling into simplistic ideas of gender inequalities. The protagonists of *Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro* are not oppressed; on the contrary, they assert their agency, leadership, confidence, and dignity. At the same time, Toledo Paz avoids the conventional representations of Juchitán as a unique matriarchal enclave of Mexico, portrayed in various historical and contemporary discourses.[23] She offers her personal reflection on this famous Juchitec "matriarchy," where women, just like men, are taught to work, earn, save, and be economically productive members of society: "eso no tiene que ver con la actualidad, con movimientos feministas, tiene que ver con un grupo que funciona así, que trabaja, que guarda, que sabe administrar, somos grandes comerciantes. De hecho, zapoteca, pochteca es comerciante. Por algo nos llaman así"[24] (this does not have anything to do with the contemporary feminist movements, it has to do with a group that functions this way, that works, saves, knows how to administer, we are great traders. In fact, *zapoteca*, *pochteca* means "trader." They call us that for a reason). Juchitán is a residence of farmers and fishermen as well as a women-centered regional trade center based on provisioning. The women are entrepreneurs and traders who work at the market apart from having other occupations in households and community (figure 6.2).

An example of such a talented woman who has had a multifaceted career is Doña Marcelina. Natalia considers Marcelina one of her oldest friends: "*Marcelina me conoce desde que estoy en la panza de mi mamá*"[25] (Marcelina has known me since I was in the belly of my mom). In her youth, she was travelling to sell hammocks with Natalia's mother, Olga, to the merchants of Oaxaca, Monte Albán, and Mitla. Then, she opened her own shop with

Figure 6.2 Women at the Juchitan Market. ***By Ned Mueller***

hammocks and jewelry. One day, she had a spiritual revelation in a temple and began to work as a holistic healer, curing peoples' illnesses and restoring their physical and emotional well-being. The poem, "Doña Marcelina," is dedicated to her:

Serene and enlightened

in her eyes and in her hands.
Alpha and omega
of all the heavens with neither beginning nor end.
Saint Theresa child of the sea appears
to collect the withered basil from your hands,
the purple onion, the dark lemons
with their dusky peels.
With the wind from your lips
you remove the dust from eyes,
you restore their color and joy,
you free the body of fever
and the sweat begins to reclaim the senses.[26]

The protagonist of this poem is like a creator of the universe: "alpha and omega of all the heavens with neither beginning nor end." Toledo Paz uses a Christian symbology (Saint Theresa that is celebrated in one of the local legends, as well as Alpha and Omega indicating the comprehensiveness of God); however, the holistic perception of the world, based on the cycles of life, refers to the pre-Columbian indigenous cosmology.[27] Doña Marcelina represents a female power of creation, a caring mother, and a nature-goddess. Like in many pre-Hispanic cultures, women were honored by the Zapotec people as principles of fertility and creation. In the archeological sites of the region, there are various carved rocks depicting female figures as creators of the universe. Roberto Zarate Morán, in "Las piedras de la luna y la piedra del Llano del Santo de Asunción Tlacolulita, Oaxaca," explores the symbolic meaning of the stone carvings in the Zapotec region of Mexico (Tlacolula). The female figures dominating these ceremonial sites prove the local belief that the universe was created by a female deity: "la diosa madre [. . .] pariendo la naturaleza, las constelaciones, las plantas, los animales y los hombres"[28] (the mother-goddess giving birth to nature, constellations, plants, animals, and people). Zarate Morán further explains that, in order to facilitate the evangelization process, the Christian missionaries introduced the image of Santa María de la Asunción, which resembled the original pre-Hispanic goddess of creation, Pijxoonij. Toledo Paz revives this symbolism of goddess as a life-giving force, commemorating the healer from Juchitán who has special powers.

Doña Marcelina works with nature ("the withered basil," "the purple onion," "the dark lemons," "the wind," and "the dust"), and has special faculties to heal and to create. Toledo Paz refers to the cultic worship of female powers, universal in hunting and agrarian societies. The identification of women with nature was at the center of early symbolism and was related to the correspondence between nature's cycles and woman's cycles (their ability to procreate). Contemporary feminists criticize this analogy with

nature because it limits woman's possibilities, autonomy, and a potential for achievement, confining her to a collective or tribal identity. However, Toledo Paz does not perceive it this way. As an artist and independent thinker, she values Marcelina's individualism and self-realization, but, at the same time, recognizes her intimate connection to nature and her traditional role as a healer and a nurturer. The poet respects the ancestral wisdom that women and men have been wired differently for millions of years and their tendencies are biologically determined.

