Childrearing in the discourse of friars and Nahaus in early colonial central Mexico

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Childrearing in the Discourse of Friars and Nahuas
in Early Colonial Central Mexico

By

Nadia Marín-Guadarrama

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Abstract

This dissertation illustrates the terms in which indigenous' conceptions of childrearing and childhoods were discussed and depicted in a Mesoamerican setting of the XVI Century. During this early colonial period, Nahuas from Central Mexico realized that Spanish colonizers were interested in learning about and transforming even the most intimate aspects of their lives, including the meaning of a girl and a boy of different ages, and the practices of childrearing. In the process, friars and Nahuas had agreements or experienced contradictions regarding how girls or boys should be raised. The analysis is based on ethnographic, ecclesiastic, and civil documents written in Nahuatl and Spanish by male Nahua scholars and Christian friars. I explore the sociocultural confrontation demonstrating that in this historical period, the discourses related to childrearing practices as well as childhood entered into a process that ended up in the transformation of indigenous practices and moral patterns, at least observed in the colonial discourses.
To José Ramón, my amore with whom I have lived intense years of learning and love.

To Dante and Julieta; notlazopilhuan, my beloved children who inspired me to take the journey of studying gender and children.

To Rosita and Héctor, my beloved parents who always encouraged me to know and love my country, and to know and love all of humanity.

To the girls and boys of Mesoamerica and the world.
Acknowledgments

Usually, a section like this starts with the acknowledgements to the academic support received during the process of research. This time I want to write it differently. First, I want to specially thank six people who have supported me emotionally and with their time in every part of this arduous process of finishing my dissertation: My husband José Ramón, my kids Dante and Julieta, my parents Rosita and Héctor, and Petra Bermudez, my dear friend.

During my childhood, my parents Héctor Marín Rebollo and Rosita Polo gave me a propitious environment for learning. Books everywhere in the house and the travels to many different places in my beloved rural Mexico were crucial for my academic interests. In those spaces, my brothers and I used to play with girls and boys of different ages and ethnicities. We spent the days chasing each other in the milpas, eating green beans, and grabbing blue and white tortillas from the comal of the ladies who were cooking in the kitchen. Without noticing, my parents lead me to the field that I decided to embrace: the study of gender and childhoods among indigenous communities in Mexico, past and present.

Being a mother and a graduate student at the same time was not an easy task. It was only possible thanks to the great support of my mom Rosita Polo, my father Hector Marin, and my husband J. Ramon Gil-Garcia. Since the beginning of my studies, my mom has been spending her time and energy cheering me up, and loving and taking care of my children when my husband and I have been absent due to our academic responsibilities. Now in my home country, my father has been also helping us with our
hectic daily schedule. Both of them have been really important in rearing Dante and Julieta in a happy and constructive environment. For my husband and me, negotiating parenthood while pursuing our academic goals has been an opportunity to challenge and transform traditional ways of love and childrearing. He is an exceptional man. His example and his love have been my inspiration and my strength to finish my doctoral studies.

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Louise Burkhart, my academic and life advisor, has been a great support for me since the first day of my graduate studies in Albany. She is an international and outstanding scholar from whom I kept learning since the beginning of my graduate studies. Besides, she has also been a sensible person who has helped me with through
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The last four years, I have spent my summers at the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives at the University at Albany. It has been a great place to work, where I consulted different codices useful for my dissertation. The chilliness in the department necessary to preserve the collections was always alleviated with the warm welcome that the staff gave me every day.

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The *Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México* (UAEM) has always been a vital institution for my academic development, especially Carlos Arriaga Jordán who supported every stage of my graduate studies. Finally, this dissertation could not be done without the support of a great Mexican institution. The *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* (CONACYT) gave me a marvelous scholarship to study my masters and almost all my PhD studies at the State University of New York at Albany. I hope the Mexican government maintains the program for generations to come. Many times, this is the only possibility non-wealthy Mexicans have for pursuing their dreams of learning, either inside or outside our country.
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Introduction

This dissertation addresses the study of indigenous childhoods and childrearing in Mesoamerican ethnohistory. It contributes to a better understanding of why and in what terms colonial social actors discussed the roles, practices, and beliefs that indigenous populations had concerning childrearing. The principal topics studied on childrearing in Mesoamerica are observed based on the analysis of discourses that Nahua scholars and friars wrote during the early epoch of the colony in New Spain. Those documents, as well as civil records, are the only ethnohistorical sources in which it is possible to have a window for the study of colonial indigenous children, as their voices are not heard in any written material. With this brief introduction, the reader is first informed about the type of documents in which this dissertation grounds its findings. Then, it is explained the way in which children studies have become important in the social sciences within the last few years. Later, the basic concepts of children studies is presented within the context of Mesoamerican studies from ethnohistory, placing this dissertation as a relevant study for continuing with the efforts of reconstructing the colonial Mesoamerican society. The end of this introduction briefly describes each chapter included in the dissertation.

Looking for information about the way children were raised in colonial Mesoamerica was an interesting academic adventure that took me to some libraries and archives in Mexico and the United States, and to the microfilms kept in the drawers of Louise Burkhart, my advisor, who has devoted her life to the study of colonial Nahuas. In her drawers, as well as in the John Carter Brown Library and the National Library in Mexico, I found a book that gave me my first insights into the intention followed by friars and Nahua scholars for rebuilding childrearing. In 1607, Augustinian friar Juan de
Mijangos published an unusual Christian Doctrine in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. He wrote the book in the form of a dialogue between a father and a son. The first chapter is the most interesting one. It is a very elaborated and elegant dialogue in which the worried father recriminates with painful words his lazy child, who he found doing nothing but sleeping. Agustin explains to his son that God would punish him for his failure in instructing him. As a result, the father has to punish him and beat him to fulfill God’s commands. Juan asks the father for more information about the behavior that as a Christian boy he should have. Then, Agustin encourages his son to leave childhood since it was a stage of incapacity—a non-productive one. The father uses the examples of biblical children such as Tobias, Eli, and Anne to admonish his Juan and stop his sins. The father’s major worry is his risk of going to hell because he was not doing the work dictated by God, which is raising his child prudently, which meant in a spiritual way. At the end of the chapter, the child accepts going to church with the friars for receiving instruction on colonial Christian education.

The title of this book is *Sacred Mirror* in the Mexican language, in which fathers can see themselves and take documentation to teach their children properly, and make them fond of the virtues (see Illustration 1). I consider this book the maximum example of the colonial desires that the ecclesiastic power had for transforming the most intimate spaces of society. It is the synthesis that resulted from the discussion friars and Nahua scholars had about childrearing during the early years of the Colony. The space they wanted to transform was the Nahua household, in which occurs those “mundane”

---

1 The title in antique Spanish is *Espejo divino en lengua mexicana, en que pueden verse los padres y tomar documento para acertar a doctrinar bien a sus hijos y aficionarlos a las virtudes*. 

2
processes of social reproduction. With that intention, they were entering into a process for understanding and reconfiguring the meanings and roles of indigenous mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters in New Spain.

Mijangos is the author of the book, however, he did not write it alone. Nahua scholar Agustín de la Fuente gave a special contribution to the text, and Mijangos gave special credit to him. The book is a long discourse, the result of a negotiation of a Nahua scholar and a friar about the way they should create discourses about childrearing. Mijangos and de la Fuente had something in common: They lived their childhood in a colonized territory; they were raised in New Spain. Nevertheless, the experiences they had during their childhood were quite different. Their ethnic background placed them in social spaces, where one was less than the other at least in the general structure of the colonial society.

Mijangos, a descendant of Spanish mother and father, had an interesting experience playing with the indigenous children since his early childhood. This advantage allowed him to become familiar with the Nahua culture and language. His knowledge about the culture that friars wanted to convert to Christianity, and his ethnic background allowed him to become a friar, and an outstanding one who is known as one of the shining stars of the list of Nahuatl writers of his epoch (Garibay Kintana 1971a, 1971b).

Agustin de la Fuente was another story. He was a Nahua child when he started his education at the College of the Holy Cross, a school created by the Franciscan friars especially for indigenous noble boys. De la Fuente was instructed in the arts of writing and reading, as well as in the Christian doctrine and the knowledge that friars brought
with them to Mesoamerica. He was an outstanding Nahua, recognized for his knowledge of Latin and Nahuatl languages, for his expertise on the Christian doctrine, and for his outstanding ability for learning the humanistic knowledge taught by the friars. Nevertheless, and although he might not be interested in becoming one, he did not have the opportunity of having the title of friar because he was an Indian. Despite his participation in the elaboration of Espejo Divino, he was not able to be co-author of this or any other book. The great de la Fuente found limits on the role he could play in the colonial society because of his ethnic background. Nevertheless, he was able to intervene in the most important indigenous structures without the necessity of following a life of celibacy—something that Nahuas did not find enticing. They preferred to have a life not only holding a higher social status, but also to have a life where they could become procreators of daughters and sons, a Mesoamerican characteristic that would give equilibrium to their life (Burkhart 1989).

Despite this situation, Nahua boys had an advantage living in that colonial context. They knew both cultures. They lived in the borderline that allowed them to participate in two colonial worlds. While their community identified de la Fuente as a Nahua, he also became important for the ecclesiastic colonial power. The friars esteemed him because he was intelligent and productive; they saw him as an element for transforming the Nahua ideology, but at the same time, he might be using this space to give continuity to his indigenous heritage.

Despite the ethnic differences, the fact that Juan de Mijangos and Agustin de la Fuente wrote a book of 552 pages with Christian moral codes and practices that parents and children should follow (with emphasis on the father and the son) shows that among
the political, economic, and social changes that Nahuas confronted, friars as well as Christianized Nahuas were challenging (or questioning) the Mesoamerican social reproduction related to the way indigenous mothers and fathers should raise their children. It is clear that the early colonial strategies of changing the intimate spaces in New Spain was part of a program for creating a new colonial indigenous society that went beyond rudimentary doctrinal education.

Besides a few sources written in Spanish, along with *Espejo Divino*, other colonial documents written in the Nahua language is the material from which this dissertation takes note of the ecclesiastic intentions for transforming the Mesoamerican society. The classification of these materials in ethnographic, ecclesiastic, and civil documents helps to understand the mechanisms in which friars based their efforts of conversion. To know, to educate, and to use formulaic instruments brought from Spain for registering deaths and baptisms were the strategies that friars along with the Nahua scholars used to try to shape the practices and values of those who lived inside the indigenous households.

The indigenous colonial documents were written mostly in Nahua, because it was the *lingua franca* in Mesoamerica. Different indigenous groups adopted it during the expansion of the Aztecs over the territory. At the beginning of the Spanish colonization, some Nahuas learned to write and to read with the Latin alphabet, and started to write their Nahua language using the same Latin characters (Sell 1993). In the documents, the writers constructed a series of speeches that considered fathers and mothers as the main and only persons in charge of raising their children. The discourses were usually centered on discussions about the way mothers and fathers used to or should raise children of
different ages. The analysis of those documents shows the interest that friars and Nahua scholars had in recording topics such as the role and value of fathers and mothers, as well as the practices of childbearing, babyhood, the practices of raising children capable to perform gendered chores, and the patterns of discipline and punishment administered to them. That is why the study of discourses that friars and Nahuas produced is important for understanding childrearing.

Recently, there has been an important moment for the advancement of studies on children and childhood. The academic journal *Childhood* started its publication in 1993, and is the oldest and most important space where academics advocated for and presented their studies of children. However, in 2007, *American Anthropologist* published a special issue on the study of children and alerted scholars to the necessity of bringing more research to understand the participation of children in societies. In the issue, Alison James and Alan Prout (2007) delineated on the theoretical characteristics that social scientists should use in the task of giving voice to children in the social sciences; Robert Levine (2007) also published a historical overview of children studies from an ethnographic perspective. After that publication, several research organizations, centers, and journals have started work on learning about children past and present.
The efforts made by different sectors inside the social sciences are concretized now in academic organizations such as the Commission on the Anthropology of Children, Youth and Childhood that belongs to the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), which was established in 2001. The Society for the History of Children and Youth was also established in 2001, and has built a space of conversation about children with the journal History of Childhood and Youth. The newest

Illustration 1. First page of the book Espejo Divino (Mijangos 1607).
organization is the Children and Youth Interest Group from the American Anthropological Association, created in 2007.

Research centers are also popping up across the globe. The Norwegian Center for Child Research (NOSEB) is the pioneer in the studies of children that started its work in 1982, and is the research center that gave life to journal Childhood. The Center for Children and Childhood Studies, formed at Rutgers University at Camden in 2000, and the Center for the Study of Childhood and Youth, formed at the University of Sheffield in England in 2001, have joined forces to study children across the globe. Now they are developing important theoretical and methodological perspectives on children studies.

Of course, children studies did not start in 2007 with the publication of a special issue of a journal, or in 1983 when the first research center was established. Efforts from anthropologists and sociologists as well as historians can be traced since the beginning of the 20th century when Margaret Mead (1928) wrote about how girls and boys grow up in Samoa. Almost 40 years later, Ariès (1962) contributed in an outstanding manner when he stated that childhood was a social construction. After that publication, and especially in history, many documents were published supporting the idea that childhood was a stage that already existed during medieval times. In anthropology, the studies of Whiting et al. (1973) found that children were raised differently according to their specific society. Contrary to what psychologists of that epoch believed, they stated that children’s development was different. What we had at that moment was a Western perspective, which was far from a universal understanding. At the end of the 20th century, Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) proposed that children should not only be studied as part of an institution or as a psychological or pedagogical interest, but they proposed to use children
as a main subject since they are part of complex social structures. Such perspectives have brought into international discussion theoretical and methodological issues that intertwine with more empirical realities of race, gender, and class. During the last five years, such perspectives have arisen that relate children past and present to diverse topics such as urbanity, rurality, labor, health, spaces, orphanhood, prostitution, bilingualism, childrearing, children death, childbirth, early childhood, ecology, demography, race, class, war, material culture, citizenship, migration, children’s rights, public policy, language, migration, circulation, and morality.

Although the social sciences have embraced the study of children, the topic of childhood and childrearing in colonial settings is limited to a few studies by scholars whose contributions are relevant for the study of childrearing in colonial Mesoamerica. With her research in Southeast Asia, Ann Stoler (1991, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006 [1995], and 2009) has stated that the existence of colonial states as institutions is driven by sentiments and by a constant anxiety for regulating the colony. She considers these institutions not as homogeneous entities but as those integrated by colonizers who wanted to impose dispositions, and the colonized, whose role was to help the colonizers to establish their power. However, Stoler does not consider the colonial state a monolithic institution, but a heterogeneous one in which colonizers and the colonized participate in the formation of the new state. Stoler (2004) states that such dispositions were only imperial desires for shaping the society that actually produced colonial anxieties, and the existence of such discourses was not an indication of a reality. The ones who at the end fulfilled such desires were the natives who fought in their daily lives for the upbringing of their children.
Bianca Premo (2005) and Gonzalez and Premo (2007) have delved into the situation of children in Latin America. They have found the existence of a reproduction of social systems where the European patriarchal structure changed the social structure of the indigenous groups. Studies on children in colonial Mesoamerica are few. Trexler (1987) and Ellsworth Hamann (2006) were the first historian and anthropologist, respectively, to write about the experience of Christianity in the life of Nahua children. They both discussed the enhanced conflict between indigenous and Spanish beliefs, the later ones embraced by indigenous boys uprooted from their houses, and who became martyrs for destroying their parents’ shrines and confronting their indigenous beliefs. Finally, Robert Haskett (2008) is the first ethnohistorian writing a document about childrearing from the ethnohistorical perspective based on a writing attributed to Motolinia, focusing his research on the practices of childrearing.

This research delves into the representations of childrearing from the beginning of the colonization (circa 1521 C.E. until 1650 C.E.), which is the time when the production of documents written in Nahuatl was significantly reduced, apparently for its fall from being the lingua franca of the region (Lockhart 1999[1992]: 378–468). The space is the Basin of Mexico, where the Mexica, the most powerful prehispanic state of the postclassical period, was established, and later conquered by the Spanish. The textual and philological analysis that contemporary ethnohistorians use as their methodological perspective is also the basis for this dissertation. The origin of this type of investigations is relatively recent. Garibay Kintana (1971a, 1971b) started a tradition of writing the history of those colonized groups of Mesoamerica. Using colonial documents written in indigenous languages, he took on the challenge of trying to understand the life of the

In the 1980s, researchers from North America focused on the study of colonial Mesoamerica in an innovative way. They based their studies on Gibson’s (1964) proposal to understand colonial history as a series of social processes in which the indigenous people were immersed in the construction of the new colonial society and the colonial institutions were being built based on the existing indigenous sociopolitical structure. In other words, the indigenous culture was not swept out as Ricard (1933) proposed; instead, the indigenous culture found mechanisms to survive within the colonial society.

Based on this perspective, James Lockhart proposed a methodology known as the New Philology Studies. This perspective involves a close systematic analysis of the texts written in indigenous languages, in which words are the research tools that would uncover social and cultural changes. According to Lockhart (2007: 6), the analysis of texts would take the scholar to social understandings of the studied society. Terraciano (1998) states that this perspective changes the direction of the ethnohistorical studies. Rather than trying to understand the colonial times through the study of institutions, they propose that it is necessary to understand the cultural processes, the forms of organization, as well as the forms of thought that can be observed in the words used in the indigenous languages. The studies of this school in Mesoamerica and Stoler’s (2007) studies in Southeast Asia coincide in considering that the existence of the text does not imply that its message was carried out; instead, this methodology attaches skepticism to
This school of philology studies has gained knowledge about the life of the Nahuas and other groups in Mesoamerica. For instance, based on a corpus of testaments written in Nahuatl, Cline (1986) studied the local ethnohistory of Culhuacan, a prominent preconquest and colonial Nahua community. Schroeder has studied the socio-political life of the colonial Nahuas through the analysis of Nahuatl annals written by the Nahua church steward Chimalpahin (Schroeder 1991; Anderson and Schroeder 1997; Lockhart, Schroeder and Namala 2006).

Another topic that gives insights into local conflicts is the study of property titles and election records, which reveals the strategies used by the Nahuas for keeping their lands. Research of this type has been done by Stephanie Wood (1984, 2003) in the Toluca Valley, Robert Haskett (1991, 2005) in Cuernavaca, and Rebecca Horn (1997) in Coyoacan. Other scholars of the same school have conducted research in other regions, which required the translation of not only Nahuatl documents, but also of other Mesoamerican languages. For example, Kevin Terraciano (1998, 2001) published a study on the history of Oaxaca, in which he found documents in the colonial Mixtec language. The studies of Matthew Restall (1997, 2001, 2005) in the Yucatan and Robert Hill (1992) in Guatemala involved the study of documents written in variants of the colonial Maya languages.

Scholars have employed the methodology of the New Philological Studies. However, the use of an anthropological perspective, as well as the focus on other types of sources and methodological tools such as textual analysis, has driven other scholars toward different conclusions. For example, Susan Kellogg (1995: 215–219), who used
judicial sources to study the social transformation of Nahua culture as well as gender and
kinship, argued that the transformation in Nahua culture was not as smooth as Lockhart
proposed. Her analysis of the lawsuits demonstrates different ways social relationships
struggle between the indigenous population and the colony.

documents that did not attract any prior scholarly attention: the religious texts produced
by friars and Nahua scholars during the 16th century. Her studies, based on textual and
philological analysis, have brought knowledge into academic discourse about the
religious and moral conflicts between the Nahuas and the friars. In addition, following
Thelma Sullivan’s (1976) translation style, Burkhart keeps the Nahua metaphors that
Lockhart changes for concrete ideas in English. This type of translation has been much
more useful in the exploration of the Nahua culture.

Unlike the limited research on children in the ethnohistory of Mesoamerica, the
focus women’s studies has brought insights into the roles and values of Nahua women.
These studies have also reported the transformation of women’s roles and value
desire for understanding the Other and converting them into the colonial religion, friars
entered into the Nahuas’ intimate spaces. Even though in Spain the patriarchal paradigm
was not the reality that friars imagined it to be,² it was still a model that they transported
to Mesoamerica, which modified the Nahuas’ social structure. The elders’ wisdom
competed with the authority of the Christian God and the balance of power between

² Collidge’s (2001) dissertation on widows or women whose husbands went to the
Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries found that they had great autonomy and were
deciding important matters for raising their children in Spain.
women and men was transformed. Burkhart (1997) describes the different activities that the Mexica mother conducted during her daily life in the company of her child, who was learning the cultural meanings of that intimate space of the household. That female space, which existed in equilibrium with the male’s activities in warfare and in agriculture, was changed leaving indigenous females as possessions of male members of the society. They were diminishing their possibility of becoming owners of properties. Instead, the father gave the properties to his daughter’s husband (see Kellogg 1985, 1995). This situation surely affected parental roles.

Based on those historical and anthropological studies, this dissertation proposes a model of childrearing for the study of colonial Mesoamerica. It requires that childhood, motherhood and fatherhood be considered as social spaces in constant change (James and Prout 2007). The meanings of childhood, motherhood, and fatherhood shape the practices of childrearing, which consists of social practices followed by caregivers (mothers, fathers, or other adults that hold authority toward children’s care) who are cohabiting in specific spaces with the children. The practices are in constant transformation, too. In colonial settings, such transformations of childrearing practices are contextualized by social changes in gender and generational relationships. These social changes were triggered by the impositions of colonizers, justified in terms of the Christian religion and morality that brought contradictions, resistances, and adaptations by the colonized.

There are six important ideas that should be considered for the discussion of each of the topics about childrearing that friars and Nahua scholars wrote in Nahua texts. First, it is important to look at this research with the perspective of gender, class, and ethnicity. Those who wrote the texts were men. The three categories conditioned the way in which
they approached the spaces of discussion about childrearing. In other words, those texts were written by male religious Spaniards, or by males born in New Spain but whose father and/or mother were from Spain; and by male, noble, Christianized Nahuas. Second, the indigenous’ appropriation of the Christian religion, and the resistance for leaving behind their Nahua cultural background brought a reformulation of social values and practices of childrearing.

The third idea is the dichotomist European perspective that permeated all of their thoughts; an idea already discussed by Burkhart (1989) and López Austin (2004), who explain that the colonial texts tended to represent the reality as good or bad, corresponding to the European model. The fourth general idea is the constant interest in introducing the patriarchal system, which brought as a consequence the change of the hierarchical order inside households. I use patriarchy as “colonial practices based on the belief that multiple individuals—male and female, young and old—were naturally subordinate to an authority figure, usually a male, who held superiority based on the hierarchical model of the Western family” (Premo 2005: 9). Nevertheless, I do not assume the existence of patriarchy in colonial Mesoamerica. Instead, this study brings insights into the process of inserting this system in the indigenous household where girls and boys were learning the new hierarchies in their daily lives. The imposition of the European hierarchical model, wanted a social transformation that led toward a change where the social value of mothers and fathers, as well as of girls and boys, was changed.

In this respect, transformations in gender relationships were the most important characteristic in the way friars and Nahua scholars wanted the households to work. For example, Kellogg (1995) reports changes in the strategies for bequeathing properties in
the area of Tenochtitlan. She found that in legal documents such as testaments and lawsuits, indigenous women were losing the right of owning properties. From 1500 to 1700 A.D., she observed a decreasing process on women receiving lands and other properties. Gender relationships were changing in Central Mexico, leaving females a role of dependents toward males. Furthermore, the roles followed by men and women inside the household changed its importance in the society toward an undervalued position, compared to years before when female work inside the household as well as procreation were compared to that of the warriors (Burkhart 1997).

The fifth idea is the discussion of the respect that children and parents must give to the elders. The elders in the Mesoamerican tradition were the most important persons in the hierarchical order of the state and the household. They were wise and children should show respect to them. However, as will be explained later, during the colonial period there was an insistent campaign to diminish the ancestors and, therefore, the elder.

The sixth idea is about the way in which this dissertation approaches children in Mesoamerica. I consider children not as actors but as subjects. Children studies in history started with works related to practices related to children care, and there was an adult-oriented perspective that changed in the following years. Around the 1990s, historians started focusing their studies on children experiences. However, most of the time children did not leave written sources, and such a situation made harder the work for those interested in learning about children experiences (González 2007: 5). Such a situation in any manner melts the intention that historians—and now ethnohistorians—have in reconstructing childhood and childrearing issues. Historians in Latin America have found institutional sources such as records of foundling homes, apprenticeship conventions, and
Christian manuals as rich sources of data where they can learn about children issues (González 2007). For this dissertation, children are also studied through textual and pictorial documents from the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is important to emphasize the classification of children for this dissertation. The original idea was to use sexuality as the main difference between the stages of children. However, texts do not give precise information about it. Actually, I found an emphasis in the ideological and practical considerations related to the caregiving of babies and on the chores children should learn according to their gender. Thus, I classify Mesoamerican children into two groups: babies who need assistance from others at all times; and children who can execute social roles inside and outside their households. The characteristic that makes them different is the grade of dependence for performing activities by themselves.

Categories of gender, religion, morality, political hierarchies inside households, respect for the elders, and the way in which friars and scholars envisioned children are the topics of discussions in the Nahuatl discourses that affected childrearing in some way. The six analytical approaches guide the discussions of children in the mother’s womb, children as infants, and children who were already capable of performing specific gendered tasks. Those topics structure the following chapters of this research.

The dissertation is organized in five chapters. The first chapter is a discussion about the role Nahuas had in writing materials about childrearing and their formation as helpers of the friars, where they found a place to register their conflicting identities that went between the Spanish colonial intentions and their indigenous culture. Such discussion involves considerations about how the Nahua scholars lived their childhoods.
in the frontier between the indigenous culture and the Spanish colonial dispositions. Colonial ethnographies, as well as ecclesiastic and civil documents written in Nahuatl by male Nahua scholars, mostly under the supervision of the Christian friars, are used as a window to observe the life of Nahua scholars as writers. This chapter contextualizes those mechanisms with which friars and Nahua scholars showed their desires for building an indigenous Christianized colonial society starting with the youngest children. It explains the mechanisms that friars and Nahua scholars used to describe and to try to affect the existence of girls and boys in the early colonial world.

Chapter two is a discussion about the Nahua social network created for raising the children based on wills and ethnographic material. It also reports changes in the values that friars and Nahua scholars wanted to give to parents, permeated by the patriarchal European understanding of social organization. It shows the tendency toward the empowerment of fathers as the authority inside the households—fathers who at the same time became colonial instruments of the ecclesiastic power.

The third chapter is a discussion of babyhood and the practices of childbearing and baby care. It describes the meaning of babies according to their gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as the intentions the Christian and Nahua writers had in directing the practices of care that babies needed. It includes a discussion on the discourses written about the smallest of all the children in matters of sentiments and practices related to the best way to take care of them whether the babies were alive or dead.

The ethnographic and ecclesiastic sources show that friars admired the rigorous discipline Nahua parents practiced with their children. Thus, based on the moral and religiosity that Burkhart (1989) and López Austin (2004) delve in their researches,
Chapter four discusses the Nahuatl terms to refer to children and the colonial appropriation of Nahua practices for administering discipline and punishment to girls and boys.

In the last chapter, the reader can find the general conclusions explaining that even though the voices of the colonial Nahua children are lost, the study of childrearing as a social practice in a colonial setting provides a very important understanding of the social and cultural constructions of the actors involved in the practices of childrearing. Studies such as this dissertation gives the opportunity to understand the complex processes of colonization occurred in Mesoamerica during the first part of the colonial times.

With this research, I am bringing an element most of the time forgotten by the social studies, which are girls and boys in colonial Mesoamerica. I truly want to contribute to the reconstruction of colonial settings where children are not taken for granted, and this dissertation is a good start.
Chapter 1

Nahua Children as Colonial Projects: The Representation of Childrearing in Early Nahua Colonial Discourses

Colonial studies have shown that childrearing practices are an area where economic and national issues are contested; the Mesoamerican region was not an exception. During early colonial times, Nahuas from Central Mexico realized that Spaniards were interested in learning about and transforming even the most intimate aspects of their lives, including childrearing. In the process, friars and Nahuas negotiated how a girl or a boy must be raised and what roles mothers and fathers should perform inside their households. The ethnographic, ecclesiastic, and civil documents written in Nahuatl are the window through which we may learn about this colonial negotiation. Such texts were the result of Nahuas who were raised by the friars at the beginning of the colony. Those indigenous children became the scholars who reconstructed their identities while living in the borderland of the Spanish and the Mesoamerican cultures. Spanish children raised in the same territory had a similar experience to the indigenous, but having a different ethnic background, their history was different. This chapter discusses the role of mainly Mesoamerican children in colonial New Spain. To fulfill this objective, the chapter is organized in three sections. The first part presents the Mesoamerican child as the subject of study. The second part is about the production of writings and paintings during the adulthood of those children. In the third part are the conclusions of the chapter.
1. The Mesoamerican Child as the Subject of Study

To begin the analysis of Mesoamerican childrearing, it is useful to start with an engraving placed in a book written by friar Diego Valadés (1579), entitled *Rhetorica Christiana*. Valadés’s interest was to inform Europe about the labor of evangelization that friars were performing in New Spain. In the book, he included an engraving of a church patio representing the different activities friars performed with the indigenous population (see Illustration 1). In this depiction, children are shown around the baptismal font, where friars and indigenous males and females are participating in the administration of baptism of their babies who are carried by the indigenous women.

There is more to observe in the representation. At the lower right side, the ritual of marriage includes little bodies dressed in tunics, similar to the clothing of the friars. These children are helping the priest to perform the Christian ritual of marriage. At the upper right side, there is a friar teaching a group of indigenous people about the creation of the world based on the Bible’s narrative. This group is divided by gender. While among the men there are no children, women are represented carrying babies, and others have little ones at their side. Finally, at the upper corners, there are two places where children are depicted taking classes with a friar. The two groups of children are also divided by gender, a fact known by the Latin words *pueri* and *puelle*, written in the upper part, which mean “boys” and “girls,” respectively.

The children’s inclusion in the different spaces of this engraving emphasizes the importance friars and Nahuas gave to the indigenous children in the colonial society. This example traces the social relevance that the anonymous artist of the engraving and the friars gave to the younger generations. These friars were recreating the environment they
used to inhabit in New Spain, and the emphasis of the activities gave high importance to
the gender roles they expected to be performed by every subject in the engraving, and
their role for caring for children was registered and enhanced.

The study of childrearing involves the necessity for questioning who was a child
in colonial Mesoamerica. Academics have tried to answer this question with a critical
perspective. Ariès (1962) proposed to understand childhood as a cultural construction.
What is now a consensus among historians, anthropologists, and sociologists is that the
concept of a child does not fit within a homogeneous definition. Instead, children and
childhoods are complex perspectives linked with historical and cultural contexts
(González 2007: 2).

Along with the idea of childhoods, comes the concept of childrearing. Even
though it is a poorly explored field in the ethnohistory of Mesoamerica, historians,
sociologists, and anthropologists have investigated such topics in other areas and epochs.
In contexts different than Mesoamerica, those studies have shown that concepts of
families—for example, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood—are socially and
culturally constructed (see, for example, the works of Cunningham 2005; Katz Rothman
social scientists to understand children not only as subjects for the interest of biological
reproduction or psychological consideration, but as “subjects inside complex social
structures” (5).
During recent years, there has been a tendency to understand children as social actors, not as subjects; however, for the ethnohistorical perspective used to develop the research, there is a necessity to understand children as subjects because there were other individuals who were studying boys or girls of different ages. Additionally, as aforementioned in the introduction, childrearing is an analytical departure to understand their representations. Stoler (2001, 2002, 2004, 2006) and McElhinni (2005) take childrearing as a space of contestation, where definitions of nation and economy are discussed. Following this logic, Stoler proposes that studies of intimacy, as well as of interventions of women and children’s bodies, have been ways in which the colonies have driven their politics. To add more context to childrearing, it is necessary to point out that colonial states were not only interested in mothers and children, but also fathers. As will be explained in chapters two and four, they were all considered potential colonial instruments to change the dispositions of the most elemental social organization within the households.

Latin American and Hispanic historians have produced a compilation of works about children during colonial times. Through them, we can learn about the cases of child slavery in Brazil (Kuznezof 2007), child migration and labor in Lima (Vergara 2007), orphans in Seville and in Havana (Tikoff 2007; González 2007), aristocratic girls in Chile (Rojas Flores 2007), and the circulation of children in Mexico (Shelton 2007). López Austin (2004) made the first contributions to the study of Mesoamerican childhood with his book Cuerpo Humano e Ideología (Human Body and Ideology). Burkhart (1997) has reconstructed indigenous women raising their children within the prehispanic Nahua household, and has made a deeper contribution to the study of Nahua children in colonial
times (Burkhart 1989). Richard Trexler (1987), Ellsworth Hamman (2006), and Robert Haskett (2007) have explored indigenous children based on the chronicles from the friars Motolinia, Mendieta, and Torquemada. They are the pioneers in studying children in Mesoamerica. Their work is useful as a base to build more knowledge, and it is in the different texts produced by friars and Nahuas during the early colonial times where we can learn more about childrearing. Many of those documents are very well known by the community of ethnohistorians specializing in the region. The representations made of texts or images suggest that both Spaniards and the Nahua writers considered boys and girls part of the social reconfiguration of the colony.

In Mesoamerica, López Austin has proposed different stages in the life of the indigenous people. Based on the study of sources such as Memoriales con Escolios, the Mendoza, the Matritense, and the Florentine codices, as well as the Primeros Memoriales and Molina’s dictionary (2004), López Austin (2004: 319–320) considers a difference in the conception of human life in Mesoamerica and is aware of the problems of using colonial sources for constructing periods. Specifically, comparing the Florentine Codex with the Primeros Memoriales, compiled by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, he finds that the friar does not use the dichotomist model of the good and the bad in the first text. Differently, in Book X of the Florentine Codex, the dichotomist perspective of the good and the bad drives the explanation of the types of indigenous persons. He finds that Robertson’s proposal that links the dichotomist interpretation to a medieval model coined by Bartholomeus Glanville, who divided human attributes into good and bad categories, is appropriate to understand the logic of the reports on life stages gathered in colonial Mesoamerica. He finds contradictions in the explanations of Nahuatl concepts. For
example, while Motolinia describes *tlapalihui* as a young male of marriageable age, for Molina it is the young man who has already married a woman. Another problem he identifies is the lack of specification about gender in the terminology found in the sources. The terms do not differentiate gender until *adolescence.* Before that time, the discourses only use *cihuatl* or *oquichtl* occasionally to specify gender (López Austin 2004: 319–321).

The typology presented by López Austin (2004: 322) considers five stages of childhood before children enter into the stage of youth. The meaning of each of the words will be explained in the chapters written specifically for each age. For now, it is enough to mention them. During the time when they are inside the mother’s womb (first stage) they are called *piltzintli itic ca.* As babies who are breastfed (second stage), they are called *oc chichi pilontli* or *oc chichi piltzintli.* When the child still cannot speak (third stage), they are called *conealacton, conechichipil, xoctic, conechichipilli, oc tototl, oc atl,* and *conetontli.* If they are less than 6 years old (fourth stage), they are called *conetl, coneptil,* and *pipil.* And if they are more than 6 years old (fifth stage), they are called *piltzintli* and *pilotl.* The author attributes *adolescence* as a stage separated from childhood. As already mentioned, it is the stage during which they are most clearly differentiated by their gender. In the case of the boys, they are called *telpuchtontli,* *telpocapiltontli,* *telpocaconetontli,* *oquichpiltzintli,* *telputzintli,* *telpocaton,* *oquichpilontli,* and *telpocaconetl.* In the case of the young women, they are called *ichpuchtontli,* *ichpuchpiltontli,* *ichpuchcaconetontli,* *cihuapiltzintli,* *ichpuchtzintli,* and *ichpuchpiltzintli.*

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3 There is no such concept in colonial Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, it is used by López Austin (2004) to refer to the age of sexual changes.
López Austin (2004: 324) explains that among the Nahuas, childhood was conceived as the age in which the individual was exposed to enormous natural and supernatural danger. At the same time, they were in a period of purity that made them capable to communicate with the Mexican gods. Children were also in the process of learning, and later such knowledge would lead them to their incorporation into the economic activities of their households and their community. Further, because children were so weak, adults should protect them with ceremonies using religious and magical resources that incorporated water or fire, to obtain the kindness of their gods so the children could survive.

In this respect, Burkhart (1989) explains that indigenous ideology considered the existence of good and bad acts, but they were used for pursuing equilibrium in life: “[L]ife is a process of give and take: in return for sustenance, joy, and children one must accept gradual contamination and disintegration; a careful lifestyle slows the process” (131). This perspective contradicted the European ideology, which emphasized a dichotomist religious morality. The encounter of both cultures implied the intertwining of the European and the Nahua moral meanings. In this respect, Burkhart (1989: 28) states,

Basic to Christian Morality was the concept of sin, which in turn was predicated on the dichotomy between good and evil, a force personified in the figure of the Devil. These concepts were alien to the Nahua mind, but the friars had no choice but to grasp the closest parallels they could find and set to work. For sin they substituted *tlatlacolli*; the acts classified as *tlatlacolli* were somewhat different under Christianity, but the nature of “sin” itself was made continuous with native thought. For the good-evil dichotomy they substituted various expressions of the Mesoamerican dialectic of order and chaos, structure and antistructure. They elevated a category of indigenous sorcerer the role of God’s Adversary.
Thus, native concepts were carried over into the most fundamental aspects of Christian moral teaching.

The interest in educating children was lead by this colonial understanding of morality. The shaping of Nahua girls’ and boys’ personalities surely was a series of complex processes. In this context, the codes of morality were in constant reconstruction and the rearing of children was contextualized in a moment of uncertainty.

2. From Nahua Children to Writers: Children Identities and the Production of Colonial Texts

This section is a discussion of the Nahuatl sources that contains information about childrearing based on the life experience of those who were instructed in the Spanish institutions created to educate the boys from the Nahua nobility. Although there is little information about this topic, it is an important exercise to understand the origin of the sources for the study of childrearing.

Nahua children who grew up during colonial time experienced not only the economic and political changes in Central Mexico, but they also dwelled within a time when languages, knowledge, and customs were reorganized and resignified; they were the ones who absorbed such changes. Children of the Nahua nobility of central Mexico had a peculiar experience because they learned cultural codes that were difficult to internalize for the older indigenous population. This situation allocated the noble Nahua boys as bridges between Spaniards and Nahuas. Their early age allowed them not only to learn just two languages or two cultures, but also three cultural models in constant transformation since they also had an important background in classical antiquity (see
Osorio Romero 1990: XI–LXVIII). It certainly was not an easy journey; their lives were involved in a problematic regional reconfiguration that contextualized the setting of their identities, social positions, and the intergenerational relationships with their elders who still believed in the Mesoamerican deities.

The friars saw a possibility of creating educational institutions for instructing the indigenous children in the arts and the humanistic knowledge consolidated in Europe (Bataillon 2007: 1–22). For the friars, the project of educating noble boys was necessary to create instruments that would introduce the Christian religion through the same indigenous children. On 6 January 1536, the College of the Holy Cross was created in the town of Tlatelolco. Besides this institution, other convents opened schools to teach boys, which is the case of the Tiripetio Convent, located in current Michoacan, where Agustinians created a school for Tarascan indigenous to learn the arts of stonework and ironwork (Kobayashi 2007). In the Florentine Codex, Sahagún narrates the time in which the friars invite noble Nahuas to give up their boys so they could receive education at the College of the Holy Cross. He writes that some Nahuas were scared and decided to send other children, generally offspring of the macehuales—the poor people who worked and lived in the regions the nobles governed.

There is little known about the life of the Nahua scholars who started their education at the college from a very early age. Nevertheless, the result of the first generations as students is present in the Nahuatl literature they wrote under the vigilance of friars. Information found in Friar Juan Bautista’s Sermonario (1606: Prologue) registered some of the names of the outstanding children educated by the friars. In some cases, there are records about the place where the Nahua scholars were born. As an
example, it is known that some of the scholars were originally from Azcapotzalco; Don Antonio Valeriano, who was distinguished for his elegant speaking was one of them. Friar Bautista compared his talent with the greatest rhetoricians from the Roman times. Valeriano became Bautista’s teacher on the etymology and meanings of Nahuatl terms. Another very important scholar who was born in Azcapotzalco was Francisco Baptista de Contreras. This Nahua scholar, who became governor of Xochimilco, helped friar Bautista to write two books: the *Contemptus Mundi* and the *Libro de las Vanidades del Mundo*. Pedro de Gante was another Nahuatlato from Azcapotzalco who translated several texts, especially on the lives of the saints. Friar Bautista reported that Don Juan Berardo, who was originally from Huexotzingo, and Esteban Bravo from San Diego Tlailotlacan, Tezcoco helped him to write his Sermonario.

Friar Bautista remembers another outstanding Nahua scholar educated at the College. Three of the earliest children instructed at the Holy Cross College, who wrote books in which the friars appeared as authors, were Hernando de Rivas, Diego Adriano, and Agustin de la Fuente. After living his childhood inside the College, Hernando de Rivas taught Nahuatl to friars and wrote and translated Spanish texts into his mother tongue. He helped Friar Alonso de Molina write the outstanding *Arte y Vocabulario Mexicano* and priest Juan de Gaona write the *Diálogos de la Paz y Tranquilidad del Alma*. Hernando helped Bautista write the *Vocabulario Ecclesiástico*, *La Vida de los Santos*, and *La Exposición del Decálogo*, among other writings. Diego Adriano was an excellent translator from Latin to Nahuatl; Bautista said he was so good that he did not make any writing mistakes. Agustin de la Fuente became a teacher at the Holy Cross College. This important Nahuatlato worked with some of the most outstanding friars who
belonged to different ecclesiastic orders. For example, he worked with Franciscan friars Juan Bautista and Bernardino de Sahagún, but also with friars who belonged to other religious orders, such as Augustinian friars Juan de Mijangos and Pedro de Oros.

The great performance reached by the Nahua boys was a continuation of the strict education noble Nahuas received in the calmecac before the conquest. The importance on apprehending the most proper way of speaking with eloquence was highly valuated by the Nahua society. In this respect, referring to the learning of the ancient speeches, called huehuetlatolli, Sullivan (1974: 84) states,

> The importance of teaching a child to speak properly and to greet people properly extended beyond the social amenities normally associated with good breeding, refinement, and civility [...] in the child who learned to speak with eloquence, to turn a mellifluous phrase, were the seeds of the future orator who would be made to learn the discourses of the great orators in the past.

Her statement links the high performance of the Nahua boys with the one found during the first years of the colony. The regimen created by this Mesoamerican group was one in which the education of the Nahuas relied upon the friars who created schools.

Although most of the Nahuas who assisted the friars were male Nahuas, there were also cases of Spanish children who were raised in New Spain, and who learned the culture and language of the Nahuas from a very early age. That is the case of Friar Juan de Mijangos, who was raised in Oaxaca, where he had contact with the Nahuatl language. This friar became one of the greatest lenguas from the golden epoch who wrote books in Nahuatl with great talent. Another friar who had a similar history was Alonso de Molina, the author of one of the most important Nahuatl-Spanish dictionaries. In the prologue of
his Sermonario, Bautista writes a brief history of this friar. He explains that Molina was a
fructuous example of the compromise that a Spanish child could develop in a colony, as
well as the successful way friars could work as caregivers. This boy came from Spain
with his parents and was exposed to the Nahuatl language and culture. The description of
his arrival says that he acquired the indigenous language and culture through his contact
with the “Indian children.” Friars offered care to the child because they saw the potential
for him to meld with the Nahua society while driving the conversion of Nahuas.4

Thus, Nahua and Spanish men who lived their childhoods in Mesoamerica had
social advantages, especially in central Mexico. They were able to live along the
borderland of two cultural systems, where they adopted a mimetic personality to enter the
world of the colonized and the colonizers. Nevertheless, the ethnic background of the
Nahua scholars and the Spanish people allowed them to enter into the social groups to
different degrees. The Spanish children who were educated near the indigenous groups
would become friars, or had the opportunity of occupying political charges. It was not the
same case for the Nahua scholars; although they could become directors of the College of
the Holy Cross and became teachers of the friars, they did not print their names as

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4 “Vino de España el Padre fray Alonso de Molina con sus Padres, niño de muy tierna
edad, luego al principio de la Conquista de la Nueva España, y con la comunicación de
los otros niños indíceitos, aprendió en muy breue tiempo la lengua Mexicana, como si le
fuera Natural. Y teniendo los primeros doze Religiosos primeros noticia del niño Alonso,
pidieronle a sus padres (que era gente honrada y noble) para tenerle consigo, y que les
fuese interprete en la doctrina delos Indios” (Bautista 1606: Prologue).
Translation to English:
Friar Alonso de Molina came from Spain with his parents. He came at an early age. At
the beginning of the conquest of New Spain, and with the communication he had with
other little Indian children, he learned in a short time the Mexican language, as if it was
his natural language. When the 12 friars learned about the child Alonso, asked his parents
(who were honored and noble people) to have him with them so he could be interpreter
for indoctrinating the Indians (My translation).
authors of the books, and they did not become friars. Although they were very esteemed by the friars, their ethnic background was an impediment for occupying spaces of power. Nevertheless, they found a place where it was possible to perform their own agenda. Those children became important in the indigenous colonial structure. Aside from their contribution to the work of the friars, they became governors of their indigenous communities, which were very prestigious and powerful social positions, although it did not allow them to jump into the Spanish colonial structures of power. Such life was more important for them than becoming friars (even though it was prohibited by their colonized ethnic background), because they had the opportunity to become fathers and have a marital life, properties, and money, all which were very appreciated roles in Mesoamerican society.

One of the results of the education at the College of the Holy Cross was the production of translations of Latin texts into the Nahuatl language. Nahua scholars and friars produced texts with diverse intentions. They wrote documents to report activities of the indigenous groups, for conversion, or to execute colonial dispositions such as the documentation of baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Those writings were the result of the friars’ education of Nahua boys.

The indigenous scholars introduced in this section were important contributors who gave the texts their style and content. They, along with the friars, created a corpus of colonial masculine discourses focused on learning about and then transforming the way in which Nahuas raised their children. Such documents are also evidence of the introduction of the patriarchal authority that was the norm for the friars, but not for the Nahuas, at least at the beginning of the colony.
Thus, the representations of children in pictures or texts are important remnants that delve into parts of the complex processes of colonialism. Children depicted in the diverse Nahua documents such as sermons, ethnographies, codices, plays, testaments, and Christian doctrines, among others, suggest colonial intentions for transforming even the most “mundane” sociocultural practices that take place within the households; for instance, childrearing.

The corpus of the Nahuatl documents is categorized into three groups. The first category is the ethnographic material, such as the Florentine and the Mendoza codices, as well as Motolinía’s *Memoriales*, Mendieta’s *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, or Torquemada’s *Monarquía Indiana*. The desire and necessity of learning about the Other drove the friars to write or to encourage Nahua scholars to write about customs, history, traditions, beliefs, moral codes, and the language of the indigenous. This literature draws upon images of the colonized indigenous, where descriptions of the cultural behaviors and mechanisms related to the growing of children can be found.

The second group, which is the most numerous, is the ecclesiastic literature. There are sermons, Christian doctrines, and guides for confession translated into Nahuatl by Nahua scholars. Consequently, they became adaptations to the indigenous culture, at the same time that they intertwine with the Christian indoctrination. The campaign for changing the system of beliefs and the practices originated by the Mesoamerican religion motivated the friars to set forth a corpus of doctrinal literature based on European models, originally written mostly in Latin, but which could also be found in Spanish. Those texts were written or at least revised by those Nahuas who once were children displaced from their parents’ home in order to be educated by the friars.
The third group is composed of civil documents such as testaments, baptismal records, and censuses. Those are the documents most related to the daily life of the Nahuas. The alphabetic writing was rapidly adopted by some indigenous who incorporated European models for registering dispositions from the Nahuas. Every altepetl adopted the structure of cabildo, which should have a literate man called scribe who had the role of notary (Burkhart, personal communication 2011; Lockhart 1999).

The existence of these documents aligns with the childrearing processes that occurred in the territories where the friars were participating in the culture. Friars decided to raise predominantly noble Nahua boys, who later became the foremost actors responsible for the production of ecclesiastic documents written in Nahuatl. Those circumstances lead to the creation of a corpus of documents from males of noble lineage. Those personages also finished the documents as ordered by the friars in an amalgam that intertwined the Christian religion and the Nahua culture received by their parents and other caregivers during the early years of their childhoods.

2.1 Registering Childrearing in Rituals and Daily Life

From the contact with the indigenous population and the rearing of some children in their own school, friars produced some of the most important ethnographic materials: chronicles and ethnographies. In 1533, the president of the Audiencia, Sebastian Ramirez de Fuenleal, encouraged Friar Andrés de Olmos to write a letter about the life of the Aztecs (Baudot 1983). However, Franciscan friars, the first missionaries that arrived to New Spain, did not need inspiration from the president of the Audiencia to start building a body of texts describing the life of the Nahuas. Actually, it was a necessity for them due
to their objective of evangelizing the indigenous population. This interest was based in part on their 16th century eschatological beliefs that caused them to worry that the earth would come to an end. Thus, they found that the indigenous had an ascetic and pious way of living; they only needed to change the god to worship. Friars started observing the way in which people lived in the conquered territories so they could indoctrinate the Mesoamerican groups. After Olmos, chronicles written by friars Motolinia (1969), Gerónimo de Mendieta (1945b), Juan de Torquemada (1986), and Diego Durán (1967) followed; in all of them, some passage of childrearing and childhood were depicted.

Their descriptions do not compare to the polished *Florentine Codex*, an ethnographic work that nowadays is considered an encyclopedic study of the Nahua culture. Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1953–1982) and the Nahua students from Tlatelolco compiled the Codex. Scattered through the 12 volumes of that work are drawings and texts depicting mothers, fathers, and children in texts and illustrations.

![Illustration 2. Babies in their crib while men are offering pulque to women during a celebration from their calendar (Florentine Codex 1979).](image)

Documents such as the Florentine Codex are complex due to the existence of a double dialog. While in the first one the descriptions speak about a great culture, in the second one the Spanish Christian prejudices are voiced with repetitive alarm about the
customs of the indigenous. The text convened three actors: a group of mainly Nahua scholars who belong to the colonial indigenous-Christian culture; a friar, who admired the Nahuas, but still expressed repugnancy toward their cultural practices; and the older people, who provided information and whom the writers sometimes quoted. In the different ethnographies, children and caregivers are represented during the monthly celebrations of their calendar that coincide with the celebrations depicted in the codices. They are also found in descriptions of how friars ask the indigenous nobility to give their children up to bring them into the Christian doctrine (Mendieta 1945b: 55–57; Torquemada 1986c: 23–25). These texts give a description of the methods friars used to educate those noble indigenous boys and the difficulties they encountered because of the language barrier. However, they also report how the children accepted conversion and how they confronted the elders (Mendieta 1945b: 59–65; Torquemada 1986c: 28–35).