This controversial identification of woman with nature has its origin in prehistorical times when femaleness was worshipped as a life-giving force. Women's creative powers and biological cycles were associated with nature's cycles: "The ancients knew that woman is bound to nature's calendar, an appointment she cannot refuse."[29] The cult of female fertility receded in importance as civilization progressed, with crafts and commerce freeing societies from their dependence on nature. Camille Paglia further elaborates on the identification of femaleness with nature, claiming that women, unlike men, do not need to search for personal identity: "Woman does not dream of transcendental or historical escape from natural cycle, since she *is* that cycle."[30] In contrast to the traditional masculine role of action and achievement, women are biologically linked to nature's rhythms, and therefore, more earthbound and self-contained: "Woman's centrality gives her a stability of identity. She does not have to become, only to be."[31] That explains the reason why female intense bonding in history and literature has been less epitomized than the male one. We rarely find dramatic stories of female epic adventures, expeditions, fellowships, comradery, heroic deeds, and struggles.[32] There are few literary and historical recounts of women's devotion to such life-and-death alliances outside of the family or sexual sphere, but their emotional unions are equally compelling and meaningful. Natalia Toledo Paz perceives this female earthly connection and stability of identity in positive terms, and not in a contradiction to personal, artistic, or spiritual growth. This perspective is explicitly conveyed in "For the girls Rocío, Olga y Monserrat," dedicated to the individuals especially dear to the poet's heart:

> Love yourself as one loves the sun and the rain.
> Love yourself as one loves a freshly composed poetry.
> Do not expect from anyone.
> Everything that you can value and love on this earth is inside you.[33]

The poem reflects the women's connection to the natural world and their self-sufficiency. They do not need to compete or perform to feel worthy and develop a sense of personal achievement. One can see in this message a spiritual dimension which combines the sense of identity with the experience

of nature, art, and love. Even though, Toledo Paz writes this poem for Rocío, Olga, and Monserrat, the message is universal in its scope. The author recognizes the differences between women and men as well as their respective traditional roles, but, simultaneously, she understands the spiritual aspect of human beings which goes beyond any compartmentalization. Women are the pivot and fulcrum of her work, but they act as representatives of all human beings. The author processes the themes of humanity with a cast of women, who are capable of adopting all of the roles.

In Natalia's representation of her native community, there is room for unconventional or eccentric individuals. In her poem, "Friné," she recalls a barkeeper, who was also a striptease dancer:

> In a wooden threshold
> an underskirt sways, catches, tears;
> she smiles with her husky voice and golden teeth.
> She invites, and they invite her,
> she lifts her *huipil*, lowers and lifts her shoulders,
> and starts to spin with her full moon breasts
> enormous and wrinkled.[34]

Friné had her bar close to Natalia's house, in the neighborhood of fishermen, where she did striptease in the evenings. The men from the town and the countryside would gather there after work, while the children from the neighborhood would sneak close to the house to peek. The poet was fascinated with Friné's performace: "lo interestante de ella es que tenía como sesenta años, no era una joven, pero la seguridad con la que mostraba su cuerpo era impresionante, por eso le escribí ese poema"[35] (the interesting thing about her was that she was about sixty years old, she was not a young woman, but the confidence with which she was showing her body was amazing, that's why I wrote her that poem. The theme of female strength determines this poem. Toledo Paz presents the erotic dancer completely in charge of her male audience, contrary to a Mexican archetype of a passive woman "behind the veil of her modesty and immobility."[36] The author strips away this conventional veil, and exposes Friné's life energy, physicality, and liberty. The dancing woman's voluptuous shape and large breasts allude to the mother goddess ideal, which combines her sexuality and maternity. There is almost a caring and nurturing quality in her attitude toward men. Toledo Paz challenges the perception of sexual dancing as objectifying or subordinating women to the "male gaze"; instead, she recognizes it as an important ritual with ancient roots that brings men in community together and fulfills their longings.