The texts report Tlaxcalan children killing a priest who did not convert into Christianity, as well as children martyred by their fathers because of their “idolatry and drunkenness,” or because of their interest in converting the indigenous population (Mendieta 1945b: 78–90; Torquemada 1986c: 82–101). The repetition of information in those three ethnographies is not a coincidence. Actually, Friars Mendieta and Torquemada wrote their ethnographies using Motolinia’s ethnography, adapting the texts to their own interests.

The friars’ need to learn about the culture of the conquered drove them not only to represent the culture through observations and interviews, but also to record discourses where we can find information about childrearing. Those were called huehuetlatolli. Translated into English as “the ancient word” or “the word of the elders,” those were
beautiful oral discourses full of metaphors used by the Nahua elite for the celebration of
different rituals of passage. Some aspects of childrearing discussed in those texts are the
roles and moral guidelines that a Nahua girl or a boy must know.

There are different versions of *huehuetlatolli*. Friar Andrés de Olmos collected the
oldest version in 1530. Based on Olmos’s version, Friar Juan Bautista published his book
of *huehuetlatolli* in 1600. In Book VI of the *Florentine Codex*, there is another version
collected in the 1540s. Another version exists from around the 1520s (Sullivan 1974). Motolinia and Medieta inserted in their ethnographies a version in Spanish. Finally, there
is an additional series of this type of discourses in the Bancroft dialogues (Karttunen and
Lockhart 1987), which were recorded in the 17th century. Those discourses documented
different admonitions associated with childrearing and childhood. For example, they
show the way in which parents ask the children to behave using elegant expressions to
address their offspring. They also offer detailed descriptions of their roles according to
gender and how adults expected their children to behave according to age, which
correspond to the illustrations depicted in Codex Mendoza.

Another ethnographic source are the dictionaries. In their search for knowing the
other, friars understood the necessity of learning the native languages. In that endeavor,
friars, with the support of Nahua, wrote Nahuatl or Nahuatl-Spanish dictionaries in
alphabetical order. Friar Alonso de Molina wrote the most finished dictionary during the
16th century, which was finished in two stages. Molina finished his version of Spanish to
Nahuatl in 1555, and the completed version that also has Nahuatl to Spanish was
published in 1571. As mentioned before, Molina grew up in close contact to the Nahua
inhabitants. His experiences as a child gave him the opportunity to learn both languages.
and better understand the culture of the indigenous population. Nowadays, scholars who specialize in the Nahuatl culture consider this dictionary the best source to understand the meanings of Nahuatl words of the 16th century. There is another important dictionary written by Rémi Siméon in 1885 that created a larger compilation of entries.

Dictionaries include different entries about childrearing that help to understand the texts written in Nahuatl language, or the words themselves allow the scholar to learn about the world that Nahuas had related to an activity. Even though the entries are a mere list of Nahuatl words, the explanation of the meaning of each one, as well as finding those words in other sources, provide important information to understand the world of the caregivers and the children. The verbs *huapaha* and *izcalitia* (both words that mean to raise a child) and derived words from those verbs are examples of the entries that speak to the existence of ideological constructions of childrearing, and of the interest friars had to learn about it.

Friars made use not only of the alphabetic written word, but also of the Mesoamerican writing developed by the prehispanic cultures to depict their history, religious rituals, and calendars. This type is called the *Early Colonial Pictorial Documents*. Mesoamericans had their own way to record information. They had *codices* (singular: *codex*), which were pictographic documents written on native materials such as bark, deerskin, or maguey. Most of the time, codices were historical records or were used for rituals according to the Nahua religious calendar of 260 days. Codices contained information about a newborn’s fortune and the sacrifices of children that Nahuas offered to gods during various festivities of their calendar, among other information. During the conquest, many codices were destroyed. However, this genre remained in the way
Nahuas printed their ideas. The depiction of children is not very clear in this type of document. There are small figures that would depict children. However, there is no way to confirm whether it was a child or a figurine. For example, Codex Borbonicus, which is a very early colonial pictorial document, has a drawing of a woman who goes toward the temple carrying on her back a small cloaked figure that might be a child, but in that ritualistic context it could also be an idol (see Illustration 3).

![Illustration 3. Extract of the Borbonicus Codex with a representation of a woman carrying a child.](image)

A very illustrative pictorial document is the Codex Mendoza. Artistically painted, this codex contains detailed depictions of the ways Nahuas raised their children, including the activities boys and girls had to learn and the punishments caregivers should administer in case the children did not perform their duties (see Illustration 4). Documents such as this one are usually accompanied with explanations of the drawings in Spanish. Since those documents were written during the early period, the mixture of colonial and prehispanic styles is noticeable where the representations show an interrelation between adult and child according to gender.
In Illustration 4, we can see clearly the intention of the author for depicting punishments administered by both genders to girls and boys respectively. However, in the study of this type of source, it is necessary to consider the existence of three actors. One is the friar who asked to depict the ways in which children were raised. The other belongs to the Nahua scholars who may be representing their culture as a way to show their civilization as a “good” and “developed” culture before the colonizers who appreciated the way of raising children. The third one is the intended audience friars and Nahua scholars wanted to reach through their writing or painting.

2.2 Christian-Nahuatl Texts for Raising Children

The friars were so concerned about learning issues related to childrearing that they went beyond merely gathering and writing about the life of the Nahuas or recording beautiful discourses. In order to fulfill their plans of evangelization, they produced ecclesiastic documents in the same formats used in Spain, but written in Nahuatl. Friars and Nahua scholars incorporated the ancestral childrearing practices at the same time that they declared their disagreement with the ancestral religious beliefs (Trexler 1987;
Some of the sources that friars and Nahua scholars wrote were sermons. Those were religious speeches designed to teach the Christian doctrine to Nahuatl speakers. The texts were supposed to be read during a specific part of mass. The earliest sermons are from Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, originally written during the 1540s, followed by the sermons of friar Juan de la Anunciación (1577) and Alonso de Escalona (1530s). Juan de Mijangos, Martín de León (1611), and Juan Bautista (1606) also wrote sermons. In the case of those written by a Nahua scholar under the supervision of Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1563), it is usual to find passages in which the friar dictates the behaviors that fathers and mothers should follow. In the sermons, indigenous people are always addressed as children.
This type of text is frequently found in the doctrinal literature (Trexler 1987; Burkhart 1989; Premo 2005). The sermons invite Nahua parents to educate their children in a specific way. They are encouraged to teach their children to avoid oversleeping, to wash their faces and dress themselves up, to comb their hair, to go to church to hear mass and pray, and to work. In the sermons, friars also ask parents to educate their children in the Christian religion by teaching them specific prayers and knowledge about moral behaviors coined in the Ten Commandments. These lessons would describe Jesus’ childhood, obliging them to disagree with what the elders said about prehispanic beliefs, and teaching them the importance of baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage, and extreme unction. The friars instructed the indigenous about the different rituals of passage Christians must follow during their life. In general, those passages delve into a great number of religious doctrines that present the rules mothers and fathers must follow to raise their boys and girls. In general, it is in the sermons where Nahua scholars adapted the friars’ discourses with local cultural patterns. The result is a mixture full of cultural contradictions on childrearing practices and representations of childhood.

The confessionary and the guides for confession, which are texts that describe the religious activities a Christian must know and practice, form another group of ecclesiastic documents. Friar Alonso de Molina’s *Confessionary* is from 1565, and Bartolomé de Alva’s dates from 1634. Friar Juan Bautista’s guide for confession is from 1599. In these texts there are representations of children. For instance, Molina’s *Confessionary* describes the way in which people must perform a baptism (a topic that will be discussed in chapter three), and he exemplifies the one administered to infants. Some of the illustrations of this *Confessionario* are representations of the Virgin Mary and Jesus as a
Bautista’s guide for confession presents a priest asking the Nahua whether he killed his son because he was oversleeping and a priest asking a Nahua man if he hit his wife and caused her miscarriage. The imagination of Nahua scholars and friars, which may be based on their personal and collective reality, made them represent situations that today can speak to the different interrelation between parents and children in the colonial epoch.

Another corpus of documents are the Christian Doctrines that were mainly printed books with Christian and moral content and were written only in Nahuatl, or in Nahuatl and Spanish. This type of document started with the Dominican friars, who published the first version in Nahuatl and Spanish in 1548. Later, friar Pedro de Gante published his Doctrine in 1553. Subsequently, Domingo de la Anunciación published his Doctrine in 1565, and in 1575 friar Juan de la Anunciación published another one.

Between 1559 and 1561, a Nahua scholar wrote for Friar Bernardino de Sahagún the *Apéndice a la Postilla*; in 1569, there was a revision of the text. In 1579, the document was written together with another document called *Adiciones*. However, the document was never published (Anderson 1993: XIII, XIV). This document is unique because of its description of the practices of childrearing that friars wanted the children and parents to adopt. Such practices coincide with the information registered in the *huehuetlatolli* included in Book VI of the *Florentine Codex*.

The *Apéndice a la Postilla* is proof of the acceptance of such practices for raising children. The document is also an important source to learn about the colonial intention of creating a generational struggle in beliefs (not in moral practices), because it declares
that the ancestral practices of the elders were a product of the devil. The incorporation of practices and moral values, but the rejection of prehispanic religious beliefs is visible in the *Apéndice a la Postilla*, and is part of the documents that speak about the politics toward the constitution of a new Nahua society where children were important subjects for the strategies of colonization.

Excellent sources of information are plays. This interesting genre has been translated and studied by Mexican and North American scholars (Horcasitas 1974; Sell and Burkhart 2004, 2009; Sell, Burkhart, and Poole 2006; and Sell, Burkhart, and Wright 2008). Plays are a genre that Nahua scholars and friars used for teaching morality and religion. Nowadays, plays are a rich source of information on childrearing because we can find different topics related to the issue, where they represent mothers, fathers, other caregivers, and children. As an example, there is a play in which a woman dies because she neglected to have children. Others represent passages of the Bible, such as in the play translated by Sell and Burkhart (2004) and analyzed by Diaz Balsera (2004), in which Abraham offers his only child to God in sacrifice. Another example is the play already translated and published by Burkhart (1996), which dramatizes the moment in which Jesus says goodbye to his mother before his crucifixion. The author analyzes the versions in Nahuatl and in Spanish, concluding that the representation of the mother and the son is different. While the Spanish version represents a submissive mother and an authoritative son, the Nahuatl play depicts a mother with power and a humble son.
2.3 Legal Nahuatl Sources Depicting Childrearing Practices

Religious and ethnographic documents do not give researchers direct access to the voices of the colonized population that faced the daily challenge of raising the colonial Nahua children in a time of constant social changes. However, even though Nahuas did not produce personal letters, there are documents where we can “read” their voices indirectly because a literate Nahua wrote down their intentions and declarations. Those documents are lawsuits, censuses, primordial titles, testaments, decrees, petitions, records, complaints, and baptismal and marriage records. Those are the only documents that let scholars directly into the lives of those who gave accounts of them with the descriptions of households, lists of names, and the description of personal conflicts, some while on the verge of death.

For example, the Nahuatl censuses are documents that, different than today, are written in a narrative style that reports a unique indigenous viewpoint. Such documents contain basic household information about their structure, membership, land holding, and tribute obligations. In short, those documents give information on household structure and on broader social organizations (Cline, 2007).

The data on baptized individuals also provides information, which was discussed by the same author (Cline 1993, 2007). She explains that baptismal records report religious change (and I add another aspect that census reports show generational transformation). For Cline, baptism was a social and religious marker. She found that individuals closer to the tlatoani (ruler) reported a higher number of baptisms; her statistical analysis in the communities with the lowest baptisms reported more boys baptized than girls. She reports that while not all parents were baptized, children always
were: “Parents may have positively encouraged their children, seeing the status as important for future generations but not their own. Another possibility is that parents were unable to prevent the baptism of their offspring” (Cline 2007: 7). While explaining that this type of document shows a close interaction between colonial institutions and the Nahua households, Cline reports the existence of information about an individual’s baptismal status and the ages of minor children. She states that “[t]he data on children and their ages allow insight into rates of reproduction and survival” (2007: 3).

Lawsuits give information about the conflictive life Nahuas might have had in colonial times, which sometimes involves the lives of their children. In those types of documents, children are part of the discussions of adults who were using the colonial institutions to arrange their disputes. Nowadays, there are no published translations of lawsuits, but Susan Kellogg (1995) based her study on the transformation of the law in those types of documents. There are some corpuses of lawsuits in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City. However, they are not used in this dissertation and are left as part of the future research agenda to continue with the study of childrearing in Mesoamerica.

Cline (1986) states that testaments written in the Nahuatl language are real-life histories. Testaments followed a Spanish model. In New Spain, they were written by a notary who recorded the last wills of Nahua men and women of different social rank and economic status at the end of their lives. The testament followed a format brought from Spain. Cline explains that testaments can even be life histories due to the detailed style some Nahuas used—most of the time, to defend their territory. The way the notary ended up writing the testament depended on the social status and gender of the Nahua. Aside
from the insights based on the type of things that Nahuas gave to their children according to gender, testaments also record pious declarations where they express their sentiments. The collections of testaments published by Teresa Rojas Rabiela and her collaborators (Rojas Rabiela, Rea López, and Medina Lima 1999a, 1999b; Rojas Rabiela and Medina Lima 2000; Rojas Rabiela and Rea López 2002) and the testaments that León-Portilla and Cline published in 1984 are the main sources that report some representations of children. In testaments, we can find Nahuas worried about the children they were leaving on earth after their passing.

Finally, another corpus of sacramental documents is the baptismal records. During the winters of 2006 and 2007, I found a group of baptismal records not yet studied. It is located in the Toluca Valley, and the section written in Nahuatl corresponds to the second half of the 17th century. One group of baptismal documents is from El Sagrario, the oldest parish in the Toluca Valley (see Illustration 7). The other corpus of baptismal records I found is in Zinacantepec. A third group of records in the Toluca Valley is from Malinalco, which were found by Olliver Alberto Carmona Mañón, a municipality located nears the Toluca Valley (see Illustration 6). Schwaller has also found non-native records written in Nahuatl in Tulancingo, Hidalgo; and Richie has been working with records from Tecamachalco, Puebla to learn about the community. The records of the Toluca Valley, Malinalco, Tulancingo, and Tecamachalco bring the possibility to find the indigenous kin terms, as well as social relationships related to gender, class, and ethnicity.
Illustration 7. Picture of first page of the baptismal records from 1642, from the Church El Sagrario, Toluca, México. Photo by the author with the help of Victorino Torres Nava (January, 2007).

Testaments and baptismal records can give information about childrearing practices in context, not only of the household but also related to the broader structure of
the colony. This type of document can give an account not only on the transformation of a society, but specifically on the characteristics that a society adopted for its reproduction.

As we can see, this corpus of documents that ran from the interest of knowing the indigenous, or attempting to reach religious conversion, or the use of the documents for legitimating social positions or economic properties through the birth or death of a person were reporting the existence of caregivers and children in different conditions.

3. Conclusions

In Central Mexico, the early stage of the Spanish colonization framed a series of historical events that generated the production of texts. While colonized Mesoamerican women and men continued giving birth and raising their children, and tried to appropriate or resist the colonial impositions, colonizers, especially those inserted in the religious activity, were interested not only in transforming beliefs, but also the ways in which those Nahuas lived their daily lives. They learned that the colonizers were entering into one the most intimate aspects of Nahua life: their practices of childrearing.

The existence of colonial documents written in indigenous languages makes possible the historical reconstruction of conquered societies. The ethnohistorical texts produced in early colonial times are sources of information for understanding socio-cultural colonial transformations in different arenas. Colonial texts are the fundamental material for ethnohistorians. Their use must be considered as valuable as the data that an ethnographer gathers in the field. The practice of learning about the existence of material is one important phase in ethnohistorical research, and it is an important focus for
questioning the type of information that we confront.

The ethnographic literature reports events and activities performed by colonial Nahuas and colonizer friars that show at least intentions and perspectives, or even the Nahua responses to the inquiries of the friars. The case of the *huehuetlatolli* is particularly important because it reports on a compilation of documents that specifically speak about childrearing. There exist adaptations in the discourses, because while writers were reporting Nahua practices, they were also including occidental religious terms, especially when writing about God. The permissions to publish this type of book speaks of the importance that childrearing had for the colonial authorities, as well as for the Nahuas who reported this practices in their own language. In the dictionaries, writers also reported the existence of those practices of childrearing. They were so relevant that Nahuas had special words for naming such practices of caring, and friars were also aware and interested in the recorded entries of nouns and verbs related to the caring of the children.

The doctrinal literature projects demonstrate the intentions of friars and Nahuas toward their practices of childrearing in different ways. Sermons, guides for confession, plays, the Apendice a la Postilla, and dialogues such as the book *Espejo Divino* were written by Nahua scholars under the supervision of friars. Once friars had information about how Nahuas raised their children, they adopted the elaborated Nahua speech in their description of the practices of childrearing to their ecclesiastic discourses, as well as the meaning of childhood and parenthood. It is in those documents where we can observe how the colonial ecclesiastic power wanted to constitute the new Nahua society. However, as in the case of the ethnographic literature, we must not forget that Nahua
scholars wrote such documents. Thus, conceptions of both actors determined the result of such documents. The legal literature is the only one that will give a closer understanding of the Nahuas without the constant revision of friars. Wills and lawsuits report information using already established Spanish formats. Rather than finding this work an imposition, it would appear that Nahuas found it useful to record events and history through these types of documents. The case of censuses might be slightly different because, as Cline explains, they follow a narrative used in codices that in the end are also colonial. Finally, this corpus of material is the result of two social facts: the education that friars gave to some Nahua boys and the indigenous background that Nahua boys always kept in their identities. Those children who were living in that cultural borderland did not reach spaces of power outside the colonial structure of the indigenous and were only allowed to publish under the names of the friars. Nevertheless, they were actually following their own agendas; for them, the role of a friar would not fulfill their expectations of life. Although they did not jump into the Spanish colonial structure, they highly valued the places of power where they could govern the people of their own indigenous communities. The three types of colonial literature written in Nahuatl, promises the possibility to learn about the colonial project and the reactions that Nahuas had toward such policies. As stated in the introduction, the intention of this dissertation is to explain the importance of the existence of the Nahuatl documents as a way to understand the changes in raising the indigenous children in colonial Mesoamerica. Immersion into the translation and analysis of the documents follows in the next chapters.
Chapter 2

Caregivers in Colonial Discourses: Efforts to Transform the Nahua Network of Childrearing

In Spain, as in Mesoamerica, the ways in which women and men started their reproductive life followed specific rituals. In Spanish culture, as it is celebrated today, the ceremony was called *casamiento* (marriage), and consisted of a ritual in which a priest gave a speech to the couple, and the couple makes promises to stay together and to reproduce and maintain their household. Among the Nahuas, the union of a man and a woman was a common practice. In the colonial documents, the Nahuatl term *nenamictiliztli* was used for referring to marriage, but Lockhart (1992) has stated that it was not a prehispanic term.

For nobles, the couple was arranged by negotiations between the parents of the woman, the parents of the man and the midwife who helped in choosing the right woman for him. The most important moment of the ceremony was when they tied the woman’s *huipil* (blouse) and the man’s cloak together (see Illustration 1). After this ritual, the couple was officially able to live together.

Variations on the start of the reproductive life in Mesoamerica are reported in the Nahua interpretations related to the daily life and ritual practices of other indigenous groups. While in the Mexica communities polygamy was permitted, the *Chichimeca* and the *Çacachichimeca*, nomadic groups practiced monogamy; the ruler only had one wife, and, like the ruler, the other members of the community only had one spouse and lived
together since a very early age (Sahagún 1950–1982: Book X, 171–172). The practice of marriage during childhood and monogamy was relevant in a nomadic society and gives another insight into the different childhoods children could experience in early colonial Mesoamerica. In the Florentine Codex, it is reported that at the age of 4 or 5 years old, girls were given to a boy from the same ethnic group.

_Auh intla cioatl tlacati in inconeto, in ie nauhxiuhtia, in ie macujlixiuhtia: niman noce qujmaca chichimeca telpopil njman cana, mochipa quivicatinemj._ (Sahagún 1950–1982: Book X, 175)

And if the baby born is a girl, when she turns 4, when she turns 5 years old, then they give her to a Chichimeca boy, then he takes her and they always live together. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Thus, there were different ways of settling rituals for the community to acknowledge the couple’s new social status and future roles of reproducing their household through the raising of children.

_Illustration 7. Ceremony of marriage (Mendoza Codex 1992: 61r)._
charge of raising the Christian indigenous children, ethnographic sources report the existence of a complex network created for raising them. Society had strategic networks specially created for rearing the new integrant of the indigenous society. The objective of this chapter is to show the existence of that system for the caring of the children, where consanguine and non-consanguine individuals participated, demonstrating that Nahua boys and girls were raised by the community, not only by parents. Additionally, it shows the transformations that this network had in the colonial discourse, leaving parents as the main and only responsible people for childrearing. To fulfill the goal of this part of the dissertation, the chapter is divided into three sections. First, I describe the different actors that would participate in the indigenous network of childrearing, then the roles of parents in a changing context of colonialism are addressed. The third section is for the conclusions of the chapter.

1. Weaving the Network for Rearing Nahua Children

The rearing of girls and boys of different ages was a labor that depended on social networks where the consanguine family and people who earn their living from such work were participating in that endeavor. This social behavior was not only observed in Mesoamerica; it has been reported in historical and ethnographic studies. Harkness and Supper (1983) observed childhood from a “developmental niche”—understood as a space where the child absorbs the cultural characteristics of a given society. In this context, they started using the term caretaker—also referred to as caregiver—as the subjects for their study. Such a concept goes beyond the existence of mother and father as the main or only person responsible of childrearing and opens the network to any individual involved in
the bringing up of girls and boys. In this dissertation, for caregiver, it is understood that the individual who takes care of the young, because he or she is culturally accepted as capable. By this logic, kinship (such as mothers, fathers, grandmothers aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, etc.) and outsiders are involved in the care of the new generations.

Such terms are not intrinsically linked to the occidental concept of “family” because children are not raised exclusively in that institution. In this respect, and especially in Mesoamerica, it is necessary to mention a debate about the existence of the term in Nahuatl. According to Lockhart (1999) and Nutini (1976), there was no equivalent term for the word family in this Mesoamerican language. In the occidental and religious thought of the early modern period, children should grow inside a family, a social institution integrated by the father, the mother, and the children who were consanguine related. It was the most elemental organization where the children must grow. However, this concept did not match with the Nahua social structure. Nutini (1976: 5) states that parental and family relationships in indigenous and mestizo communities in Mesoamerica have a Spanish root, or at least those forms represent transformations by acculturation, in which the Spanish characteristics predominated based on elements of indigenous traditions. Through a philological analysis, Lockhart (1999) shows the inexistence of a term equal to family in colonial Nahuatl, terms such as cenyeliztli (cen: one + yeliztli: nature = those who are one), cencalli (cen: one + calli: house = one house), cencaltin (cen: one + calli: house + tin: plural suffix = those in one house), cemithualtin (cem (n): one + ithualli: patio = those of one patio), and techan tlaca (te: indefinite personal prefix + chantli: house + tlaca: people = people of a house) are related to place, but do not imply consanguine relationship in their etymology. They have a
meaning that involves the place in which individuals have a common life. Kellogg (1986) and Offner (1983) proposed that calpulli, was an organization that congregated persons in social units based on common religious affiliations. As we can see, the list of terms mentioned is not explicitly related to kinship.

With or without the existence of the concept, indigenous and European children were raised inside or outside a consanguine group; thus, leaving aside the polemic about family in Mesoamerica, the discussion should be centered on childrearing and its actors. As aforementioned, childrearing is a series of processes followed by caregivers that look toward ensuring the survival of the new generations and help them to become part of the social structures. These processes are different in time and space and can be contextualized by abrupt or slow social changes. These processes are determined by economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. In order to understand the sociocultural condition of childrearing in a given society, the condition of race, gender, class, and colonization determine the ways caregivers manage to raise the children in their daily life. In the ethnohistory of colonial Mesoamerica, such analysis is centered on the practices that friars and Nahua scholars imagined. They were the ones deciding how to represent the different subjects that would participate in childrearing. Thus, for the caregiver, it is understood that the individual who procures for someone, because he or she is culturally accepted as capable to perform such role. In this logic, kinship (such as mothers, fathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, etc.) and non-kinship are involved in the care of the new generations. The ethnographies of Sargent and Harris (1992) as well as Greenhalgh (1994) report networks of support for raising the children. They show the existence of preferences according to the child’s gender, which is also notorious in the
Mesoamerican case.

The complex social relationship where caregivers figure out how to manage their children to survive is observable in codices, testaments still written in Nahuatl language, and in the baptismal records. The data we can find in those types of documents vary enormously. As an example, the *Florentine Codex* gives descriptions of the different caregivers who participated in the Nahua network of childrearing, but resulted in a general description that diminish the labor of those social actors. On the contrary, testaments are the documents that we can use to trace the ways caregivers strategically gave their children properties, and constructed tactics so children would not be left without someone to take care of them. Sometimes the properties were limited, but in most of the cases, the ones who were able have a testament were indigenous of a wealthy social class. In the following paragraphs, the role of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles, as well as godparents are reconstructed based on the last wills they left behind. The discussion about mothers and fathers are left aside; they deserve a special section since friars and Nahua scholars centered their attention on them for constructing colonial ways for raising children.

1.1. Relatives Who Cared for the Children

Due to their recognized participation in the growing of the children, it is a good idea to start with the discussion of grandmothers. In the *Florentine Codex*, grandparents are defined according to the good and the bad characteristics of their behavior. Grandmothers were defined as follows:

*Citli teci. In teci tzone izte, ixquamule tentzone, yxuíua, cacamaio, tzicueuallo, vitzio, auaiio. Yn
Grandmother. A grandmother has hair, has nails, eyebrows, beard, she has grandchildren, she has little maize ears, of noble lineage, spiny, thorny. The good grandmother sustains people with the stone, the stick, and she is a castigator, a mentor. The bad grandmother is a stupid old woman. She is a hidden woman, she makes others blind, she causes people to encounter the wood, cliff, plains, current, rain. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Thus, a grandmother is not only a woman with the responsibility of raising the grandchildren but also a person with great wisdom. As shown in the Spanish and Nahuatl discourses, the translation into Spanish dilutes the metaphors used for describing grandmothers. The nails, eyebrows, and beard metaphors are used to refer to their descendants, and is translated as, “has children, grandchildren, great grandchildren,” leaving behind the metaphors used in Nahuatl. The metaphor referring to grandmothers as a symbol representing their ability and responsibility of raising and correcting children was *huitziyo* (thorny). It was representing an old woman who was able to reprimand, correct and punish her heir. In Nahuatl as in Spanish, the discourses give an extension to her role as mother, but with the accumulated knowledge and experience that made her wise. Her depictions locate this personage in the space of childrearing where she is distinguished in the discourse of the Florentine Codex. As a great grandmother reaches one more generation, she forms the ones procreated by her daughters or daughters in law, and are defined as follows:
**Veltiuhtli:** teueltiuh: yiellelacic ilama, aoc quimati ilama. Qualli ueltiuhtli iecteneualonj, tlaçocamachoni, itech netlamilo, ytech netzatzilo, tlacapeualtia, tlacatzintia. Amo qualli ueltiuhtli, tequalani, acaonj, tetlaelti, tetlatultia, tequalania, tetlauelcujtia. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 5)

The great-grandmother: One’s great-grandmother [is] decrepit, childish in her old age. The good great-grandmother [is] worthy of praise, deserving of gratitude. She is accorded glory, acclaim by her descendants. She is the founder, the beginner [of her lineage]. The bad great-grandmother [is] detestable, unworthy of mention by name; she arouses nausea, loathing, anger, wrath. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 5)

Besides her good attributes as a caregiver for children, a great grandmother is also compared to a girl, which means she needs support from others, she needs to be cared for, her age produces an idea of ending, and lays more on her name and the work done years before than on the things she does in the present. Some great-grandmothers can reach one more generation, but the age transforms the idea they have about themselves. Although in the framework of a “grandmother,” she is considered capable for taking care of the children, it vanishes in her specific description. Her capability of rearing children disappears. She is a living memory.


Great-great-grandparent. The great-great-grandparent [is] one who trembles with age, a cougher, a totterer. He has reached extreme old age. The good great-grandparent [is] the originator of good progeny. He started, began, sowed [a good
progeny]; he produces off-shoots. The bad great-great grandparent [is] a vile old person, a despicable originator of progeny. He left [his own] ruined, destitute. (Sahagún 1953–1982:Book X, 5–6)

The description of the grandmothers from the Florentine Codex is an acceptable description of what a grandmother was according to the testaments left by women from Central Mexico during the early colony. They were women who bequeathed properties and objects to their grandchildren. That is the case of Ana Tiacapan, grandmother from the district of Tepetench Tlanepantla, in Xochimico. In 1566, she bequeathed her grandson Juan one cornfield and a land located in Ahuayuca, as well as a metate, a grinding stone. To her granddaughter Clara, she gave her two camellones located in Tlazalaoztooc (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 144–147). Maria Berónica, from the district of Santiago Mitepeque, located in current Toluca, bequeathed two houses to her grandchildren Francisco de la Cruz and Cristobal de San Petro and a metate to her granddaughter Juana Francisca (Rojas Rabiela et al. 2000: 136–137).

Besides the passing of properties, grandmothers also took care of the children. Doña Ana de Santa Barbara, a cacica from the town of Santo Domingo Tepexi de la Seda located in current Tehuacán, Puebla, gave an outstanding testimony of that responsibility. In 1621, Baltasar de San Miguel Cortés, scribe of the town wrote the last wills of Doña Ana. Although her grandchildren were not small anymore, she narrated the way she ended up taking care of her five grandchildren. Her daughter Doña Maria de Esquivel married a cacique, Don Diego Sainos de Mendoza. Both of them died, leaving properties to their children, who were left under the care of the cacica. She declared herself the executor (albacea) of the children’s cattle, lands, and macehuales; and made an inventory.
of the properties the five received from their parents as well as from Doña Ana. She refers to the time when she had to invest with the properties to resolve the necessities of food and caring.

Auh yn mochi yn quexquich nican omotlali omotenehuac hacienda bacas cabras obejas yehuas potros garañones burros burras yhuan buritos tlali amili yhuan tepemili, Ca mochi nicmocuitia ynemac yhuantin noxhuihuan yaxca ytlatqui oquincauiliteuhque ytatzin yhuan ynantzin auh zan no yhui yn quexquich tlali necis ytech escrituras donaciones oquicouhque mopia amatl ca mochi ynemac yeguantin noxhuihuan yca noconciencia yuhqui declaracion niccihua. (Rojas Rabiela et al. 2000: 115)

And all of it, everything that was mentioned here, hacienda, cows, goats, sheep, mares, colts, garañones, male and female donkeys and their little donkeys, land, irrigated fields, and hill fields. I declare everything is the heritage of my grandchildren, their goods their possessions that their father and mother bequeathed to them. And just the same all the land will appear in the official papers and donations that they bought, the papers have been preserved. All are heritages of my grandchildren, and with my conscience, I make my declaration. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Her grandchildren, Don Diego de Mendoza, Don Domino de Mendoza, Doña Escolástica de Mendoza, Doña Maria de Esquivel, and Don Toribio de Esquivel, were raised under the care of Doña Ana, but at the time of the testament, only Don Diego was old enough for taking care of the properties and the other siblings, so she declared,

Auh Nehuatl niquixquetza noxhuiuh don Diego de Mendoça quinmocuitlahuiz yn iermanos ytutor mochihuaz quintlazotlas auh quinmacaz yn mochitlen ytech monequiz auh yn ycuac monamictizque quinmacahuiliz yn inemac hacienda. Auh yn oquic amo monamictizque ca quipiaz quinmocuitlahuiz
And I name my grandson Don Diego de Mendoza, to look after his siblings and become their tutor, he will love them and he will give them everything that they need. And when they get married he will give them control of their properties. And as long as they are not married he will keep and look after the properties because it is my wish. My executors likewise will keep track of my grandchildren’s property so they won’t be lost, as I say my words. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Her cacicazgo should be kept together because it was bequeathed from their ancestors and it was her elder grandson responsible for taking care of the other siblings and of the properties. After Don Diego’s death, her other grandchildren should be in charge of the cacicazgo following a logic of age; the elder should govern and should take care of their other siblings. Her strategy drove her to name three persons as albaceas. They were the Dominican friar Juan Rizo, who was a priest of the town, her elder grandson Diego de Mendoza, and another person called Nicolas Ramirez from whom there was no other reference. Doña Ana not only was albacea of her grandchildren’s properties, but she also created business on the children’s properties, leaving a larger amount of properties than the one left by the parents.

Thus, in the wills as well as in the descriptions of the Florentine Codex, the labor of the grandmother as an authority and as a caregiver was acknowledged. She teaches, she admonishes, and she creates strategies for looking after her grandchildren. In the Florentine Codex it is clear the role of the grandmother as a caregiver, but the testaments add another characteristic, which was the grandmother as a builder of social networks for
the survival of the children. Grandmothers were making decisions related to the well-being of her descendants. That was the case of Doña Ana, who did not only leave properties to her grandchildren, but also wove the network to ensure their successful rearing.

Grandfathers also managed to procure for their grandchildren. Tomas Matheo, from San Mateo Atenco, located in the current State of Mexico, gave a solar to his grandson Pedro Lasaro to whom he refers as piltontli, a little child (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 78–79). In 1595, the scribe Pedro Dias recorded the testament of Don Alonso Juarez (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 292–301), cacique from the caballerato in the town of Tizatlan, Tlaxcala. He had a granddaughter named Maria Mexeltin, to whom he gave land located in Bartolomé Tenango. It was land worked by two macehuales to whom he asked to take care of Maria. He also had another grandson called Marco Juarez; as in the case of Maria, he asked non-consanguineal people—Bernavé Pocatón, Fabian Salinas, and Matheo de Palencia—to take care of his grandson. As Don Alonso’s son-in-law was dead, he had rights over his properties, and he gave a hacienda to his grandson Marco Juarez. To her granddaughter, he gave one land. Differently, he bequeathed Marco with a series of lands from his properties. He gave him an old house with a solar in Tlatepan, 30 brazas of land somewhere else, another land in Xaiolapan, and another located in Bartolomé Tenango. He also gave him land, the property of two men called Fabian and Alonso, which was given as a present to Don Alonso, and he asked his grandson to be very thankful to those two men. Additionally, he gave Marco a box to keep his clothes, a table, and two chairs. Marco also got land in Santa Isabel Quauhtlantzinco that he must share with Ines, Marco’s mother, and with Justina, Marco’s grandmother (Alonso’s wife).
Don Alonso did not give up any land for the mother and the grandmother for themselves.

Besides the properties, Marco also received the social position that his grandfather was weaving for him in his testament. He gave him his place to run the household.

_Quito in cocoxqui yn noshuitzin Marcos Juarez yehuatl nixiptla motlacuitlahuiz ynican nochan yhuan in inantzin ytoca Ines yn quezquican nicmaca cuemtitl Marcos nochi yhuan quipiazque yn ynantzin._ (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999: Vol 2, 299)

The sick person said my representative will take care of my grandson Marcos Juarez here in my house along with his mother, her name is Ines; all the property that I give to Marcos, he will keep along with his mother. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

He also gave his grandson the possibility of deciding over lands that Don Alonso gave to other people. In short, besides his properties he bequeathed his place, his social status to Marco Juarez. The way he strategically managed to protect his grandson was beyond the mere procuring of properties; he entwined a social network in which the grandson had economic comfort, he was under the care of consanguine women and non-consanguine men, and also received his social status and power to decide over things and people.

Thus, Don Alonso was a Nahua nobleman, a caregiver who bequeathed his properties and power on the verge of his death. His social role was represented in Book X of the Florentine Codex as a father with white hair who cannot reproduce anymore, and is likened to a child because of his impossibility to perform activities:

_Tecul, culli, yn tecul, chicauac, pipinqui, tzonitzac, quaiztac, otlatziuh, aoc quen ca yiollo, oteut. Qualli culli, tenonotzani, teizcaliani, tealceceuia, tetzitzicazuia, teixtoma, tenacaztlapoa. Culli aqualli_
One’s grandfather-grandfather: One’s grandfather [is] hardened, lean, white-haired, white-headed. He becomes impotent, childish. The good grandfather [is] an advisor, an indoctrinator. He reprimands one, beats one with nettles, teaches one prudence, discretion. The bad grandfather [is] negligent, of misspent days and nights; of no fame, of no renown. A luxurious old man, he is decrepit, senile. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 4–5)

A great-grandfather is defined as follows:


The great-grandfather: [He is] decrepit, in his second childhood. The good great-grandfather [is] of exemplary life, of fame, of renown. His good works remain written in books. He is esteemed, he is praised. He leaves a good reputation, a good example. The bad great-grandfather [is] forgotten, worthy of being detested, cursed, ridiculed; worthy after death of complaints, worthy of murmurs in his absence. There is ridicule, spitting, anger because of him. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 5)

Thus, the grandfather, the great-grandfather, and the great-great-grandfather are described as old men who cannot reproduce anymore, they are similar to children, and are described as useless. At the same time, they are remembered by their work done during their life. Nevertheless, the testament shows him as a man who receives not only
properties but also power. Besides, he can make strategies for taking care of their children; he is the one who has the ability to weave the network that would provide grandchildren with the elements to survive, and who supported the preference toward grandsons over granddaughters.

Aunts and uncles were part of the network created to raise the children. Sometimes they received the responsibility for taking care of the children. The *Florentine Codex* defines them as the good and the bad. In the case of the uncle,\(^5\) the text mentions the custom of passing the responsibility of taking care of the house and the wife to the husband’s brother when the husband dies. The woman is referred to as part of the man’s properties.\(^6\) The important point here is the social strategy that gives the uncle the responsibility of taking care of the wife and the house. The children are not mentioned. It is in the testaments where those personages are represented during the planning of the last wills. Uncles and aunts give properties to their nephews and nieces. That is the case of Don Juan Francisco, mayor of the town of Azcapotzalco, located in current Mexico City.

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\(^5\) The Uncle.
Nahuatl: *Tlatl*, *tetla*, *in tetla*, *ytech necaualoteuani*, *itech necahualoni*, *tenice*, *machice*, *mamale*, *naoatile*. *Yn qualli tetla ycnioio*, *teca muchioani* [*motecuitaluan*], *tlaceliani*, *lapiani*, *tepiani*, *itech netlacencon*, *mahuq*, *tlamauhcaahuiani*, *teca muchiu* *teca tlaocuya*. *Tetla amo qualli tlaumiliztiani*, *teauliztiani*, *tlamucuitlaui*, *tlamahcu*.

Translation to English:
One’s uncle [is] the provider for those who are orphaned, the entrusted one, the tutor, the manager, the provider of support; the one who takes charge, who directs. One’s good uncle [is] kind; [he is] a caretaker, a guardian, loyal, respectful, just—a server of others, a pitier of others. One’s bad uncle [is] a dissipator, an alienator of people; he squanders, dissipates, wastes his possessions; he hates despises, detests one (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 3).

\(^6\) An interesting point to discuss about gender relationships in early colonial times, but let us leave this topic for another moment and focus now on the topic of this chapter, which is the weaving of the network for the caring of indigenous children. To know more about Mesoamerican gender relationships see Burkhart (1996, 1997) and Kellogg (1986).
In 1639, he dictated his last will and gave the responsibility to his brother Pedro de San Miguel to raise and provide a house for his children who at that time were young. Pedro was named executor of Don Juan’s children.

And I leave my brother as the executor, he will look after, he will take care of the house and the land until his children grow. He will give the properties when God takes him with Him. I do not want my children to perish. May it just be for the sake of God that he will do it, and the house and land will not be destroyed. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Other people were possible actors in the raising of the children during the colony. For example the aunt, the stepfather, the stepmother, the godmother, and the godfather.

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7 The Aunt
Nahuatl: *Teaui, yn teaui mamale yn qualli teaui tlaocullo in iillo, icnoio, tepan tlatoani, tehiceliani, tlaçoti in iillo, tetlaçotiani, tetlaçotlani, motecuclauia, teca motequipachoa.
Teaui yn atlacatl iollococole, iollocuicuitla, qualaxpul, temputzpul, tempiopul, tenxiquipil, haitloc monequi, tetlauelitta, tequalancaitta, tetlailitta, haiel teitta (Sahagún 1979: 3r).
Translation to English: One’s aunt [is] a provider for [her nieces and nephews]. One’s good aunt [is] merciful, of good memory, kind; an intercessor, solicitous, of noble birth, loving. She admires others, cares for them, is solicitous of others. One’s bad aunt is savage, rude, vicious, tempestuous, pouting, sullen. She is peevish; she looks at one with hate, with ill-will; she is disdainful, spiteful (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 4).

8 The stepfather.
All of them were part of the possible strategies followed by the main caregivers. Stephens (1995: 3–24) explains that caregivers do not behave in a unidirectional manner. This point was similar to Ginsburg and Rapp’s (1995: 1) perspective, which states, “people everywhere actively use their local cultural logics and social relations to incorporate, revise, or resist the influence of seemingly distant political and economic forces.” Thus, starting with the birthday of a child, children are inside a social complex relationship in which the heritage of positions, properties, rights, and values are negotiated by the caregivers. In this sense, reproduction in its biological and social essence is intimately related to cultural reproduction. They explained that their perspective gives the theoretical basis to understand the way societies reproduce or challenge social structures, while individuals think about and make the next generation (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995: 2).

1.2 Outside the Consanguine Caregivers

Mothers, stepmothers, fathers, stepfathers, grandparents, great grandparents, great-great-grandparents, aunts, and uncles participated in the reproduction of their communities spending time and performing actions for the growing of the children. Nevertheless, there was another dimension to that network. Stephens (1995: 8) proposes

Translation to English: [He is] one who has stepchildren, who adopts children; one who provides support, who works steadily, who accepts his stepchildren as his own. The bad stepfather [is] one who desires, wishes, yearns for the death [of his stepchildren] (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 9).

9 The stepmother.


Translation to English: Stepmother, the stepmother [is] one who has stepchildren. The good stepmother [is] one who is gracious, who loves, who is merciful [to her stepchildren]. The bad stepmother [is] sad, hateful, rancorous, impatient. She looks at one with anger; she foretells the worst for one (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 9).
the existence of two intertwined spheres that evoke the feminist perspective for understanding the spaces in which women perform their multiple roles. One is the domestic and the other is the public; and childrearing intersects with those two arenas. Defining further those two spaces due to the ubiquity of the terms public and private, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1988) understand this division of spaces as the activities performed by people in the daily life inside a household, and the dispositions dictated by the state. In the second sphere, those activities go far beyond the mere instruction for caregivers; they actually participate with actors and institutions outside the household. In the case of Mesoamerica, there were institutions where children went to receive education. In prehispanic times, calmecac and telpochcalli were the schools where Nahua children received formal education. School also changed during colonization. As it was discussed in the first chapter, at the College of the Holy Cross in Tlatelolco, friars became teachers of noble indigenous boys. Thus, friars, tlamatiname (teachers), tlacaizcaltiame (educators that could be men or women), tehuapahuame (caregivers), and other people in the community raised children along with the immediate families.

In the calmecac, priests in charge of the education of boys had special titles that give insight into the division and type of caregiving they used to perform. There was the Mexicatl teuhoatzin,10 a priest elected by two other priests. He was in charge of young

10 Mexicatl Teuhoatzin.
Nahuatl: Injc muchivaia mexicatl teuohatzin ixicol, itlema, ixiquipil injc qujmauiztiliaia Diablo, yoan iclapiaia ca iuhqui inteta muchiuhticatca in calmecac, iuhquin intlatocauh catca inteteuhoatzizin injc noujian; yoan in ixquich in tepilhoan itech oncaualoia injc quimizcatiz inic quiuapaauaz tlatolica injc vel nemizque, yoan in aço tlatocatizque, anoco mocuiltonozque, anoco teiacanazque, tlapachozque muchiichoatl iteqyujuh catca in Mexicatl teuhoatzin, yoan noichoatl tlanavatiaia innoujian tetepuan quimihujaia in tlein quichivazque teteuhoatzizin, auh in anoco aca tlatlacoa muchiichoatl qujmatia in Mexicatl teuhoitzin (Sahagún 1979: Book 2, 127v–128r).
priests and of all the administrative matters of the region, and as an important issue he
had to procure the laws and customs. As well as the Mexicatl teuhoatzin, there was also
another person called Uitznauac teuhoatzin\textsuperscript{11} who also worked for matters related to the
calmecac. Finally, the Tepan teuatzin\textsuperscript{12} was in charge of taking care of the good
procedures used for childrearing inside the calmecac.

Returning to the roles caregivers played within households, there were personages
registered by friar Pedro de Arenas (1611). The word pilhuapahuani (pilli: child
+huapahua: to raise + ni = children’s caregiver) and chichihuatlahuapahua (chichihu:}
breast +hua: + tla +huapahua: to raise), translated into Spanish as *ama que cria*: a female worker who raises children. Molina included two words that refer to a woman in charge of rearing a child with no maternal relationship. Those words, *chichiu* and *tlachichiti* (Molina 2004 [1555–1571]: 20r and 117r), derive from the word *chichi*, which means *mamar* in Spanish and to breastfeed in English.

People who looked after older kids were called *teuapauani, tlacauapauqui*, or *tlacauapahuani*. The three nouns share the linguistic root of *uapaua*, which, in its intransitive form, means to harden, or that something should stand up straight13 (Molina 2004 [1571]: 154v). *Huapahua* as a transitive verb, combined with the indefinite personal prefix *te*, or *tlaca*, which means “person,” form words related to people in charge of raising and instructing children. In a figurative way, the instruction of the *tehuapahuani* should harden and firm up the child’s personality. If the child stands up straight, it would mean that his or her life has been firmed up. Another word for the action of rearing children is *izcaltia*. Combined with the word *tlaca* (person), *tlacaizcalti*, literally means to cause a person to be raised. Molina also registered the words *tlacazcalti* and *tlacazcaltiani*, nouns related to individuals or non-gendered servants in charge of raising children (Molina 2004 [1555–1571]: 116r and 143v).

Although we can see the existence of a big network for taking care of the children, in the documents, friars and Nahua scholars only depicted mothers and fathers as responsible for rearing them. They considered parents the main and only people with an obligation to raise their offspring. Some friars rejected the existence of others rearing the Nahua children. That is the case of Juan de Mijangos (1607), who writes a passage

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about a father called Agustin admonishing his son Juan about the responsibility of fathers for taking care of their children. In the text, Mijangos writes that parents would be negligent if they leave the children with other people:

Quinxiccahua in impilhuan in cencaltin itlacahuan ichantlaca, inic ahquittazque Missa ahquicaquizque temachtilli? (Mijangos 1607: 8)

They abandon their children [with] the people of the house, their servants, the people of their home so they do not see mass, they do not listen to the teaching? (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d.: translation of page 8)

To leave the children with others was a behavior parents should avoid in order to raise their children adequately. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastic institution wanted to stop such practice as part of their intentions for shaping the colonial indigenous society. No matter if there existed a social web that made childrearing possible; in the eyes of friars and their Nahua collaborators, those social relationships were not considered appropriate. Nevertheless, no matter if friars accepted or not, it was a different situation among the Nahua households; rearing the children in community was about necessity.

As it has been explained through the sections above, the ethnographic indigenous documents give descriptions of different caregivers, a situation that did not happen with the ecclesiastic documents. Such discourses show part of the processes friars and Nahua scholars went through in the resignification of the indigenous maternal and paternal figures in colonial New Spain. The only places where other people exist in the ethnographic sources were in the testaments, in the Nahuatl dictionaries, and in Book Ten of the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1979). Nahuas did not rely only on parents and mothers for raising their children, but on a more complex network. Nahuatl-Spanish
dictionaries also report the existence of wetnurses, male and female servants in charge of raising kids, and who were also in charge of instructing them before they entered school; and grandparents who bequeathed lands, magueyes, houses, or personal articles such as skirts or images, giving their grandchildren properties in order to survive. They were important subjects who helped raise the children. Such networks traced here drive the analysis to consider that children were the responsibility of the community, a hint on childrearing that went far beyond the individualistic ideal friars and Nahua scholars wanted to impose in their discourses. There, as it will be discussed in the following sections, only mothers and fathers were the people accountable for rearing their own children. After this section, the chapter focuses on those discourses that friars and Nahuas wrote about parenthood, and where the other caregivers are left aside.

2. Nahua Parents in a Transforming World

Scholars have stated that before colonization, and even though males occupied the highest places of power, males and females had a complementary and parallel relationship in their daily lives. Gender roles did not have the same value reported in European discourses. In other words, social relationships between Nahua women and men did not carry the same inequalities found in Europe (Burkhart 1997; Kellogg 1986; 1988, 1995).

For instance, using civil documents such as testaments and lawsuits, Kellogg (1986, 1988, 1995) found a reduction in Nahua female authority as they lost the right of receiving lands and goods. While in the testaments of the 1500s it was common to find women receiving lands, houses, magueys, and other goods, during the 1700s there was a
change in the distribution of power inside household. Daughters were not becoming owners of properties anymore; instead, the husbands were the ones who received the properties from the parents-in-law. Thus, there was a transformation on the values and roles of both women and men.

Through the study of women’s lives inside the prehispanic Nahua household, Burkhart (1997) explains that the meanings of daily and ritual female activities, such as giving birth, sweeping, cooking, and doing the house chores, were not practices that indicated female subjugation. Instead, they were activities that gave power to Nahua females. Nahua males and Nahua females had their own valuable place in the Nahua society. Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* (1950–1982: Book VI) shows a series of discourses used by mothers and fathers to instruct their children of different ages. It is common that parents emphasized the necessity and responsibility of practicing *in nanyotl, in tayotl* (motherhood, fatherhood) in a good and proper way. Nahua parents used to refer to themselves with a symbolic phrase: *nimonan, nimota* (I your mother, your father). This way of naming themselves using masculine and feminine terms as one category, suggests a distinct social value of motherhood and fatherhood. It is very different from the nouns in the European models, where parents use a dichotomistic assignation of roles and values: Motherhood is for women and fatherhood is for males, and if they need to use one word to refer to parents, they omit mother and use *padres* (literally: “fathers”) as a general noun.

In Mesoamerica, and specifically in the Nahua society, there was a gender parallelism, illustrated, for one, in the pictorial representations of Codex Mendoza. In the beautiful pictures included in the third part of the document, the *tlacuilo* (painter)
artistically summarized the activities of parents instructing their children on different roles according to gender and age. Parents are always in the same folio describing a rigorous order of gender roles. On the left side, a male is depicted in his role of father with his son, and on the right side, a woman is represented in her role of mother with her daughter. The spaces are organized with a uniform distribution, the configuration of pages is ordered by rows, and the activities are registered by the ages of the children. This way of representing parental roles is unique in the Nahuatl colonial codices (see illustrations 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Chapter 4). Another example is in Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* where there is a recurrent use of the couplet *motherhood, fatherhood* for referring to the activity of a goddess (Sahagún 1950–1982: Book VI, 149) or a god (Sahagún 1950–1982: Book VI, 12, 13, 19, 27, 31, 36, 41, 48). It is also used for referring to the parent as it is written in Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli* when a father gives advice to his son about the good and proper behavior he should practice (Bautista 1988: 276–277).