Similarly, the poem, "Doña Manuela León," is dedicated to an alcohol vendor ("tabernera"), whom Toledo Paz remembers as "famosa, importante,

guapa"[37] (famous, important, good-looking). Juchitán is known for its street festivals and community celebrations, which are mainly the women's domain. They form an integral part of the local economy and foster the spirit of tradition. Manuela León was one of the women who was selling beer and other alcohol during these traditional festivities in town.[38] They would stand outside with tables, chairs, and coolers, and invite people to have a drink or two, before entering a celebration place. Many people would go to a party, eat, dance, and then continue drinking with the *taberneras*, hanging out with them. The author fondly associates these women who work at night with "luciérnagas de oro" (golden fireflies), and leads the reader to appreciate their service: "no son las más elegantes, son las más alegres, las que prenden la tibieza del hombre, las que siempre van a estar al inicio y al final de la fiesta"[39] (they are not the most elegant, they are the most joyful, the ones that warm up the man, the ones that will always be at the beginning and at the end of a party). Both Friné and Manuela serve men, and the author values their work that is entertaining and demanding at the same time: "rostros bellamente macerados por la noche y el alcohol"[40] (faces beautifully soaked with the night and the alcohol). There is nothing degrading or subservient in their position—they enjoy it as much as their clients. The poems counteract the simplistic views on patriarchal domination or oppression, proliferating in contemporary feminist discourses.

Natalia Toledo Paz revives the women of Juchitán that have influenced her personally, emotionally, and artistically. These women inspired *Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro* because of their important role in the author's life and contribution to community. Learning about their work and relationships helps to understand the values of a traditional society, based on ancestral wisdom and human connection to nature. The author presents the life in Juchitán not as a patriarchal or matriarchal order, but as a vibrant community where women and men have their respective roles and activities. There is no injustice or inequality in this social order, but logic and common sense. The protagonists of the collection of poems are neither victims of male domination nor controlling matriarchs, but confident and empowered women. The author values the traditional order based on separate gender roles; furthermore, she does not see it in contradiction to personal/spiritual autonomy and artistic expression. Through this heartfelt poetic survey, she evokes particular memories and special connections with each woman, focusing on their individuality. The poet presents personal relationships as vital to fulfill the human need for intimacy, sense of belonging, and purpose. Toledo Paz "recorre el mundo cotidiano y lo assume, observa, siente, repira, suda"[41] (tours the everyday world and engages with it, observes, feels, breathes, sweats). *Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro* celebrates the cultural Zapotec heritage and conveys the importance of human and universal values of community and relationships.

NOTES

1. For more information on the images of Juchitán that generated myths of matriarchal utopia, see Analisa Taylor's "Malinche and Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (2006): 815–840.

2. Octavio Paz, in his iconic study of Mexican character and culture, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), comments that the Mexican considers woman to be a reflection of masculine will: "When passive, she becomes a goddess, a beloved one, a being who embodies the ancient, stable elements of the universe: the earth, motherhood, virginity. When active, she is always function and means, a receptacle and a channel. Womanhood, unlike manhood, is never an end in itself" (36).

3. Among the contemporary indigenous authors of various regions of Mexico that focus on female roles and relationships it is important to distinguish Sol Ceh Moo, Briceida Cuevas Cob, and Irma Pineda. For more information, see Mónica Elena Ríos's "Escritoras indígenas del México contemporáneo," *Fuentes Humanísticas* 49 (2014). There are also contemporary indigenous authors in other regions of Latin America that focus on female relationships: Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, Maya Cu Choc, and Rosa Chavez from Guatemala. See Emilio del Valle Escalante's *Uk'u'x kaj, uk'u'x ulew: Antología de poesía maya guatemalteca contemporánea* (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2010).

4. Elena Poniatowska, "Natalia Toledo y sus mujeres de sol," prologue to *Ca gunaa gubidxa, ca gunaa guiiba' risaca/Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*, by Natalia Toledo Paz (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 2002): 11.

5. Ibid., 12.

6. Natalia Toledo Paz, "Natalia Toledo regresa a la poesía con 'El dorso del cangrejo,'" interview by Columba Vértiz de la Fuente, *Proceso* (2016): n.p.