*Auh ma oc yehuatzin quimomachitia, ma oc yehuatzin mitzmoeyecalhui, mitzmotamachihuili, ca teult, ca tlahihuani, ca huey macoche, mamalhuace, ca huey tepotze. Ca yehuatzin Dios huel monantzin, mottatzin; in cenca tlapanahuiya inic huel mitzmoctlahuitzinohtzia, inic mitzmotlazotilia in ahmo mach yuhqui inic nimitzmotlazotilia in nehuatl in nimonan, nimotta.* (Bautista 1988: 276–277)

And may He (our Lord) know it, May He put you through tests, may he measure you. He is God, he is the ruler, He is truly a great helper, a protector, and he is really a great possessor of a back. He is God, really your mother, your father. He is the best at taking care of you and loves you. How I, your mother, your father, love you is not like it. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)
This passage is illustrative of the mother-father couplet on both levels; one is for the God as an entity who can be a loving and protecting *father and mother*. The second is the role of the father as *mother and father* of the child, whom he loves greatly. Besides defining *mamalhuace* and *tlacachihuale* as “parent,” Molina also included a definition for father and mother with the Nahuatl words *teta, tenan* (a father, a mother of someone), and to *tenan, teta* (a mother, a father of someone) (Molina 2004: 91v).

In the Nahuatl ecclesiastic discourse, there is a change in the way writers addressed parents. Although the use of the diphrase *tetta, tenan* still existed, the word *tetahuan*, which literally means “the fathers of someone,” was used for generally referring to fathers and mothers—a tendency for assimilating the Spanish way of referring to parents. What comes in the following sections is the transformation of this Mesoamerican *diphrase*. Lockhart (1992) has stated that colonization of the Mesoamerican territory was relatively easy because they had similar institutions. Marriage was one of those cases. However, women had a different value in those societies. Thus, the patriarchal system was confronted with an indigenous system where men and women were complementary. This analysis supports the statements of colonial Mesoamerican scholars such as Kellogg (1995) and Burkhart (1997). Nevertheless, it is necessary to dig more into the Mesoamerican system of gender relationships. The use of the term “mother and father” as one word for referring to Nahua parents also proves that the dichotomistic system from Spain was not the same in Mesoamerica. Now it is time to approach to the roles and values of the mother and the father separately to see the transformation of the discourses that intended to change the indigenous communities’ values and roles.
Motherhood has been a topic of interest since the early history of the social sciences. Those studies started with a tendency of conceptualizing a mother’s love as natural. Nevertheless, feminist studies have proved that biology determines the female ability of having children, but the values and practices related to motherhood are determined by cultural, social, economical, and political contexts. Around the 1990s, there was an influx of studies that looked at motherhood from different perspectives. Several of them were done in the researchers’ own country, often the United States. Layne (1999), Wosniak (1999), Landsman (1999), Modell (1999), and Ragoné (1999) produced interesting studies about the different ways women mother their children in the United States, a capitalist society characterized by consumerism. They studied unusual motherhoods. For example, mothers and disabled children (Landsman 1999), surrogated children (Ragoné), adopted children (Mallon 1999), and fostered children (Wozniak 1999).

From a general perspective, based on her physical anthropological study comparing humans and animals, Blaffer Hrdy (1999) explains that, biologically, maternity means to conceive and to give birth, but in occidental societies, maternity also “carries with it a long tradition of self-sacrifice” (10), which actually bears cultural inventions found even in scientific writings. In the 1980s, feminist studies investigated the formation of societies through reproduction (Martin 2001). Ginsburg and Rapp proposed that the study of reproduction helps to the understanding of the formation of cultures. The authors use reproduction to “bring the conflict among groups who try to survive” into light. That description matches the case of the indigenous societies of Mesoamerica, where the categories of generation, ethnicity, class, and gender are the
basis for the study of mothers and fathers.

In Mesoamerica, due to the introduction of the patriarchal system, the formation of a new social order inside households was determinant to understand colonial contexts in which the participation of mothers and fathers was deeply changed. Such modification inside households is intrinsically linked to the reproduction of the colonial state. Stoler (1991) studied the colonial interest on learning about and transforming the intimate spaces where social and biological reproduction was taking place. The household was an important space that, in the case of Mesoamerica, friars and Nahua scholars deeply desired to transform. The intensity of sentiments that mothers and fathers were able to feel, as well as the attachment toward offspring and the identities associated with those roles are aspects that allow the researcher to look for the relationship between the families and the colonial State. Metaphors are usually present in the texts where a mother or a father is depicted.

Illustration 8. Two folios of the Florentine Codex with fragments of huehuetlatolli (Sahagún 1979: Book VI, 3r–3v).
In Book X of the *Florentine Codex*, Nahua scholars described briefly men and women in their roles as parents. Trying to illustrate their characteristics, they emphasize the European dichotomist perspective. Aside from the emphasis on their biological capacity of reproduction, mothers were also described based on values attached to their maternal condition. Beyond her interest in caring and teaching others (not only her own children) and being a hard worker, a good mother was described with a list of adjectives like sincere, solicitous, anxious, vigilant, and agile. They also depicted a bad mother as a woman full of evilness, stupidity, dullness, sleepiness, laziness, and anger. She was described as a disrespectful and unreliable woman who would not pay attention to anything or anyone, a mother who used to castigate, and who encouraged disobedience to others.

One’s mother has children; she suckles them. Sincere, vigilant, agile, solicitous, full of anxiety. She teaches people, she is attentive to them. She caresses, she serves others; she is apprehensive for their welfare; she is careful, thrifty—constantly at work. One’s bad mother [is] evil, dull, stupid, sleepy, lazy; [she is] a squanderer, a petty thief, a
deceiver, a fraud. Reliable, [she is] one who loses things through neglect or anger, who heeds no one. She is disrespectful, inconsiderate, disregarding, careless; she castigates; she causes disregard of conventions, she shows the way—lead the way—to disobedience; she expounds nonconformity. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 2)

The Spanish version of the meaning of mother is described as follows:

La propiedad de la madre es tener hijos, y darles leche, la madre virtuosa es vigilante ligera, no se para diligente veladora, solicita, congoxosa. Cria a sus hijos, tiene contino, cuidado dellos, tiene vigilancia en que no les falte nada, regala los, es como esclava de todos los de su casa, congoxase por la necesidad de cada uno de ninguna cosa necesaria en casa se descuida es guardadora, es laboriosa, o trabajadora. La madre mala es bob,a necia, dormilona, perezosa, desperdiciadora, persona de mal recaudo, descuidada de su casa, dexe perder las cosas por pereza / o por enojo; no cuida de las necesidades, de los de su casa, no mira por las cosas de su casa, no corrige las culpas de los de su casa: y por eso cada día se empeora. (Sahagún 1979: Book 10, 1v)

The characteristic of mother is to have children, to give them milk. The virtuous mother is vigilant, light, does not stop. She is a guardian, solicitous, suffers. She raise her children, takes care of them, she ensures that her children do not lack anything at home. She neglects herself; she is a keeper, hard worker. A bad mother is stupid, foolish, sleepy, heavy-eyed, wasted, she does not save, neglects her house; she lost things because of her sluggishness or her angriness. She does not solve the needs of her house; she does not look after the things at her home. She does not correct her children; that is why everyday things get worse at home. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

As we can see in the quotes above, in Spanish as in Nahuatl, a mother is described by her ability for procreation and by her capability to feed children with milk produced in
her body. She is defined by her ability for taking care of others. It is defined by her anxiety, vigilantism, and her disposition to forget about herself and dedicate her life to take care of her children. In short, she is a hard worker in both discourses. The description of a good mother has correspondence in both versions of the term mother contained in the *Florentine Codex*.

When the discourse describes the bad mother, it uses words such as “opaque,” “stupid,” “a person who likes to sleep,” “a lazy woman who does not save anything.” In Nahuatl the bad mother is a thief, and in the Spanish version she is defined as *persona de mal recaudo* (person of bad care). She is also a liar, and a fraud in the Nahuatl version. In both cases, the bad mother neglects taking care of the children and of the house. Besides, she does not discipline her children. While in the Nahuatl version she castigates others at the same time, this is an example of disobedience and inconformity; in the Spanish version she is the cause of the problems inside her household. In general, the obligation of being a good caregiver, a good creator of life, a good feeder, and a good person who can correct the others are important characteristics a mother should have. Actually, the negation of what a bad mother is helps to shape the colonial Nahua concept. The ability to take care of the smallest children of all is depicted also in Friar Alonso de Escalona’s (n.d.) manuscript. In the Sermon titled *Second Sunday of Pascua*, he explains how infants look to their parents for the satisfaction of their most elemental needs.

*Ca anquimomachitia topilhuane yn pilztintli yn iquac itla ytech monequi niman quinotza yn inan anoço yta, inic yeuatl yn inan anoço ita quimacazque yn tlein yn itech monequi.* (Alonso de Escalona, nd)

You know, O our children: When a child needs something, the child will call mother or maybe
father, so that her mother or father will give what they need. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

However, if the child does not speak yet, the mother is the only one who can fulfill the infant’s needs.

_Auh intla ypiltzin amo uellatoa yntla tlaquaznegui, anoço ytlá/ytechmonequí niman choca, niman choquitztica quinextia yn tleyn ytech monequí. Auh yn ynan ca nelli quitlaçoatlá yn yconeuh niman quitemoa yn ytech monequí quimaca ynpiltzintli: yc mocaua, yc pachiui yn yyollo._ (Alonso de Escalona, nd)

If the beloved child cannot talk, and needs to eat, or if they need something, then the child cries, and with the crying shows what he needs. And the mother, who truly loves her child, then she looks for what is needed, she gives it to the child: so that the child stops crying, so that the child’s heart is satisfied. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Even though Escalona, or the Nahua scholar who wrote the sermon, acknowledged the capability of both fathers and mothers for taking care of their children, care during the first years was considered mother’s work. For the friars, females had a natural ability to understand their children as a result of that unconditional maternal love that friars and Nahuas attached to mothers. Thus, mother was considered the principal caregiver for infants due to her capability to love her offspring, which was understood as a natural female ability.

_Scheper-Hugues (1992: 402) proposed that motherly love is not universal, neither innate. Instead, motherly love is an ideological and symbolic representation, which finds its basis on the essential maternal conditions of the female reproductive life. She explains that under conditions of high mortality and high fertility, the demographic behavior_
brings a logic of giving birth to many children knowing already that only a few will survive infancy. In that logic, she proposes a materialistic perspective on the social construction of motherhood and the child. She suggests the existence of an *old reproductive strategy*, which implies a different maternal thinking with different maternal attachments, feelings, and sentiments. She expands this interpretation to other temporal contexts, arguing that it is the way women have experienced motherhood during most of human history. Nowadays, her arguments about motherhood have been questioned. For example, in their work about indigenous Mazahua mothers in two periods of time, Marín-Guadarrama and Vizcarra Bordi (n.d.), proposed the existence of different maternities, and Leinaweaver’s (2007, 2008) study on the circulation of children shows the multiple forms in which rearing of a child takes place in Peruvian contexts giving insights into the experience of different maternities. Thus, instead of a dichotomistic thinking, it is necessary to think of this a continuum along which it would be possible to observe different motherhoods, which is also part of the different maternities that could exist in Colonial New Spain among the indigenous population. Nevertheless, what we have is information about what the writers wanted motherhood to be in that part of Mesoamerica. The Nahuatl play *The Nobleman and his Barren Wife* (Burkhart and Sell 2009: 313–333) shows the role of the female Nahua body through what a woman should think and do with respect to maternity. In the play, a woman is sent to hell because of her rejection of becoming a mother. The text shows a married woman who does not have the desire to procreate. She is depicted as a woman who does not want to feel her breastmilk pouring from her body, and who does not want to spend economic resources on children. She resists having the appearance of other mothers, who are represented as women who lack
personal hygiene:


O my beloved younger sister, what your son is upset about is that God does not give us a single child. It has been in vain that they’ve put offerings in the churches everywhere. And now I think he is getting desperate. He wants to give all the money we have to the sick [because] he sees he has no child. But you know, O my daughter, even if a little child comes to be born—well, they are really disgraceful, annoying, dirtying, and corrupting, the way they cry and the way they pee in front of people. So, what am I to think, on my own? Whatever my heart wants, won’t this happen? Is what I am saying bad, O my beloved daughter, O noblewoman? (Sell and Burkhart 2009: 321)

Again, as in the case of the Florentine Codex, the rejection of the role of mother in this passage helps to construct the role of Nahua colonial mothers. The man in the play is noble and rich. He desires to give his property to the sick as an offering to God so that God would give them a child. He wants to be a father. The woman lacks the aspiration for conceiving a baby; she does not want to be a mother. She rejects the work of a mother because she considers it a dirty one; mothers always were dirty. The negative portrayal of
the woman reflects the meaning that motherhood should have for the Nahua in the colony:


Take heed, O my son, O my grandson, O hair of my head, O nail of my finger, O youngerst son: thou wert given life, thou wert born on earth. The master, our lord, sent thee. And thou comest not as thou wert before; before, thou couldst not defend thyself; before, thou couldst not stretch out thy arms. Truly thy mother hath given thee strength; with thee, she hath endured fatigue, weariness; with thee she hath nodded half asleep; she hath been soiled by [thy] excretions; and with her milk she hath given thee strength. But even as thou art, thou wishest to look for thyself, to move for thyself. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 213–214)

In the quotation above, the father congratulates his son on the day he begins to receive his education as a noble boy in the _Calmecac_. It was a new stage in the noble boy’s life; the father creates a brief history of his child’s life, emphasizing the mother’s work and suffering to rear the boy. She was the one who strengthens the newborn and the child in his first years. The father is aware of the work the mother carried out to make the child grow and build him strong. Sleeplessness, tiredness, and dirtiness were emphasized to illustrate the mother’s work, and such characteristics were highly appreciated from the
In the ecclesiastic discourses, there are also ideas about mothers who should naturally know how to rear infants and naturally love them but with some differences.

In *Espejo Divino* (Mijangos 1607), a mother is the one who brings the children to earth and is the one who raises the children with care, who nurses them, who creates unfinished boys who, later, fathers would transform into polished jades with their spiritual teaching. The argument is made through a figurative resource, in which the mother is linked to the earth and the father is linked to a person who polishes the non-perfect creations of the earth, which are the children:


Here is a sign. Know it. Earth is considered, is known as people’s honored mother. All the things that lie here on earth come out of it, as if it gives birth to them. From it emerge the various edible things. From it emerge, from it grow silver and gold, all the precious stones, which are not yet finished, not yet adorned, not yet polished, not yet scraped, absolutely not beautiful. So that this not polished precious stone will become beautiful, it is necessary that the jade cutter fixes it up, scrapes it, polishes it, adorns it with sacred sand. As for you
my beloved jewel, it is as if you are a precious stone, you are a precious jade. You emerged, you were born from the earth, which means mother. You are unfinished, you are not polished, you are not pure, you are not beautiful, you are not fine looking (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: Translation of page 12).

Compared to the early documents such as the texts found in the Florentine Codex, in which the mother is the one who gives strength to the infants, in this document the work of the mother becomes unfinished, imperfect. The text represents the mother with the European meaning brought by friars who think of women as inferior beings and mothers as servants of the husbands. Nevertheless, it is possible that the friars’ idea of parenthood was not a generalization even in Spain. Collidge’s (2001) study of noble women as guardians in Early Modern Spain demonstrates this difference in perspective. In her work, she proves that in times of disease, warfare, criminality, and overseas voyages, noble women became the head of the household and became the guardian of their children. In this social situation, women were living as single mothers. Thus, while their children reached the age of adulthood, mothers had political and economic power through the administration of their children’s goods.

The mother’s role differed from the one friars brought with them to Mesoamerica, where indigenous women had a more powerful social status. The ideas of the friars followed a male-cleric ideology, which did not incorporate the daily life of a Nahua household. That is reflected in the conception and roles of the mother depicted in Espejo Divino. This book allows learning about the patriarchal system introduced by the Spaniards. This discourse also reflects the introduction of the patriarchal authority that was the norm for the friars, but not for the Nahuas. In chapter one of Espejo Divino, the
incorporation of the colonial Nahua Christian meanings of fatherhood is discussed meticulously and the discussion about motherhood is only tangential. Nevertheless, wills are an important instrument to see what was the concept of motherhood and fatherhood in that society that was under the process of reconstructing not only religious views but also the whole system for rearing children. In this sense, an example of those women was Angelina, who, at the end of her life, was arranging strategies to ensure the life of her children on earth.

I, Angelina, whose father was Diego Tetlacauhtzin, say that my house and my two mecates of land that are in Toçamac; the five mecates of land that are in Tetecomallocan, and Gabriel Yztaquauhtzin knows them; and a house that Mexicatzin Feliciano knows, and other two mecates in Halloztoc, I order that when I die, my dear child Ana will keep everything. If Ana gets sick, our dear child called Diego will keep everything, and Lucas, my brother, will take care of the child, let no one make fun of them.

(Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

This 16th-century Nahua mother thought about plans for guaranteeing the existence of her children Ana and Diego used a European model as a strategy, which would help to preserve her will. With the writing of her testament, Angelina was following the European tradition of writing a testament with the help of a scribe. She was
a Nahua mother, and her decisions were part of the role she needs to follow as a mother. She left lands and houses to her elder child, Ana, anticipating that, in case that her daughter died, all the lands and houses should be for baby Diego. She not only gave goods to her children, she also gave them words that symbolize affection. By calling her children nopiltzin Ana (my child Ana in reverential form) and toconetzin Diego (our child Diego in reverential form), she demonstrated the sentiment she felt toward her offspring; those sentiments that a colonial mother would be expected to have in the Nahua and in the Spanish cultures. Like Angelina, other mothers left behind testaments with strategies for their children. María Sinatzin said in 1587 that her “legitimate” husband should raise “her” daughter Juana. She left her husband’s land and a house (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 210–211). María Salomé left land to her husband so he could raise her two children. (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 216–217).

Strategies for children’s survival were not exclusive to Nahua mothers, but also fathers. Nahua fathers who were about to die also prepared conditions for their young children to ensure their future. In some cases, if the father’s wife was alive, they left the children under her care. That was the case of Benito Muñoz, who, in 1596, gave his houses to his three children, leaving his wife in charge of their offspring and the possessions (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 228–229). Benito was also fulfilling the responsibilities he understood he had as a Nahua father.

Another father was Favian Tamatlaneuh, who, in 1593, left his land to his wife so she could raise their two children (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 234–235). In 1591, Francisco Ernandez left his two male children properties such as land, 30 pigs, 1,400 sheep, 11 bulls, two young bulls, and one cart, among other things. The mother became
executor of the children’s properties (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 246–247). In 1597, Lorenzo Acolatzin from San Andrés Algotitlan also left instructions for his son and his nephew to take care of his youngest children. Although the mother was still alive, they should support her with land, houses, and magueyes to ensure his children would survive (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999: 314–315). Leaving property to grandchildren or delegating the responsibility to others represents two strategies to raising children.

In 1598, Francisco Gutiérrez from Santa Bárbara, Ocotelulco, left his house to his wife Juana Tostlapatl and his eldest daughter, Ynés Mayor, where he ordered his children to be raised (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 302–303). Gaspar Tochquimile, also from Santa Barbara, Ocotelulco, gave his wife María Caxtilanxochitl the responsibility of keeping his house to nurture his daughters Bárbara and Pedronila. Gaspar went further in the organization of strategies to rear his daughters. In the case his wife dies, he left his sister Agueda Ylhuicatzihuatzin in charge of raising his children. He not only received lands to his daughters, but also left magueyes and money to his wife so she could take care of the offspring (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999a: 308–309).

Thus, fathers were interested in finding ways for their children to survive. The idea behind this was that bequeathing properties when the children were not old enough, the mother would be the one who would take care of them. It is important to find out if the father was dying and leaving small children, because he would bestow on behalf of his children lands, houses, animals, and objects to his wife, so she could take care of the children. Sometimes fathers would think beyond the survival of the mother designating an albacea for their children in case the mother died. That was the information gathered from the wills, but there was also the discourse of friars and Nahuas about the
responsibility of fathers inside household.

In the *Florentine Codex*, there is a definition of fathers characterized with a hierarchical power structure inside households.


One’s father [is] the source of lineage, the beginning of lineage. [He is] the sincere one. One’s father is diligent, solicitous, compassionate, sympathetic; a careful administrator [of his household]. He rears, he teaches people; he rears, he teaches others. He advises, he admonishes one. He is exemplary; he leads a model life. He stores up for himself: He stores up for others. He cares for his assets; he saves for others. He is thrifty—he saves for the future, teaches thrift, looks to the future. He regulates, distributes with care, establishes order. One’s bad father [is] lazy, incompassionate, negligent, unreliable. He is unfeeling, neglectful of duty, untrustworthy; a shirker, a loafer, a sullen worker. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 1)

Nahua scholars emphasized the father’s ability to administer a household (which is also found in the wills of mothers and grandparents). The dichotomist tendency of colonial interpretations of morality portrayed the good father as disciplined, honest, and compassionate. Rearing his children was one of his duties. He was considered a teacher
for his offspring and for others too. He was a person who used to counsel and admonish people. He was considered a model for life. The bad father was described as lazy, incompassionate, negligent in his work, unreliable, insensitive, dishonest, a good-for-nothing, and a bad-tempered male. In contrast, as it was stated in the section above, in *Espejo Divino* the parents are under the frightened service of the Christian God. For example, in chapter one, when the father Agustin talks to his son Juan about his worry related to God’s punishments, he says,

\[
\text{Muchipa noyollo contoca in quenin ixachintin tettahuan oquinmotlatzacuillli toTecuiyo Dios in ipampa innentayo innennayo. (Mijangos 1607: 5)}
\]

Always my heart comprehends how our lord God punished very many fathers because of their neglected fatherhood, their neglected motherhood. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d.: translation of page 5)

In this passage, the couplet *innentayo, innennayo* is similar to the ones found in the different *huehuetlatolli*. However, it has a different meaning. It was not the obligation of the father practicing a good motherhood and a good fatherhood for raising the children feeling supported by the Mexica pantheon. Now, the dualistic expression was used to explain how dreadful luck the father would have if the child would not learn the Christian doctrine. The father must comply with the colonial requirements for educating the boy and continuously worry about his own salvation. Comparing Bautista (1600b) and Sahagún’s (1979: Book VI) *huehuetlatolli* with the first chapter of *Espejo Divino*, the father does not show concern about going to hell. In the two sets of *huehuetlatolli*, God is used as an ally of the Nahua father and mother. However, the colonial model dictated a different pattern of authority. In Mijangos’s book, the outstanding colonial characteristic
for fatherhood is the continuous worry in which a father lives. Compared to the authority he had before the introduction of the Christian God, in this colonial setting, he was an instrument of God for educating boys. In the text, parent’s wisdom, based on the knowledge they learned from their ancestors, no longer exists.

In *Adiciones a la Postilla* (Sahagún 1993), the comparison of the soul and the body with the child and the father helps to explain the way a father should treat his child. In this case, the father is encouraged to prohibit things and to fight and whip his child; if he does not do it, God would be angry with him:

*Auh intla tiqujtta in mopiltzin jtlal qujchiua in achialonj, jn amo tictlacoaltia, yn amo ticaoa, amo ticmecaujeqj (ynjc cenca ticmalhuja in jnacaio injc amo chocaz tlaucujaz): ynin ic neci ca cenca itlacauhtica in motcaltlaliz: iehica çan ie in tictlácotla in jnacaio, yn amo iuh tictlácotla in janjma: auh ca motech ca in jqualantzin Dios.* (Sahagún 1993: 63)

If you see that your child does something wrong and you do not prohibit him, if you don’t scold him/her, if you don’t whip him/her (so you treat very well his body so he won’t cry, or be sad): by this appears that the love you have for others is very corrupted, because you only love his/her body, you do not love his/her soul in the same way, and God’s anger is over you. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

In *Apéndice a la Postilla* (Sahagún 1578: 65–66) the bad father is the one who does not want to spend his gold to feed his family; on the contrary, he afflicts and anguishes his family. The bad father is also the one who prefers to save his gold instead of looking for medicines to cure his sick child; it was part of the exemplification of care that indigenous should have for their neighbor.
Listen, you who have children, you who have a house! If you afflict, starve, or anguish the people of your household (if I assume you have gold) and do not want to spend it on them; if they are sick (but you love your gold) that you do not look for medicines for the cure, and do not look for a doctor to cure them although they are really sick; maybe they are about to die, you are sinning seriously. And it is obvious that you love your goods, your possessions, your gold much more than the body of your fellow. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

A good father should give properties and money to his children. He is the one who should provide food, good health, and discipline though the respect of the Christian God, of whom the father is afraid. Thus, as we can observe in the colonial documents the desires Nahua scholars and friars had for changing the value of such roles, which were determined by the patriarchal system that for friars was already apprehended and for Nahua scholars became an acceptable way to think about shaping the colonial Nahua society.

Nahuatl testaments written by the scribes show the real strategies fathers and mothers thought of on the verge of their death for protecting their children. Mothers and fathers were bequeathing land to their children or to others who could take care of the
littlest ones. The negotiation between the scribe and the dying parent allowed them to register some words where they refer to their children. They were not quetzal feathers or jades; they were the beloved children (*tepiltzin* or *toconetzin*). Besides the dictionaries written by the friars and the Nahua scholars, the testament is also a window to understanding that network created to raise children. The cases considered for this study indicated that parents had a tendency for leaving the children in the care of the other parent, but sometimes such planning considered a second consanguine possibility to ensure their children would survive. Other documents that show sentiments toward children are the ecclesiastic documents in which Nahua scholars had the opportunity to use an elaborated Nahuatl language to show the type of sentiments that parents were allowed to have for their children. Women were permitted to love their children, and they are able to show their love by the effort she put into raising their offspring. However, while in the early ethnographic colonial documents, the good upbringing of a child was attributed to the mother; in the ecclesiastic documents, mothers were inferior persons who created imperfect bodies. Thus, the father entered the scene as the person who would make the mother’s unfinished product perfect. Nevertheless, although the paternal figure had great power and value and subsumed the maternal figure, this role was more complex and not very fortunate. Fathers only had two options—to be good or bad fathers—according to the dichotomist Christian perspective. Through the analysis of the ecclesiastic texts, I argue that fathers were the marionettes of the colonial ecclesiastic system as it tried to gain control over the indigenous households.

In the context of colonization, such process goes toward the transformation of the cultural systems where fatherhood and motherhood are involved. In the end, it is
translated in the formation of the colonial state. The interest for interfering in the daily life of the most mundane spheres of society, which is the household, drove the Nahua scholars and the friars to enter into the home and into the roles and values that mothers and fathers had. Those areas are described in three analytical points: the intensity of parental sentiments, the attachment in this case toward their children, and the sense in which Nahua parents should construct their identities.

3. Conclusions

Consanguine family, wet nurses, servants, instructors, schools, grandparents, and of course, mothers and fathers were involved in the network that Mesoamericans created for rearing children. They were the responsibility of the community, and this social organization was the first element the colonial discourse was attempting to change. They encouraged a nuclear-family–centered ideal, in which fathers and mothers should raise their own children.

Digging into the colonial gender relationships based in the studies of Pizzigoni (2007), Burkhart (1996, 1997), and Kellogg (1986), I still consider the existence of a Mesoamerican complementary relationship between mothers and fathers in terms of the value of the work they performed inside the household; it was not diminished for either of the two social actors. There are texts such as Escalona’s sermon, in which the father is also responsible for the care of the youngest. In this case, it is possible that Nahua scholars were responsible for that interpretation, or Escalona’s thoughts were different to the friars of his times. But it is only one representation found among many other Nahuatl ecclesiastic sources.
What is clear is the existence of the idea of a natural maternal love that allows women to take care of their children. Colonial discourse always presented a dichotomistic portrayal of the good and bad father and the good and bad mother. Women who want to have babies and raise them, no matter their sacrifice, were good mothers. The good fathers were those with the desire to have children. Such paralleled ideas diverged in the values that a father and a mother had for friars and Nahua scholars. The *huehuetlatolli* gives an account of the great importance the Nahua mother had in Mexican society. Her work resulted in the creation of strong children who were ready to enter into a superior stage of formal education. However, her work in the colonial ecclesiastic texts, such as in *Espejo Divino*, speaks about the father’s need to perfect the child that the mother reared with great imperfections, which was the result of a lack of indoctrination. In short, all the work recognized by the Nahua society became undervalued, as it was in Spanish society.

Fathers also experience changes. Instead of a father and a mother with authority over their children as it is presented in the ethnographic documents, the authority in the colonial households was deposited through the father figure. However, fathers in ecclesiastic discourse were represented as frightened of God because He would punish them if they did not indoctrinate their children. At least in the discourse, the father became the main instrument of the ecclesiastic power to transform actions and beliefs through the threat of punishments that may send the father to hell. This is a clear example of the European idea of patriarchy being introduced in Mesoamerican territory.

Thus, it is clear now that there were transcendental changes to the Mesoamerican network of childrearing during the early period of the colony, at least in the discourses constructed by friars and Nahua scholars. They left behind the transcendental
participation that grandparents, aunts, and uncles, as well as individuals outside the consanguine circle such as godmothers and godfathers, and others who worked inside the household taking care of the children. Parents are depicted as the only and principal actors. However, a preponderant patriarchal authority substituted the authority of the Nahua fathers and mothers. Father was the one who should rule his household, always with a constant fear of the Christian God. In the case of the mother, she continued being recognized by her capability for biologically reproducing their society and being caregivers, but lacking the immense social value they had prior to colonial times. That was the change friars and Nahua scholars were aiming for in their colonial discourses related to childrearing.
Chapter 3

Babies in Nahuatl Texts: Colonial Discourses on Practices of Love, Birth, and Childrearing for Nahua Parents

This chapter specifically deals with the ideas discussed about love and care for Nahua babies who lived in Central Mexico around the 16th and 17th centuries, and it is centered on the daily life and rituals that caregivers performed for them. Those aspects discussed by two social actors, the friars and the Nahua scholars, can be grouped into similarities and contradictions, rejections or appropriations of specific cultural elements for caring for and loving Nahua babies. How the Nahua babies should be cared for, how they should be breastfed, and whether the baby should sleep with the mother were topics writers did not record with great description. Nevertheless, the small passages of texts or paintings representing babies are the sources in which this study bases its findings.

In this theoretical context, infancy in colonial Mesoamerica is considered a social space (James and Prout 2005), in which caregivers, friars, and Nahua scholars discussed the values and the practices that should be performed with babies according to categories of gender, social class, and ethnicity. In colonial settings, such topics were a place in which ideas of colonized and colonizers entered into a field of negotiation and confrontation, and where the desires of the colonizers were registered in the documents written in Nahuatl by the native scholars.

In order to explore the world of Nahua babies seen by friars and indigenous scholars during the end of the 16th and the first part of the 17th centuries in central
Mexico, this chapter is organized in five parts. First, I explain the meaning of babies during colonial times in the Nahua region. Part two presents a series of practices of care for babies who are not born yet, and the process followed for receiving the newborn. The third part is a discussion about the representation of Nahua babies and mothers as the accepted caregiver. Part four shows the collided encounters that friars and Nahuas experienced over two rituals: the welcoming of babies and the process of grief following the death of a baby.

1. The Meaning of a Baby Boy and a Baby Girl in Colonial Mesoamerica

In this section, the idea of babies as a socio-cultural construction involved in a colonial context is discussed. As it was described in the first chapter, López Austin (2004) has already developed a typology of childhood in which he includes specific stages for infancy. Piltzintli itic ca (pilli: child + tzin: reverential + tli: absolutive singular ending = child/ itic = inside / ca: verb to be = the child inside) was an infant inside the mother’s womb. A baby who was still breastfed was called oc chichi piltzintli (oc: still/ chichi: to suckle/ pilli: child + tzin: reverential + tli: absolutive singular ending) or oc chichi piltontli (oc: still/ chichi: to suckle/ pilli: child + ton: diminutive element + tli: absolutive singular ending), which means, “little child who still suckles” or “the suckling baby.” The infant who was not able to speak was addressed differently, using words such as conetontli (conetl: child + ton: diminutive element + tli: absolutive singular ending), which means “little child.” There are two words that Siméon groups together in the same definition: conechichilli (conetl: child + chichi: to suckle + lli: absolutive singular ending) and conechichipil (conetl: child + chichi: to suckle + pil:
diminutive element) to define an infant or a suckling baby. *Xochtic* (R. *xochtia*) is defined by Simèon as *joven muy niño, que todavía no habla*, which means, “a very young child who does not speak yet.” Finally, Simèon (2004 [1885]: 125) attributes two roots to the word *conealacton* (*conetl*: child + *alaua*\(^{14}\): slippery + *ton*: diminutive element). Those are *conetl* and *alaua* or *alactic*: words used to speak about a slippery entity. Nahuas also used metaphors to refer to a baby, such as *oc atl* (*oc*: still/ *atl*: water) or still water and *oc tototl* (*oc*: still/ *tototl*: bird) or still a bird. Simeón (2004 [1885]: 722) defines it as *muy niñito, todavía en la cuna*, which means, “still a very small child, still in the crib.”

Children in Nahua society were considered individuals who participated in society with specific roles and had special connections with the gods. For this reason, adult Nahuas would respect their first years, then the child would become a special element in the reproduction of their society (Quezada 1977: 309). Babies were not only important for their spiritual connection; Nahuas also enhanced their ethnicity, their social class, and their gender. Specifically for the babies’ identities, I propose that the infants’ gender roles were determined by the context in which Nahuas referred to babies during their daily life and rituals. A social web composed by different caregivers as well as midwives and soothsayers, participated in the process of shaping the babies’ identities. It was the start of the process for identifying a Nahua baby as a male or a female, a commoner or a noble, a Nahua or a non-Nahua.

When the midwife (also called *ticitl*, *temixiuitiani*, or *tlamatqui*) received the baby, she welcomed him or her with special words according to their gender. In Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli*, the welcoming of the boy occurs using the following words:

\(^{14}\) *Alauac*: resbaladizo, que se escapa como un pez, como el jabón, etc. (Simèon 2004: 20); slippery, it escapes as a fish, as the soap, etc.

Now, the midwife addresses him. If it is a male she says to him: You have arrived to earth, my youngest one, my dear male child, my dear boy. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

The baby’s age is addressed with the word noxocoio (no: first person singular possessive pronoun + xocoyotl: youngest child) (Siméon 2004: 775). As for the girl, she is received with the following words:


My dear girl, my youngest one, noblewoman, you are fatigued, you are exhausted. Your father, the person, the lord of the near and the nigh, the creator, the maker, sent you. You reached the earth. There, your relatives, your kinfolk struggle to survive, look for their living. It is hot, it is cold, it is windy. It is a place of thirstiness, of hunger. It is a place of displeasure, of sadness, of suffering, of exhaustion, of affliction. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

The girl is addressed as the youngest one too, using the word nochpuchtzin, which means “my dear girl” or “my dear daughter.” As in the case of the baby boy, nochputzin is a term used right after she is born—not until the girl can perform specific female roles in the household. The midwife is also using reverential terms to address the newborn girl. There is confusion about the moment in which the midwife stops formulating the
discourse for the little girl. In the following parts of the *huehuetlatolli*, the discourse has a neutral style, which is different from the Spanish version that continues addressing the girl specifically. This situation resulted in two different versions of the discourse elaborated for newborns.

In both, the Nahuatl and the Spanish versions (see Sahagún 1979: Book VI, 144v–146r), the midwife tells the baby that he or she might live for a short period of time, and asks whether the caregivers (including herself, the mother, the father, and the grandparents) deserve the new baby. In both versions, the midwife wonders about the roles that *Ome tecuhtli* and *Ome cihuatl* gave to the newborn, referring to the child’s possible aptitudes. Both texts refer to the chances that the child may become a criminal or may develop the necessary skills to work in society. The only place where the midwife’s discourse differs is when she speaks about the child or addresses the child directly as a girl or as a non-gendered child, as in the following lines:

*Oticmjhijovilti, oticmociavilti, noxocoiouh, notlaçopiltzin: cozcatl, quetzalli, tlaçotli, otiimaxiti: ma ximocevitzino, ma italtech ximaxiti.*

(Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 168)

You are exhausted, you are fatigued, my youngest one, my beloved child, necklace, feather, precious one. You have arrived; now rest, relax. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Whether or not it was a mistake, the point is the similitude with which the text addresses the girl and the children in general. It is the same discourse applied to different subjects. *Cozcatl, quetzalli, and tlaçotli* are used for both. Further, both male and female children can be exhausted and are welcomed to rest after their birth. The place where the discourse changes into a gendered style is in the following two *huehuetlatolli*, where the
midwife buries the umbilical cords according to the gender of the child.

The gender assignment also happens when the soothsayer describes the luck that a baby would have according to the day he or she was born. The sort of activities girls and boys should perform in their adult life was determined not only by the day they were born, but also by the social position of their relatives. For example, infants from noble lineage who were born during the day Three Crocodile might become astrologers or sorcerers, and were considered inhuman because of their attribute of changing into something else. Infants of commoners became turkeys, weasels, or dogs, and had the ability to remove their legs. They would have an enormous influence over women and would be able to know their secrets. They could persuade people, yet they would live in great misery.

The same fate befell female infants born during the day Three Crocodile. No matter if noble or commoner, they would not get married. They would not settle a house; they were not seen by anyone; and like the males born in this date, they would live in misery. Illustration 1 is the picture that accompanies this narrative. It is an infant, probably a boy, who is standing up inside a pond. A man is holding him with his right hand and with the other is pouring water to the baby. The woman also pours water to the baby using a container.
Girls and boys born during the fateful day One House were described with great detail. Baby boys would become thieves, patrons of sin. Women were lazy and loved to sleep. Boys would die in battle, and they were good candidates for being sacrificed, bursting in the fire, being stabbed, or having other people cook him. Boys who were born during this day would commit adultery, covet women, and commit suicide. They would like gambling; they would love to play *patolli* or the ball game called *tlachtli*. Baby girls born on the day One House would be incapable of performing women’s tasks, such as weaving. Like the boys, they would become promiscuous, slaves, and good candidates for sacrifice (see Illustration 2).

Ethnographies from colonial times reports the “morality” of infants; another aspect that defines the colonial Nahua baby. The *Florentine Codex* broadly described a baby as “the suckling one, the tender one, the one within the womb (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 13). Nahuas considered a baby to have existed as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed. Infants were more vulnerable than other children; they were metaphorically described similar to the rest of the older children. They were precious people, bracelets,
greenstones, and turquoises. Parents and grandparents metaphorically called them “my hair” and “my fingernail.” A little boy would be a thorn of the maguey, while a little girl was called “my little dove” or “my little one” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI).

*Illustration 2. The child born during the day One House (Sahagún 1979: Book IV, chapter 28).*

Such depictions of babies are also proof of what Robertson (1959) proposed about the European influence shown in the dichotomist perspective friars used to understand the Mesoamerican world (see Burkhart 1989; López Austin 2004). Discourses about babies in the *Florentine Codex* are organized following the European dichotomy of the good and the bad. Nahua babies were considered good if they remained healthy, clean, polished, and without blemish. Good infants were the ones who succeeded in growing.

*In qualli conetonli, haquan quenami, tetzcaltic, chipactic, tlacamelaoac, tlacanezqui, mozcalitia, mooapaoa, papatlaca, patlani mana.* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 13)

The good baby is healthy, he/she is polished, clear, healthy, human in appearance. He/she is cared for, raised, flutters, flies, grows. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)
The bad babies were defined by their lack of health. They got easily sick and the deformities of their bodies, such as a harelip, a missing body part, or ultimately death, were the aspects that made them bad babies.

In haiecntli conetontli hacemelle haonmanamic, teupoliuhqui, tenqua, xocotonqui, matzicul, hitlacauhqui, mococoa, tlanaui, mjqui. (Sahagún, 1953–1982: Book X, 13)

The bad infant [is] unfit, without resistance to sickness, full of sickness, hare-lipped, lacking an arm, a leg, blemished. (Sahagún, 1953–1982: Book X, 13)

While the representations of the bad and the good fathers or mothers were explained by moral behaviors, in the case of infants, the excerpt above shows that the characteristic that made a baby “good” or “bad” was health. If the baby was sick or if he or she died, then he or she was a bad baby. This characteristic points to a term of an unwanted fragility, where babies were not allowed to become vulnerable. The same sentiment was expressed in friar de la Cerda’s (1599) perspective about the fragility of babies. In his book entitled Libro intitulado vida politica de todos los estados de mugeres where he explains the way a woman should be raised in her different stages, he declares, “[i]n one way it makes me feel sorry and in another way shame to think how skinny and fragile is the beginning and the origin of man (who is the most superb of all the animals)” (de la Cerda 1599: 517v). He reported good and bad characteristics based on the babies’ capability for communicating ideas to adults. De la Cerda’s perspective agrees with the meaning of the Spanish word infante, which in Latin means “unable to speak”: in (not) - fant (speaking): not speaking. The indigenous perspective was linked to the luck each baby had according to the day he or she was born, which was clearly represented in the
Mesoamerican system of divination that friars wanted to uproot from indigenous beliefs. Such fragility was also attributed to babies in ecclesiastic documents. In Sahagún’s sermon about the third mass of the Day of the Birth of the Lord, the text written in Nahuatl explains the fragile condition in which Jesus was born, which corresponds to the ideas Nahua scholars had about babies. Using the words registered in the *Florentine Codex*, the baby was again the suckled one, the one who does not talk yet—attributes related to the physical conditions of a baby.

_Sahagún (1563)_

The child now born is God and also a man, and as a man He started and began when He was born. As a man the Child is just small and needs to be protected, borne in arms, suckled, etc., and as a man He cannot speak; he is still like a mute, like other small children. (Sell and Anderson n.d.: 21)

Cunningham (1995: 30) stated that depictions of deities doing daily activities are useful in creating historical reconstructions of childhood because people draw from their own experiences in order to tell a story. In the case of the quote above, baby Jesus represents those characteristics that a common baby has. Even though he is God, he cannot speak, he needs to be in his mother’s arms; Jesus was a baby just as the other ones, he needs to be breastfed, he is fragile.

Besides the background related to their ethnicity, their gender, and their social position, Nahua infants carried with them a fate dictated by the date of their birthday. The Nahuatl sources do not show elements that indicate baby girls had a lower social standing.
than baby boys. Both of them had special characteristics according to their gender, but each also had fatal or promising destinies according to the day they were born. This egalitarian situation contrasted with the ideas of gender value brought by the friars. For instances, when Spanish friar de la Cerda (1599: 6v) explained that baby girls had a lower status than baby boys, he wrote that even the mothers’ breastmilk was more nutritious when they had a baby boy than when they had a girl; and that the soul would enter into the girl’s body later than boys.

2. A Baby Within the Womb: Mesoamerican and Christian Practices for Bringing a Baby into the World

The stone sculpture from the Huasteca, which represents a goddess giving birth (see Illustration 3), depicts matters of fertility that gives an account of the way such representations were used in prehispanic times. As in other types of sculptures, this female was neither a common woman nor a ruler, but instead a goddess. Before the conquest, they were used to depicting deities in ritualistic environments.

After the conquest, such representations started to change. Pregnant women were depicted in the Florentine Codex with a midwife checking the woman’s womb (see Illustration 4). Pregnancy in colonial Mesoamerica brings forward issues of cultural beliefs about biological human formation. In Spain, the Christian belief regarding how babies were formed in the mother’s womb was that semen was the element that created the bones and the muscles of the individuals (de la Cerda 1599: 3r).

*Con la virtud del varón hacen huesos y carne, la mujer hace al bebe con nueve meses de gestación y 24 de leche materna.* (de la Cerda 1599: 3r)
Bones and flesh are made with man’s virtue. The woman makes the baby with nine months of gestation and 24 of maternal milk. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

López Austin (2004: 190) states that in Mesoamerica, Nahuas believed babies were formed in the mother’s womb with the woman and man’s sexual fluids, which were called cihuayotl and oquichyotl respectively. López Austin (2004: 190) translated a list of the words or metaphors used to describe those fluids:

- Tlacaxinachtli: human seed
- Eztl, tlapalli: “the blood, the color,” which is the metaphor to speak about heritage
- Ocotzotl, oxyotl: another metaphor that means “the turpentine, the ointment,” and is related to the fluid’s consistency
- Ixpampa huetzi or ixpampa quiza: “what falls from the front side”

There are other terms related only to male fluids, such as nemocihuilli for example, which has a sexual meaning because with the storage of this liquid, the sexual inquietude grows.

After the woman knew she was pregnant, there were rituals performed to recognize her new biological and social status. It is reported in Book VI of the Florentine Codex that, to ensure a healthy pregnancy, the woman should start worshipping the gods, which meant to sigh and to cry in front of them.

Worshipping the gods and preparing for successful childbearing and childrearing were not the only similarities between Mesoamerica and Spain during the 16th and 17th
centuries. There were also parallel suggestions for the woman’s daily life. Pregnant
women needed to worship the gods because only supernatural forces were the ones that
made possible the survival of the child. Besides offering incense, worshipping implied
sweeping, cleaning, and fixing the altars offered to gods inside the home. It also implied
avoiding sleeping too much and to wake up during night. Worshipping day and night was
important. Life was fragile, and it was impossible to know what would happen later.
Thus, pregnancy was an important period to pray and to ask the gods and goddesses for
the wellbeing of the new life.

Auh in axcan nochputze, xocoiotle: ma oc cenca
moiolicatzin, ma oc cenca tle ticmpomachitia, ma oc
mochoquiz, ma oc melciciviliz, ic xoie,
xonmoietztie: ma oc itlan xonaqui in ochpanoaztli,
in tlacucujiltzli, in chico, tlanaaoc tlaviquiltzli,
tlatequiltzli, in tlaecapehvilitzli: auh in copalli, in
tlenamactli: ma iooalli xoconztoto, macamo
xoconvelicachioa, macamo xoconaviiacachioa in
cochitzli: oc cenca oc moceniollocopa in
xonelcicivui, quenmach nenti in macujl in matlac:
anca quen tamjque o. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book
VI, 142)

And now, O my beloved daughter, O youngest one,
be specially welcomed! Be especially careful; let
there be thy tears, thy sighs. Be diligent in the
sweeping, the cleaning, the arranging of things, the
cutting [of wood], the fanning [of the fire], and the
offering of incense. Hold vigil. Do not practise
the sweetness, the agreeableness of sleep. Especially
sigh with all thy might; [say] how will this be in a
few days? How will this be with us? (Sahagún
1953–1982: Book VI, 142)

Around the same century in Spain, Friar de la Cerda (1599) also recommended
pregnant women look for supernatural favors related to childbearing. He encouraged
women to pray continuously and to take the Virgin Mary as the intercessor between them and God. Besides, women should also ask the same favor to the saints, to whom they were most devoted. Before the birth of the child, the woman was encouraged to confess and make a testament to organize how she would like to arrange her possible death and the fate of her soul. For friar de la Cerda, a female giving birth meant danger. Pregnancy was considered a sickness from which women could die easily, and de la Cerda shows how Christian women offered their pregnancies to God. Ann, the mother of the Virgin Mary, as well as the mothers of Saint Berard, Saint Dominick, and Saint Idelphonsus, asked God to give life to these babies and offered the children’s lives to the service of God.


Revelations were common among those women who offered their children’s lives. That was the case of Saint Domingo’s mother, who had a dream about her child in
her womb with a burning ax in his mouth. It was interpreted as the vocation of the child to evangelization. Saint Clare’s mother also gave her child her name based on the revelation she had. While she was praying and crying, asking that her child be brought to life and be healthy, a crucifix told Saint Clare’s mother not to fear, because she was going to have a child who would give clarity to the world. Based on those examples, de la Cerda (1599: 353r–354r) stated that after childbirth, mothers should thank God for the good childbirth, and for the child they now had under their care. Besides, they had to entrust the child’s life to God again.

To sigh and to cry, to offer the child to the Christian God or the Mesoamerican gods are similar ideas from both the colonial texts and the Spanish documents. After all, babies were offered to those supernatural entities in which their communities believed. Such behaviors were strategies for surviving the unknown. Differences in the explanations of how to have a successful outcome in pregnancy are relevant because, while in the ethnographic documents the elders taught women how to take care of their pregnancy based traditional knowledge and the care of the womb, in Spain the survival of the new mother and her baby depended on the good will of the Christian God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.

Miscarriage was an issue that both Nahuas and Spaniards hoped to avoid. The discourses in which they mentioned topics related to miscarriage were the huehuetlatolli and the Guides for Confession. However, there were two different types of discourses. While in the huehuetlatolli the elders tell the pregnant woman to avoid specific practices to avoid abortion, the Christian documents used the logic of violation from the fifth commandment that instructs the followers not to kill. For example, Molina’s (1569) short
version of the guide for confession has some questions addressed to the woman.


Have you drunk some deadly potion such that you cast something out, in order to just cast out your child, the little child that was inside of you, or so that you got sick? Did you make him hurt his mouth so he could no longer suckle your breast? Or did you kill your baby because when you were sleeping you crushed the baby? And when you were still pregnant did you keep rubbing your belly, such that you cast it out, such that you killed your child? Was it perhaps not baptized? Did you carry a big thing, or did you grind a lot so you “moved” [your baby]? Did you drink a beverage so you became infertile and you would not have more children? (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

In the Nahua list of methods for preventing the loss of a baby, the elders would say not to tease the baby, not to provoke sicknesses from the bad actions the woman might perform. They advised the woman to avoid carrying heavy things in their arms, or carrying heavy things. They also suggested not to abuse the bath because the hotness of the water would damage the baby. Elders also encouraged her not to expose it to scary things or things that provoked nausea. Different from the Spanish source, advice was not only for mothers but also for the couple who were expecting the baby. The elders encouraged fathers to avoid using disrespectful words when speaking about their baby because it would put the life of the baby at risk. The couple would not have to avoid
sexual relations. In fact, they should have sex moderately. However, abuse would mark
the life of the baby, and he or she would present a deformity, or during birth, the baby
would be involved in “dirtiness,” which meant semen. It would cause not only the baby’s
death, but also the mother would die (Sahagún 1979: Book VI, 121v–122r).