7. Sol Ceh Moo, a Mexican Maya writer and a winner of Nezahualcóyotl Prize in 2014, in *Chen tumeen chu'úpen/Sólo por ser mujer* (Mexico: Conaculta, 2015), addresses issues of female oppression and gender inequality.

8. Toledo Paz, in Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann, eds., *Words of the True Peoples. Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005): 22.

9. Taylor, "Malinche and Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico," 821.

10. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991): 42.

11. Felipe Hernández de la Cruz, prologue to *Chen tumeen chu'úpen/Sólo por ser mujer*, by Sol Ceh Moo (Mexico: Conaculta, 2015): 14.

12. Poniatowska, "Natalia Toledo y sus mujeres de sol," 10.

13. Yanet Aguilar Sosa, "El matriarcado en la poesía de Natalia Toledo," *El Universal* (2016): n.p.

14. Toledo Paz, e-mail to Ida Day, February 23, 2021.

15. Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 42.

16. Ibid., 42.

17. Toledo Paz, in Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann, eds., *Words of the True Peoples. Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers*, 81.

18. Ibid., 81.

19. Toledo Paz, *Deche biotope/El dorso del cangrejo* (Mexico: Almadía Ediciones, 2016): 61.

20. Toledo Paz, e-mail to Ida Day, February 25, 2021.

21. Toledo Paz, *Ca gunaa gubidxa, ca gunaa guiiba' risaca/Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*, 40. My translation from Spanish into English.

22. Toledo Paz, message to Ida Day, May 31, 2021.

23. In a similar way to Toledo Paz, Edaena Saynes-Vázquez, in "Galán Pa dxandí.' 'That Would Be Great if It Were True': Zapotec Women's Comment on Their Role in Society," *Identities* 3 (1996), challenges the stereotype of Juchitán as a land of female supremacy: "there is a great difference between self-identification as a Zapotec and descriptions of Zapotec culture provided by outsiders" (187).

24. Toledo Paz, in Yonet Aguilar Sosa, "El matriarcado en la poesía de Natalia Toledo," *El Universal* (2016): n.p.

25. Toledo Paz, e-mail to Ida Day, March 30, 2021.

26. Toledo Paz, in Monica de la Torre, *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry* (Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 575.

27. For more information on the local worship of Saint Theresa, see Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann, eds., *Words of the True Peoples. Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005). Saint Theresa attempted to found a city near San Mateo del Mar. However, due to human's sins God flooded it with seawater. When the saint begged forgiveness, God made the sea return to its shores, but allowed two inlets to remain: Lago Superior (or Lago de Santa Teresa) and Lago Inferior.

28. Roberto Zarate Morán, "Las piedras de la luna y la piedra del Llano del Santo de Asunción Tlacolulita, Oaxaca," in *Símbolos y representaciones zapotecas*, ed. Eva Elena Ramírez Gasga (Oaxaca: Universidad del Istmo, 2016): 154.

29. Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 10.

30. Ibid., 10.

31. Ibid., 9.

32. Camille Paglia, in *Sexual Personae*, explains the differences between the ways men and women interact, relate, and bond with each other in terms of primal gender roles determined by natural instincts. Sexually, men "must quest, pursue, court, or seize," and in life they are driven to act, create, take risks, compete, and achieve (20). The author perceives the productive dynamic of male social bonding in history in terms of their natural motivations, inspiring adventures, and solidarity that intimately bond people together.

33. Toledo Paz, *Ca gunaa gubidxa, ca gunaa guiiba' risaca/Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*, 50. My translation from Spanish into English.

34. Ibid., 46. My translation from Spanish into English.

35. Toledo Paz, message to Ida Day, May 7, 2021.

36. Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 37.

37. Toledo Paz, message to Ida Day, May 7, 2021.

38. For more information, see "Las velas de Juchitán: fiestas comunitarias de mezcal, cerveza y color" in *México Desconocido* (2020).

39. Toledo Paz, *Ca gunaa gubidxa, ca gunaa guiiba' risaca/Mujeres de sol, mujeres de oro*, 48.

40. Ibid., 48.

41. Poniatowska, "Natalia Toledo y sus mujeres de sol," 13.

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