Besides the advice included in the *huehuetlatolli*, there were omens related to
pregnancy and baby survival. For instances, there was the belief that if the tamales stick
to the pot, the male who ate it would not shoot the arrows correctly during battles, and his
wife would never give birth. The same applied to the woman. Her babies would be
adhered to her womb and would never have a successful childbirth (Sahagún 1979: Book
V, 16v):


Concerning tamales stuck [to the cooking pot] as another deception of the natives, it was said that the
men and women would not eat them. It was stated
that if the men were to eat them, when they would
shoot arrows in warfare, the arrow which was shot
would not find its mark. Or perchance therefore
they might die, or one’s wife would with difficulty
bear children. And just so was it as to a woman. If
she were to eat tamales which had stuck [to the
cooking pot], she could not bear children. Her child
would only adhere to and thus die in her womb.
Therefore the mothers sternly forbade them to eat
tamales which had stuck [to the cooking pot].
(Sahagún 1953–1982: Appendix of Book V, 185)

Other advices encouraged women to perform specific behaviors in order to have a healthy child. For example, Nahuas believed women should walk outside the home putting some ashes on their breasts or on their waist as a precaution.


Of the pregnant woman there also was a delusion of the natives. If a pregnant woman wished to go walking during the night, then she placed a little ash in her bosom. It was said that thereby she protected the child within her, in order that she should not meet [an apparition] somewhere. In this wise she took care of her child. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Appendix of Book V, 186)

Pregnant women would put ashes or wormwood—called *iztahuiatl*—on their breasts, and men should put ashes or a pebble on their chests to protect the babies getting sick of *aiomama* (swelling) or *cuetzpalicivitzli* (inflammation of the groin) (Sahagún 1953–1982: Appendix of Book V, 190). They should also avoid looking at an executioner or a man while he was injured because the child would be born with the umbilical chord wrapped around the throat (Sahagún 1953–1982: Appendix of Book V, 189). Mothers should not look at the sun or the moon during an eclipse, because the child would be born harelipped; the only way a woman could look was placing an obsidian knife in her breast (Sahagún 1953–1982: Appendix of Book V, 189). A mother chewing *chapuputli* (asphalt) would put her baby on danger because she or he would not be able to suckle
breastmilk (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book V: 189). Parents should not walk at night. If the mother does not obey, she would make her child a crying baby. If the father was the one who walked at night, then the child would get sick of the heart (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book V: 189).

Illustration 4. Midwives checking pregnant women (Sahagún 1979: Book VI).

A relevant difference is also shown in such recommendations: While the dos and don’ts of the Spanish pregnant women are attributed to the knowledge of the friar, and the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (de la Cerda 1599), the Mesoamerican tradition relies on the knowledge that elders were building from ancient times. It recognizes the knowledge of the old women and old men, and they emphasize that their ancestors were receivers of such knowledge, and now, it was their turn to pass it to the new generations (Sahagún 1979: Book VI, 121v–122r).

De la Cerda metaphorically speaks about a pregnant woman as an adorned tree that has delicate and gracious flowers that should be kept safe because they could easily freeze. That is why the friar suggested that pregnant women should carefully carry the babies. To take pregnancy to full term, he bases his recommendations on the writings of the Romans. He recommended not giving bad news to pregnant women, as well as not
making them angry. People should satisfy the pregnant whims. They should not be near places with smoke or bad odors. They would neither dance nor jump or run. He compared the behavior of pregnant women with that of pregnant female animals, because they keep safe from danger remaining in their caves. Pregnant women should use loose cloth around their waists and should not carry heavy objects. However, moderate exercise was recommended (de la Cerda 1599: 354r).

It is clear that behavior during pregnancy was an issue that friars and Nahua scholars followed with interest not only in central Mexico; it was already an issue in Spain. Pregnancy was an important topic that ruled the depiction of the Virgin Mary, one of the most important Christian references for the indigenous. There were at least four cultural parallels related to pregnancy. One was that babies were formed in the mothers’ womb through the accumulation of male and female secretions. The second was that women had to pray in order to ensure a successful childbirth, but in this case the difference was the deity to whom the woman should pray. The third was that women received advice, but the difference was that, while the Nahua woman received advice from the elders and from a midwife, in Spanish discourses, it was the Roman philosophers who advised women and relied on their faith of the Virgin Mary and the saints.

The discourses left behind shows the appropriation of these spaces by the Spanish males who brought not only a midwife, but to male philosophers and doctors. To sigh, to pray, and to cry were elements that were present in both cultures, but the way in which they were understood were different. Abortion and miscarriage were events that both cultures wanted to avoid. However, the procedures and cultural beliefs were different,
and it was related to blame. In Nahua society, avoiding miscarriage was a matter of biological surviving for the baby and the mother; it was a matter of maintaining the body’s health through practical activities such as avoiding carrying heavy things, or informing the pregnant women about omens so they could endure their months of pregnancy without harming the baby. As we saw in Molina and de la Cerda’s sources, the Christian institution considered intentional abortion part of the list of mortal sins that condemn the soul of mothers to hell—a punishment that would not exist in the Mesoamerican territory. There, every wrong action would be a punishment administered by the community. For now, there is not enough information about miscarriage and abortion to declare contradictions or similarities between the Spanish and the Nahua practices. Nevertheless, during colonial times, the shaping of sentiments and attachments toward babies became a mechanism of social control. At the end, the texts show colonial anxieties of friars and Nahuas trying to modify the status of autonomy that Nahua women had for their own body.

3. Nahua Mother Love for Babies

In Mesoamerica, an important actor in the process for ensuring the survival of a baby was the mother. However, illustrations of a loving female or a loving male taking care of the children were not used in prehispanic depictions of human figures. Whether in sculptures, figurines, drawings of codices, or paintings on walls, the interest of the artists was not the representation of daily activities or sentimental events, but those of religion or rulership.

The only archaeological representation of females with little humans I have for
now is a female figurine made of clay that carries one or two little humans on her ams. The other representation is in prehispanic codices such as the plates 17 to 20 of Codex Borgia (Díaz and Rogers 1993: 62–63).

Illustration 5. Two colonial illustrations of babies. The first one is from Molina’s (1569) Confessionario Mayor. It depicts the presentation of Jesus. The second illustration is from Book IV of the Florentine Codex. It is a representation of a woman and a man bathing the baby.

However, representations of babies in such sources are always an element of uncertainty. In paintings, there is no way to ensure the tlacuiloque (painters) were representing a baby. They may also be adults or babies, even though the size of the image was not a pattern to represent babies. The size of the person was related to the role he or she played in the picture. If they were prisoners, they were depicted smaller than the captor was. A woman carrying a bundle on her back could be carrying a baby, or a sculpture or a figure of a divinity made of clay. Even though it is impossible to ensure a baby was depicted in the different representations in prehispanic documents, it is still possible to speak about the elements related to newborns or babies. Depictions of a crib, persons hanging from breasts, and individuals showing the umbilical cord are elements that make the prehispanic world of babies.

As in example of such statements, the Codex Borgia has representations of deities with elements related to newborns or babies. Byland (1993: xix) describes plates 16 to 20 with images of deities linked to 80 days (five days in each one). Supporting Seler’s view
of assigning the directional Mesoamerican system qualities to days and the deities, Byland explains that each deity has a cardinal direction.\textsuperscript{15} The goddesses and gods are performing child-related activities such as gods holding humans with umbilical cords, and goddesses who are about to breastfeed a person. Although for Byland it is not clear the purpose of those figurines that are accompanying the gods or goddesses, he states that the five deities are nursing their own infant. \textit{Mayahuel} (Illustration 6, painting \textit{a}), the goddess of maguey is nursing a serpent; \textit{Tlazolteotl} (Illustration 6, painting \textit{b}), the goddess of filth and earth, represented with spindle whorls in her headdress, is accompanied with a human figure who is approaching to the goddess’ breast. \textit{Mictecacihuatl} (Illustration 6, painting \textit{c}), the goddess of the underworld is nursing a skeleton vomiting blood. \textit{Chalchiuhtlicue} (Illustration 6, painting \textit{d}), the goddess of running water also has an individual floating in front of her and is about to start suckling. In a different way, \textit{Mictecacihuatl} (Illustration 6, painting \textit{e}) is vomiting a skeleton with blood. The five female deities are sumptuously dressed with skirts, headdresses, sandals, \textit{quechquemitl}, and jewelry. The female deities have their arms open to their sides. One of their breasts is exposed, and the human holds it with his or her hand while the rest of the body is floating in the drawing. It is unclear if the intention of the painter was to represent babies; nevertheless, goddesses are in environments with elements concerned to the baby’s world.

\textsuperscript{15} According to Seller (in Byland 1993: xix), there are five cardinal directions, which are north, south, east, west, and center, interpreted as a lynchpin that connects the four cardinal points, and links them to the houses of gods “above and below de disc of the Earth.” In addition, Seler proposes that there is an association between the five groups of four days and the cardinal directions, thus, in the 15–17 plates of Codex Borgia, there is a correspondence in the first day of every group of days, and it is linked to the Alligator-West, Serpent-South, Water-Center, Reed-East, and Movement-North.
Illustration 7. Gods holding non-gendered newborns from umbilical cords: (a) Macuilxochitl, (b) Xipe Totec, (c) Tezcatlipoca, (d) Xochipilli, (e) Tonatiuh (Díaz and Rogers 1993: 62–63).

Such prehispanic images show elements related to babies, but do not show the sentiments that European paintings depicted. Christians represented the relationship between a mother and child with paintings and sculptures of the Virgin Mary taking care of baby Jesus. Usually, she is represented carrying, breastfeeding her baby, or adoring him. For example, Illustration 8 shows the Virgin Mary carrying baby Jesus. Sebastian López de Arteaga, the artist of that portrait epitomizes the Virgin as a loving mother. She looks at baby Jesus while holding him in her arms, and the picture is showing the “natural” maternal love.


According to Escalante Gonzalbo (2003: 170), Nahuas appropriated the European style during the very early stage of colonization. He used image a included in Illustration 10 to show similarities between the women’s gesture and the paintings of the Virgin
Mary adoring baby Jesus, which, according to the author, is a common form of representing the Virgin Mary and her child since the year 1000 C.E. The positionings of the women and the babies are reminiscent of the paintings created to represent Jesus’ Nativity. Paintings shown in Illustration 10 were also another place in which Nahuas left important depictions of their Native culture. They found it a way to represent female roles and baby roles. For the first time with these paintings, Nahuas painted the bodies of babies and some situations related to the practices of childrearing.


In Illustration 10, the gazes of the women and men who are looking at the baby are inspired by the Nativity paintings of the epoch. The Nahua painters represented the Nahua babies with European patterns, an indication of the indigenous appropriation of
European models used to communicate sentiments regarding childrearing issues—an issue never shown in such form before conquest. The process of appropriation came along with the opportunity to show special characteristics of their indigenous culture.

Illustration 10. Mothers receiving advice about newborns (from Sahagún 1979: Book V).
For example, women represented in Illustration 10 and 13 are all noble because they are wearing an adorned huipil (the piece of cloth that covers the upper part of a female’s body) and a skirt. The adornment of the huipil consists on a rectangle on the chest, sometimes colored red. Generally, the women have their hair combed and lifted at the upper part of the head in the form of two horns. The babies that lie down on the floor or in the women’s arms are naked, which are also similar to some of the painting of the Nativity.

Escalante Gonzalbo describes picture a of illustration 10 as a woman who is accompanying the mother and the baby. However, I think she is not only a visitor; she is the midwife, the woman who helped the mother to bring the child into this world. In pictures b, d, g, and k from illustration 10, one of the women has wrinkles in a specific part of her face, which marks the woman as old, or someone with more experience than the new mother. I argue that it is the midwife—an important person that was responsible for full-term pregnancies in the Nahua community, and who had an authoritative knowledge that made her one of the most powerful women in the Nahua society.

Pictures a, e, g, h, j, l, and m from Illustration 10 have a different reading; these pictures show women with uncovered legs. One of the legs is bended to the left, while the right leg is extended to the front. The other woman is holding the baby with her hands or has the child already deposited on the floor. I propose that such pictures represent the moment of childbirth; they are the mother and the midwife bringing the baby into the world. Picture j is the utmost explicit example where the mother is the most uncovered of all other mothers in the pictures. Since colonial drawings of women avoided representing female bodies exposing legs or breasts, this group of pictures is carrying a powerful
message, representing women showing body parts. Childbirth would be the only justification to show women exhibiting their body.

Colonial ethnographic representations of babies with their caregivers show the identities of the individuals who made the pictures. The fact that the painters were noble males made them characterize the babies and the women in such way. The cultural experience they had as Nahua children and the religious values learned from the friars permeated the work of the Nahua scholars at the moment of painting mothers and babies.

For example, Illustration 11 accompanies the text that narrates the fate of babies born in the day One Deer, which was a day of great fortune. This image is relevant for the colonial styles used to represent babies and motherly love. Here, a woman is carrying a baby. She sits in the dirt, wearing a huipil and a skirt. She has her hair untied. With one of her hands, she is holding her naked baby, who is able to stay straight even though he is a newborn. The baby is painted with nipples, belly button, and a lot of dark hair. The woman and the naked baby are looking at each other; they are touching each other’s

Illustration 11. Woman holding a baby in the One Deer house (Sahagún 1979: Book IV).
hand. They illustrate a maternal sentiment—a mother-child bond. Such expressions are also found in the depictions of the Virgin Mary carrying baby Jesus. Surely, Nahua painters appreciated this painting, or identified with it. They mixed it with the activities that noble female Nahuas would perform after childbirth.

I tried to link the pictures shown in Illustration 10 with the text of the codex where they were set; however, sometimes the relation between them has little concordance. An extreme case happened with the illustration and text related to One Death house. The text describes the fortune of male babies. It was a lucky and powerful date attributed to the god Tezcatlipoca, the smoking mirror. The text describes a ceremony during which boys choose a name for the baby, which should be inspired by the different names credited to the god Tezcatlipoca, which were Yaotl, Cenyaotl, Necoc Yaotl, Chicoyaotl, or Yaomahuitl.

Illustration 12 is the picture included in Florentine Codex for One Death house. However, it does not correspond to the text. At the top of the picture, the painters put the day sign One Death consisting of a skull and one circle that represent the number one. Below this number, there are three women: the one depicted in the middle of the image is in a kneeling position with her hair untidy, her hands are not touching the baby; she has them at her side as if she was in desperation. She has two symbols near her face. The upper symbol means that she is talking, and it is the only picture when the mother has it. The other symbol is a tear. While the woman is talking and crying, her baby lays down, his entire little body rigid and without expression. The baby is dead, and the mother is grieving the child. There are two women in the background of the picture. One of them is pointing with her finger to the other woman, who is listening to her. That woman is
advising or reclaiming something to the other. The discordance between the image and the text shows two different ideas. The writer and the painter did not have the same discourse. Thus, the dissociation of such arguments are showing the clash of prehispanic practices of baby rituals, while simultaneously showing the grief that the painter thought a mother could feel with the death of her newborn.

Illustration 12. Illustration of three women with an apparent death baby born during the One Death house (Sahagún 1979: Book IV, chapter 9).

The way in which Nahua painters represented the relationship between women, men, and babies gives different insight into indigenous childrearing practices during colonial times. Nevertheless, these versions are the ones interpreted by Christianized male Nahuas. First, they used the European depictions of Mary and baby Jesus as a template to represent the mother role, and mother-related sentiments. The body of a baby and the midwife as an authority are the other two themes painters emphasized. Depicting childrearing practices and rituals through painting became a way for indigenous people to portray the existence of a “civilized” Nahua society through the clothing and personal
appearance while introducing an indigenous female world. There was a clear transition to the representation of motherly love. The prehispanic pictures of the world of babies were not about a mother’s love.

Those depictions changed during the colonial times where Nahua *tlacuilos* epitomized the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus in their creations. This image of motherly love was attractive and was used to exemplify women and babies. They found these representations useful and meaningful to portray noble female and baby worlds. But in the end it is a male interpretation of a world barely known for friars. We can see it in the paintings of newborns, as well as in the dissociation between the writing and the picture.

4. Collided Encounters of Rituals for Babies

I have shown that in both cultures, babies were characterized by their fragility, vulnerability, and dependency toward others, especially toward women. They were the ones who needed their mother’s assistance so they could be cared for and fed. The existence of babies was also constructed by their gender in both cultures, although Spanish friars gave a different value to girls and boys. Besides, babies in higher social positions were also the ones upon which Nahua scholars and friars focused for constructing reports or guides for a successful upbringing of the smallest ones. Now let us analyze the existence of childrearing rituals. Rituals contextualized babies. The ideological beliefs related to babies involved the myths of the origin of humanity, intertwined with the celebration of rituals for babies, and put the existence of the youngest of all in one of the most confronted colonial battlefields, which is the introduction of the newborns into society and the mourning of the deaths of babies. In the
following subsections, I analyze baby rituals to try to reconstruct what a baby was and the related babyrearing practices in colonial times.

4.1 Nahua Baby Bath and Christian Baptism

In Codex Mendoza (1992: 56v–57r), it is said that when a Nahua baby was 4 days old, the midwife visited the family and bathed the baby for the first time. The instruments used by men or women were brought into the ritual so the baby could have not only a name, but also a gender specified by the activities attributed to men or women. Water, which was the main element of the baby bath, was used to clean the baby, accompanied by a midwife’s discourse, who had a main role in placing the child in his or her community.

Water directly connects the Nahua system of beliefs with the Christian myths and the rituals of initiation in both cultures. Nahuas bathed the newborns and Spaniards baptized them. Both of them were using water to welcome the babies to the community and to the system of beliefs. In the Christian tradition, water was the element used to purify their souls from the sin of Adam and Eve, which caused them to be expelled from paradise. Holy water was poured onto the baby as the solution for purifying the souls so they would become part of God’s grace. In the same myth, childbirth becomes condemned for women because it implies a great suffering and the possible death of her and/or her baby. Suffering during childbirth had a contradictory logic between cultures. In the Christian religion, such pain was a punishment that God gave to women after Eve’s sin, while in the Nahua tradition, it was the most important moment in the life of a woman (see Burkhart 1997).
Friars and Nahua writers used different strategies to teach Nahuas about the values, daily practices of childrearing and rituals related to newborns and mothers. One of them was the sermon, a type of discourse used for reading in front of a Nahua audience. In the sermon *Sunday within the Octave Day on the Birth of the Lord*, mothers are shown as imperfect workers who brought imperfect children into the world. It was the work of the friars to purify the souls of babies through baptism.

Our hearts already are damaged [in] all of us when we come to life inside our mothers, for there is none of the virtue and grace of our Lord in them; only sin is in them. When we are born our hearts are spoiled. For we are born in sin, and then when we are baptized our hearts are cured because on account of baptism grace is placed in [our hearts] and they thereby become good. Before we are baptized, no one is good of heart, etc. (Sell and Anderson n.d.: 23)

Thus, colonial Nahua babies were redefined as the tender ones who needed the care and the breastmilk of the mother, and at the same time were polluted individuals who had a bad heart. To reach God’s forgiveness, friars asked Nahuas to baptize their children. While the welcoming of the baby in the Mesoamerican tradition consisted of the bath performed by the midwife and the reading of the luck of his or her life by a
soothsayer, the Christian ritual consisted of pouring holy water on the head of the baby, accompanied by prayers told by a friar or a secular priest. The end of the ritual consisted of the writing of the baptismal record. According to my findings of records in the Toluca Valley, they registered the name of the person who was baptized, the names of the father and the mother, the names of the godfather or the godmother, and the date. All this information was written in Nahuatl.

Although the indigenous communities of Mesoamerica accepted baptism, the process of change found in the colonial documents shows that Nahua scholars used the ritual bath as an element to show their native culture as advanced as the one colonizers tried to impose. They were showing that their cultural system was also regulated by the baby bath, a ritual that shared characteristics with the Christian baptism.

In the *Florentine Codex*, there are 12 illustrations that show the bath of a baby (see Illustration 13). In all of the featured images, there is a main woman, the midwife, who is bathing the child, assisted by another woman or man, and sometimes by two men or two women. In Illustration 13, we can see another place where Nahua scholars show similitude between cultures.

The texts do not report any participation of men in the bath, but they are part of the ritual in images d, g, h, j, k, and l. These may be just another place where they were reproducing the European images in which baby Jesus is taken to celebrate the ritual of circumcision or to be presented at the temple. However, it is possible that the images reflect the necessity of representing a male involved in the Mesoamerican rite and may be showing that men were also involved in such rituals. Or perhaps the painter did not have enough space and needed to represent the two Nahua ceremonies in one scenario: the
bath and the moment in which the mother went to see the soothsayer to know the luck of her newborn.

Although there is uncertainty in the representations in the Codex, we can say that there was a shift in the spaces that Nahuas created to welcome the babies. Instead of the celebration of at least two ceremonies performed by a woman (the midwife) and a man or a woman (the soothsayer), the patriarchal Christian tradition gave that space to the friar—a man who was a representative of the Christian God. The complementary nature of the midwife and the soothsayer echoed the gendered relationships in the traditional Nahua household. They left behind the participation of two indigenous actors that once had a great importance in the life of babies. One was the soothsayer as a representative of the indigenous cosmology. The second was the midwife who was a powerful female member of the indigenous society and had an authoritative knowledge in matters of health, in addition to being a liaison between the Mesoamerican pantheon and the Nahuas.

4.2. Mourning the Dead Nahua Baby in a Colonial Contested Field

The other ritual that shows the cultural confrontation of Spanish and Nahua ideologies related to childrearing was during the death of a baby. Nahuas and friars agreed in the existence of a powerful maternal ability in rearing babies. However, the religious perceptions of each one entered into a disagreement for thinking about how to
express love for their dead babies. In the *Guide for Confession Large and Small in the Mexican Language* written by Bartolomé de Alva (1634) and translated by Sell and Schwaller (1999), a priest asks a woman the following question:

\[
\]

When your child died, did you put your breast milk on him with a reed? Did you bury it with him? Or where you buried him: do you go there to spill and pour your breast milk on him? (Alva 1999: 85)

With this question, Alba is reporting a ritual during which the dead baby is deposited next to the cornfield and the offering to the little child is breastmilk. While the mother offered her dead baby the most precious and nutritious nourishment the baby would drink in life, the early colonial thought filled such ritual with a sinful meaning. Such discourse not only touched the female practices of caring a dead baby, it also touched the ideological understanding of where the souls of babies went after their death.

Such custom of burying babies in the cornfield is not sufficiently documented. But a similar ritual is reported in Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* when the father explains that babies are buried next to the maize bin with the following words: *Amo çan nen o, nopiltze in cuetzcomatl ijxpan toco coconetzitzinti, in pipiltzitzinti: ca iehoatl qujnezcaiotia in qualcan in ieccan vi* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 116), which means, “it is not in vain, my child, that the babies, the infants are buried next to the maize bin. That means they go to a good and fine place.” Thus, the baby is buried next to a place related to corn, which are places for growing or storing the most important Mesoamerican food. The places were good and fine; they were propitious places for burying their dead babies. For
Nahuas, babies were clean and pure. They were beloved and desired, as it is reported in the Florentine Codex: *ca in pipiltzitzinti, in coconetzitzinti, ca cenca tlaçotin tlaçotlalo, nêneco: ypampa in chipaoaque, in oc notqujticate chalchihuhti, maqujzti, teuxiuhti, tlaçotin* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 116); which means, “the babies, the truly precious, the loved ones, desired, because they are pure they remain greenstones, bracelets, fine turquoise, precious, beloved.” The ritual of giving sustenance to the dead babies by putting or throwing breastmilk on their grave, as well as the belief that they lived in a place where they were nursed by the tree of sustenance, was in radical contradiction with the Spanish perceptions of dead babies. They had a classification of babies that consider what babies were sinners or not. If a baby received baptism before his or her death, he or she would go to heaven. However, if the baby died before baptism then the luck was different—the baby was not a real human and would forever be in Limbo.

In Spain, friar de la Cerda (1599) explained that parents who lost a baby should be mourning their infant only a little because it was God who took their child away:

*Quando a la casada se le muere un hijo que de sus entrañas salio, deue lleuarlo con gran paciencia, y procurar que la pena natural que dello se recibe, passe ligeramente considerando que no fue hombre humano el que se le quto delante de sus ojos, sino el poderoso dios, que siempre hace con nosotros lo que mejor nos esta, y mas nos cumple. Y viendo que se le lleuo Dios en tiempo que se va derecho al cielo, por no auer sido lastimado de la malicia y engaños deste mundo, le deue de dar muchas gracias por ello: porque si viuiera largos tiempos, pudiera ser perderse, o tener algun mal fin, con que dexara en gran dolor a sus padres. Y pues que el que le crio le llevo a su Reyno, y supo muy bien lo que hizo: lo mas acertado es, darle infinitas gracias.* (de la Cerda 1599: 354r–354v)
When a married woman loses the child born from her womb, she must bear the loss of the baby with patience, attempting to feel that pain lightly. It was not a human man who took her baby away from her sight. It was the powerful God who always does with us what is best for us. And since God took him, soon enough then he goes straight to heaven, because he was not wounded by the malice and deceits of this world; she should give him many thanks for that, because if the baby would live for a long time he could be lost, or have some bad ending, by which he would leave his parents with a great suffering. And since He who created him took him to his kingdom because He knew very well what He did, the right thing to do is to give him infinite thanks. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

De la Cerda explains that God makes babies die for reasons only He knows. The friar explains that since the world was a malicious place, a place of dishonesty, God was avoiding parental suffering that might happen during the children’s growing. Thus, instead of sadness, parents should thank God because they could have a better life. This discourse may coincide with the idea of babies going with Tezcatlipoca to suckle from the tree of sustenance. However, the difference was that in the Christian doctrine, not all the babies went to heaven because if they were not baptized the place they would go was Limbo. Bringing such ideas into New Spain, where Mesoamericans already had a religious explanation about the destiny of the dead babies was not easy. Such inquiries were registered in colonial sources such as in the Apèndice a la Postilla (Sahagún 1993: 94–95), where the discourse is constructed by a confrontation against the elders’ ancient beliefs. For them, the unweaned, dead infants became Tezcatlipoca’s chalchihuites, fine turquoises that were the most cherished jewels for the Nahuas. They were tender children living happily with the god Tezcatlipoca, who took the infants to a place called
*Tonacatecuhtli ichan,* which means, “the house of the lord of sustenance,” where they were suckling the flowers of the nursing tree and where they stayed waiting for an opportunity to return to the world (Sahagún 1993: 96–97). Those babies who already ate maize and other foods had to go to *mictlan* (López Austin 2004).

Notwithstanding their admiration for the way elders advised the new generations about discipline, in *Apéndice a la Postilla* (Sahagún 1993), as well as in Alva’s (1999) *Guide for Confession,* the writers implied that the elders were sinners, liars who invented stories—an argument that discredited the social position and value of the ancestors. From the Christian perspective, there was not such a happy place with infants near the most important god of the Nahuas’ pantheon. Instead, the dead babies had two options: If they
were baptized they went to heaven; if they did not receive baptism before their death, they would be in Limbo until the final Judgment. Limbo was a place where there was neither suffering nor joy—a place of eternal darkness—where the non-baptized infants resided (Alva 1999: 87). How did one explain the death of an infant to the indigenous, whose ancestral belief indicated that the unweaned babies who died were enjoying their time next to god Tezcatlipoca, and later, would return to the world?

The colonial discourses show preoccupation for the future of the infants. Molina (1569) suggested strategies for administering baptism to infants who were about to die. Since babies had an opportunity for salvation if they were baptized before their last breath, the friar describes the circumstances in which Nahuas could baptize babies who were in misfortune during childbirth or were about to die without baptism. There are five rules Nahuas should learn to administer baptism: The first one states that a man or a woman can baptize in times of need. This is for non-baptized adults and babies, but I narrow the explanation down to the babies since this is the topic of this chapter. This first rule states that laypeople can only baptize sick babies or those who cannot go to the church. If the baby is not sick or does not live far from the temple, and the person performs a baptism, then the person would be in mortal sin. Molina explains that it is the responsibility of friars and priests to administer baptism to the healthy babies (Molina 1569: 22r–22v).

The second rule is about the sacred water used in baptism. The Nahuas were not allowed to use holy water to baptize; only the priests can use it. However, if the baby is about to die and it is the only water the Christian Nahua has, then he or she is allowed to pour it on the baby. Since the important thing is to save the baby’s soul, the person is also
allowed to use polluted water. The Nahua should learn special words when pouring the water into the child; he or she had to use the words “Ego te baptizo,” which means, “I baptize you” (Molina 1569: 22v–23r).

The third rule dictates the obligation of baptizing the child who is still alive. If the baby already died and the Nahua baptizes the child, then he or she would be sinning. When the person was unsure whether the child was alive or dead, Molina gives the opportunity to the person to avoid sinning with a special procedure: the Nahua should say “yntla otimic, amo nomitquatequia: auh yntla tiyoltica, Ego te baptizo” (Molina 1569: 23v), which means, “if you are dead, I do not baptize you, and if you are alive, I baptize you.” The extreme strategy for saving a baby’s soul comes when Molina explains that if the baby cannot come out of the mother, but the head, a hand or a foot is visible, the person should pour water on the visible body parts of the baby even when they had not finished coming out of their mother’s womb:

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\]

And if [the baby] cannot be born, but a hand, or a foot of the still-alive baby has come out, has appeared, then you quickly pour water on its hand or its foot and you will say: I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. And if only the head came out, you will baptize it [the head]. And with a mantle you will cover the body of the woman who is giving birth. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

The friar does not determine the criteria for declaring the child alive or dead, even
though there is only one visible part of the baby. Nevertheless, the Nahua should say “Ego te baptizo, in nomine patris et filij et spiritus sancti. Amen,” which means, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” In those cases, because the sexual parts of the mother were exposed but were also considered polluted, the person should cover the mother’s body. Just then, the baptism could be performed. If the baby survived but the words were not clearly pronounced, then the child should be taken to the church so the priest could complete the ritual.

The fourth and the fifth rules are related to the evaluation of the complete understanding of the meaning of baptizing the child even though the Nahua was not a priest. An ideological apparatus is addressed in this case. The person who would perform the baptism should be convinced of his or her actions, metaphorically explained as being sincere with his or her heart in performing the baptism, and should evaluate the memorization of the right words that should be pronounced.

The love for babies as a sentiment and the practices for caring for them had a similar likeness in both cultures because they looked at mothers as being able to take care of the youngest ones due to their natural maternal love. However, when the religious beliefs entered into the understanding of where babies remained after their death, an enormous dispute started that questioned Spanish and Nahua beliefs. The ecclesiastic literature written by Nahua scholars and the pictures created by the tlacuiloque (Nahua painters) were originally produced with the intention of uprooting native beliefs. Nevertheless, Nahua scholars and friars started representing feminine spaces of power based on their own native, Christianized male understanding.

Thus, there were changes in the ritualistic spaces where indigenous people used to
welcome their babies that diminished the complementarity that existed in the social life of the Nahuas. Midwives continued helping women with childbirth, but the new religion took away the authority she and the soothsayer had in performing the welcoming of the babies. Thus, the documents depict social changes that would transform the ways in which gender and generational complementarity was practiced in early colonial times. In its place, such rituals were delegated to only one male Christian authority, and simultaneously constructed new social relationships. The *compadre* (godfather) and *comadre* (godmother) came onto the scene, which opened another area of power for males as well as for females. For example, from July to December of 1592, the baptismal records from the Nahua community of Malinalco, found by Olliver Alberto Carmona Mañon (see Illustration 15), registered one couple that baptized a child. Their names were Don Juan Baptista de Santa Maria and Doña Maria Jalaine. Most of the children were baptized having only one godparent. From 46 records with names of parents and godparents, most of whom had a Nahuatl surname, there were two godfathers: Miguel Servilano and Nicolas Zacanochtli. The rest were women; there were 44 godmothers. From those, Maria Xoctli was the godmother of four children; Monica Xoctli, María Quatoa, and Maria Cuetla baptized three each; and Ana Monica, Martha Xoctli, Juana Cuetla, Agustina Xoctli, and Apronia Maria baptized two each. Thus, there are nine Nahua women who, for some reason, occupied spaces of power, as the title of godmother gave social status. Those are the new social relationships that were articulating the colonial indigenous society in central Mexico (see table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of times found in baptismal records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana monica</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha moytla</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha xoectli</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha cuiltach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha tozamotzin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica tonaca</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica xoectli</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria zelo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria quatoa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria cuetla</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria salome</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria tonaca</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria xoectli</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donya maria de la corona</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria cahuaxach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doña maria de san Francisco</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana zelo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana cuetla</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana xoichi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana quaye</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana tonaca</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana maria</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana tomic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalena mabe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia cello</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doña yabarbosa. Ana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donya ysabel de zonica</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agustina xoectli</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustina cohuaxXXX</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara maria</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apronia maria</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXX quatoa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mago. ma.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catarina quatoa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Names of godmothers recorded from July to December 1592 in the town of Malinalco.*
Illustration 15. Page of the baptismal records from 1592, written in Nahuatl, from the town of Malinalco. Photo by Oliver Alberto Carmona Mañón.

Finally, the love for babies was a sentiment administered not only for the survival of the young, but it also was involved in Spanish and Nahua contradictions showing real cultural clashes. The beliefs regarding dead babies are one of these contested spaces. While for Nahuas, dead babies were waiting for their returning to earth while waiting in
the tree of sustenance and were accompanied by the main Nahua god *Tezcatlipoca*, the Christian beliefs sent them to Limbo. While Nahua women were used to perform rituals of grievance that implied the caring and feeding of the dead baby, for Christians, such practices were pagan; those dead babies were not so human.

5. Conclusions

The perspectives of Mesoamerican childhood brought by earlier scholars gave the starting points to discuss the topic of babyhood and childrearing. Intensity of feelings and the attachment toward babies that mothers had were debated between the Christians and the Mesoamericans. Gender, ethnicity, and class, as well as generation were important ingredients that shaped this colonial discussion.

The ecclesiastic and ethnographic materials highlight the colonial interest for understanding and transforming the types of feelings toward babies. Although in both cultures mother love was considered natural, the shifting value of women and the role of mothers in colonial times was part of the modifications that Nahuas and friars made through the texts. The final ritual of grievance toward a dead baby was the clearest exemplification of a cultural confrontation between the Christian and the Nahua beliefs related to the love for babies.

The existence of sources written in Spain gives more information about the issues written by the friars and Nahuas during the same time. There were three cultural parallelisms about pregnancy: the behavior and feelings that pregnant women should practice during pregnancy, the tradition of giving advice about how to ensure the baby be born without any problems, as well as avoiding abortion. However, the contexts in which
would happen those three ideas were different. For example, while the Nahua ethnographic documents emphasizes on showing strategies for bringing children into society, the Spanish sources were showing consequences of culpability and punishment. For example, if a woman performed an abortion, she would become a sinner. Thus, in colonial central Mexico, pregnancy became a mechanism of control where the ecclesiastic power wanted to decide on the sentiments produced during pregnancy and childbearing.

Gender attached to Nahua babies was another important issue built around the theoretical proposals of López-Austin (1984). It was clear that the gender for the babies was assigned as soon as they were born, and although the philological studies report neutrality on the analyzed words, the drawings are useful to understand the rituals performed for babies and the moments in which a baby became a girl or a boy.

Nahuas appropriated the ways in which Spanish painters depicted the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus, including Saint Joseph adoring the baby in the Nativity. They found the illustrations meaningful and used the European style to illustrate rituals and daily practices related to indigenous babies, mothers, midwives, and soothsayers. Such paintings, in many cases, show different intentions between the text and the writing that were part of that reconfiguration of colonial attachments and sentiments that a woman should experience.

The study of rituals brought findings about changes occurring in the spaces where indigenous societies used to welcome babies. Such change brought about a transformation of the indigenous’ social life. While midwives continued helping during childbirth, at the same time, they and the soothsayers lost the spaces of power they had
previously occupied. According to the documents, it was the friar or the priest who were now responsible for welcoming the babies, and, at the same time, there were new spaces where women and men enhanced the social status through the figure of the godparent.

Although Nahua scholars were working near the friars, the exploration of babyhood and its strategies of care are a space in which Nahuas still had agency to record their voices. The ecclesiastic literature written by Nahuas and the images created by the Nahua painters were originally produced with the intention of uprooting the native beliefs. Nevertheless, Nahua scholars started representing feminine spaces of power based on their own native, Christianized, male understanding. They used the same space for preserving rituals and childrearing practices for Nahua babies, which was one of the last efforts to show the similarities that both cultures had. Thus, the indigenous culture survived the colonial processes that attempted to change the Mesoamerican cultural system in which babies were important social subjects.

Surely, the world of Nahua babies was a social space in which different social actors were disputing the meanings and practices related to them. As seen in this chapter, the early colonial times brought uncertainty to the understandings of what a baby was and how the community should take care of him or her.
Chapter 4

Colonial Reconfigurations of the Roles and Childrearing Strategies for Children who Perform Chores

*Inic centlamantli capitulo. Oncan tzinti, umpehua in amoxtli in oncan mitohua: ca huel innahuatil in tettahuan quimixtlamachtizque in impilhuan: yehica ca toTecuiyo Dios quintlatlatzacuitiz, intlacamo Teoyotica quimizaltizque quinhuapahuazque, qualtica, yectica quimmachiotlalilizque. (Mijangos 1607: 3)*

The first chapter, where the book begins, in which are told what the laws are for the parents to teach their children, because our lord God will punish them if they do not raise them, bring them up, in a religious way, if they do not give them examples in a good and proper way. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: translation of page 3, emphasis added)

The passage that opens this chapter shows the interest that a friar and a Nahua scholar had for reconfiguring practices of childrearing for those girls and boys who already performed activities by themselves. It is the beginning of the first chapter of *Espejo divino*, written by friar Juan de Mijangos (1607) and the Nahua scholar Agustín de la Fuente, a book that Barry Sell (1993) considers the longest *huehuetlatolli* since it has a similar use of the Nahuatl language. I do not consider it the longest *huehuetlatolli* because, although it contains codes of conduct and ideologies that the religious institution expected to build in the personality of the indigenous children, it does not contain the description of the things children should perform beyond the worshipping of God. The detailed information about how to respect elders, how to behave in front of people, how
to do the chores inside and outside the household, and other behaviors are absent in the first chapter of *Espejo divino*. Its content is narrowed to the activities girls and boys should learn in order to worship the Christian deity. It is a document that shows the appropriation of the elaborated Nahuatl language. It really is a Christian doctrine written in form of a dialogue in which the friar and the Nahua appropriated different metaphors and an elaborated Nahuatl discourse to explain the ideology, the discipline, and the punishments that indigenous Nahua parents should practice with their children. It was published at the beginning of the 17th century, around the same time that Bautista’s (1600b) book of *huehuetlatolli* was published. In both documents, the *huehuetlatolli* and *Espejo divino*, there is a consistent theme of raising indigenous children in “the good and proper way” expressed with the Nahuatl diphrase *qualtica, yectica*. However, the good and proper way did not have the same meaning for both cultures. As was explained in this chapter, that phrase was ambiguous under the colonial transformations that took place during early colonial times in Mesoamerica.

The third chapter was a discussion on the meaning of a baby and of the different practices for raising them. Based on colonial indigenous texts, this chapter presents the reconfiguration followed by the methods of caring and the roles that parents and children used to raise the age group. Burkhart (1989: 131–132) identifies them as children from the nobility who were ideally raised under a strict discipline, who should learn to perform chores, for which food was limited, to whom obedience to the ancestors was encouraged, and whose sexual desires were repressed. Such characteristics of the age group were specially differentiated by gender. To be a girl or a boy was determined by their economic participation in the community, and the morality they should learn and
practice. Thus, those characteristics refer to the roles they had in the reproduction of the household, the morality as a series of accepted cultural codes related to respect, and sexuality. Education then, became the mechanism to homogenize knowledge and behaviors among the individuals who belonged to colonial Mesoamerican society. In this chapter, girls and boys are not classified by age but by their ability to manage Nahua morality and religious views, which were in constant transformation, and by their ability to learn and perform specific chores assigned to a specific gender. In order to understand friars and Nahuas’ perspectives on shaping the strategies or raising Nahua colonial children, this chapter is organized into four sections. The first part outlines the type of children that this chapter talks about. The second part is a discussion of the work and worship performed by the children as the main characteristic of conflict between the ideals of childrearing for Mesoamericans and the Christian friars. In the third part, I present the characteristics related to an ideal manual of conduct that Nahuas, friars, and Nahua scholars expected the children to follow. The final part is an overview of the important points discussed through the chapter along with general conclusions.

1. What Children are we Talking About? Nahuatl Terms for Girls and Boys

Due to the imprecision of the age of children who can perform gendered chores in the Nahuatl sources, this section is an examination on the already studied categories used to name children of different stages in order to give new suggestions of classification of children. I begin this discussion with the categorization of the stages of the life of the Nahuas, proposed by López Austin (2004: 322–323), who divided children into different phases from babyhood to adolescence, based on words seen mainly in Nahuatl
dictionaries from early colonial times. He groups children in two before they move toward adolescence and proposes to name those 6 years old or younger as conetl, conepl, and pipil. Children older than 6 years old were classified as pilontli and piltzintli. He explains that the stages of childhood did not have a classification according to gender.

The next stage is related to children who start having physical changes. Drawing connections between the Nahua and the occidental stages, López Austin identifies the stage of adolescence where the words already included the gender of the child. For “adolescent” females, López Austin identifies the words ichpuchtontli, ichpuchpilontli, ichpuchcaconetontli, cihuapiltzintli, ichpuchztintli, ichpuchpiltzinlti, and ichpocatl. Those words are translated in Spanish as mocuela, and sometimes muchacha, which, in both cases, mean “young woman;” they are exclusively reserved for young women leaving behind words related to childhood. Molina describes the word ichpochootl as the condition of a woman for being a virgin; ichpochtli is described as a virgin or a woman at the age of marriage, and ichpochtiztli is defined as an abstract idea of a virgin woman. The meanings in the dictionaries were determined by the understanding that Molina had about girls, a very limited definition based on the European meanings of women that permeated the configuration of the dictionaries. In this respect, Burkhart states the problematic activity of friars for gathering information about women inside households:

Women’s domestic life was a subject which the early friars had little knowledge and much fear […] for a friar to rub elbows with native women in such close and dimly lit quarters might give rise to temptation in his own mind and to suspicion in the minds of others. (Burkhart 1997: 27)

Thus, Molina’s constricted definitions of “girl” based on virginity are
consequence of this fear for the forbidden gender. It is also noticeable when we compare the meaning of males classified by López Austin (2004: 322–323) as adolescents. For this group, he identifies the words telpuchontli, telpocapiltonli, telpocaconetontli, oquichpiltzintli, telputzintli, telpocaton, oquichpiltontli, and telpocaconetl.

The classification related to boys follows a different logic. In Molina’s dictionary, young men or boys were called oquichpiltzintli (Molina 2004: 77v). The words telpocaconetontli and telpocapiltonli were equally described as mozuelo de poca edad; which means “small young male of little age.” The words telpcatl and telpcato were not defined with words related to childhood, but only with words related to youth; they were defined as mancebillo o moçuelo, which means “young man” (Molina 2004: 96v). Thus, virginity was not an issue for conceptualizing a boy.

López Austin leaves the words ichpocatl and telpocatl to refer to young people in the early stages of youth, and ichpuchtli and telpochtli as young people in plenitude. Nevertheless, in Molina’s dictionary, ichpocatl is defined only as mozuela, “young woman,” with no difference in meaning from the other words.

In his classification, López Austin adds a stage of nubility, in which the children are sexually mature, ready for marriage. The terms for nubile women are iyolloco ichpuchtli, ichpuchtlapalihui, omacic ichpuchtli, omacic iyolloco ichpuchtli. For the nubile men, the terms are instead iyolloco telpuchtli, telpuchtlapalihui, omacic telpuchtli, omacic iyolloco telpuchtli tlapalihui, iyolloco nemi tlapalihui, and iyolloco nemi telpuchtli.

From all these terms, he identifies the use of the roots ichpochtli (defined as “virgin” or “marriageable woman”) and telpochtli (defined as “young man”) and concludes
that those are the basic terms referring to their gender, and, combined with other terms, point to young men, not boys.\textsuperscript{16} The words omáćic and iyolloco are used to refer to the stage of maturity during youth. López Austin (2004: 322–323) explains that omáćic means maturity, and literally translates it as “he/she reached something” or “he/she arrived to somewhere,” referring to reaching the peak of virility or femaleness, respectively. The word iyolloco has an abstract meaning; it refers to the arrival of the person to the place of his or her own heart, or when he or she now lives, which is maturity.

For those stages, the use of the occidental term “adolescence” is inappropriate; the meaning is not the same. Actually, if we use that term, we are applying a third concept in a context where the Spanish and the Nahuas were reconfiguring the terms to name children and young people. I don’t know if during the 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries the word “adolescencia” was used in Spain, but there were terms that referred to three stages in the life of the child and the young. It is a mistake to imagine the existence of a stage of adolescence among the colonial Nahuas because it was an occidental concept; different studies have shown that emotional changes in individuals of such an age are not homogeneous. There is no information about emotional disequilibrium in Nahua girls and boys during their physical changes. What I propose is to name the stage with Nahua terms that we can find in the dictionaries in order to set stages according to the cultural context of the Nahuas.

Molina (2004: 32v) defines ichpochcatepitoytol, ichpochcaconeyotl, ichpochpiltonyotl, ichpochpiltzinyotl, and ichpochtepitoytol as “mocedad de moças,” or

\textsuperscript{16} In comparison, the stages of adulthood are constantly using oquichtli and cihuatl.
“young stage of young women.” Most of the time, the composition of those words have
the particles -ton, and -tepiton, which indicate smallness and reinforces the condition of
young girls; in the case of ichpochpiltonyotl, it is accompanied by the explicit word niñez
which means “childhood.” In the same way, Molina (2004: 96v) registered words related
to boys. Telpocayotl is defined as mocedad de este, “youth of this one.” Telpocaconeyotl,
telpocapiltoyotl, telpochcaconeyotl, and telpochconeyotl are defined as “childishness or
youngness,” telpochtli and telpochpilttoyotl lost the definition of childishness and only
consider the meaning of “youth.” In the case of the words for young men, the use of the
root telpochtli for referring to small and older boys or young children is clearly described.
Thus, ichpochcatepitoytotl, ichpochcaconeyotl, ichpochpiltonyotl, ichpochpiltzinyotl, and
ichpochtepitoneytotl are words that can be used to refer to girlhood and telpocayotl,
telpocaconeyotl, telpocapiltoyotl, telpochcaconeyotl, and telpochconeyotl can be used to
refer to boyhood.

Although the stages examined in this chapter are the ones that refer to the children
who can perform chores, it was based on the entries of a dictionary that may not have
been in everyday use and were generated for the purpose of gathering very specific
information. Such criteria are limited to the meaning of the word—in most of the cases
without contextualization. In codices and huehuetlatolli, as well as ecclesiastic
documents, the words for referring to children are not limited to the terms mentioned
above, and actually make use of metaphors or the creation of other gendered words such
as oquichtl (man) and cihuatl (woman). For example, in Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli, when
the parents promise to take the baby boys and girls to the calmecac or to the telpochcalli
once they grow, they refer to the babies by their gender: oquichpipiltotonti and
cihuapiltotonti (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 209). Also, when the midwife is welcoming a newborn girl, she addresses the newborn with the words “nochputzin noxocoiou, cioapilli” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 209), which means, “my girl (or my daughter), my youngest one, noblewoman.” Although the girl is a newborn, the midwife exalts the noble lineage of the baby girl with the word cioapilli, and to her condition of young girl through the use of the word ichpochtli.

In the case of a boy, the midwife welcomes him with the following words: “Otimotlalticpacquixti, noxocoiouh, noqujchpiltzin, notelpuchtzin” (Sahagún 1953–1982: 167), which means, “You arrived to earth, my youngest one, my male child, my son.” The midwife is not using the words related to babies, but to boys or girls addressed by Molina as young men. In the huehuetlatolli where the midwife cuts the umbilical cord of the boy, she addresses the child with neutral terms such as notlaçopiltzin (my precious child), however, to address the newborn girl, she uses the words cihuatl, nochputzin, nocioapiltzin, cioatzintli.

Another of Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli reports the way commoners welcome their newborns, “Oticmijhiovilti, oticmociavilti, noxocoiove notelpuchtze, anoço, nochpuchtze otimaxitico in jtlalticpactzinco totecuyo” (Sahagún 1953–1982: 192) which means, “You have suffered fatigue, you have exhausted yourself, my youngest one, my boy, or my girl, you arrived to the earth of our lord.” In this male discourse (we know this because of the suffix –e in most of the nouns), besides the use of the word noxocoiove, which means “my youngest one,” the age-condition of the newborn and the lack of nobility, the common folk addressed the child with the words notelpuchtze (my boy) and nochputze (my girl), and are addressing the child with the gender.
In the case of older children depicted in Juan Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli*, when the mother and the father admonish their daughter and son, respectively, children are addressed with metaphors like *nopiltze, nocozque, noquetzale* (Bautista 1988: 274), that means, “my child, my necklace, my quetzal feather” when a father is referring to boys. The mother uses the words *noconetzin, nococotzin, nocihuapiltzin* when the mother is addressing her daughter, which means, “my child, my dove, my noblewoman.” She also refers to the girl as in *tinocozqui, tinoquetzal*, which means “you who are my necklace, my quetzal feather” (Bautista 1988: 312).

Now, through a revision of the words used to address the boy in Bautista’s (1988: 330) *huehuetlatolli* reporting the discourse when the father admonishes his little son, the words used are *nezzotze* and *notlapallotze* (Bautista 1988: 330), which means, “my blood, my color,” and *noyollotze* and *nonacayotze* (Bautista 1988: 332), which means, “my heart, my flesh.” And when the father admonishes his grown-up son, he not only still addresses him with the words *nocozque, noquetzale* (Bautista 1988: 334), but also with a combination of expressions: *nocxie, nomae…ticozcatl, tiquetzalli, auh in ticuitlapilli, in titlapalli* (Bautista 1988: 334), which means “my foot, my hand, you are a necklace, a quetzal feather, and a tail, a wing.” Also, when the newborn noble boy is welcomed by the community, he is addressed with the following words: *Noxiuhticatzine, tlacatle totecoe, tlacotzintle, tlaçotitlacatle, chalchiuhtle, maqujztle, teuxiuitle, quetzalle, tzontle, iztitle* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 183), which means, “my turquoise one, master, our lord, beloved one, beloved person, greenstone, bracelet, turquoise, quetzal feather, hair, nail.” In Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli*, this refers to an admonition to a group of boys, as the father addresses his sons as *nopilhoan* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 87), which means
“my children.” When the boy is ready to marry, the father addresses him with the following words: *nopiltzine, notelpuche, or nopiltze, notelpuchtzine* (Bautista 1988: 338), which means, “my child, my young man” (or boy or son, depending on the meaning for *telpochtli* we would like to use). In the case of Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli*, he also uses *tinopiltzin, tinotelpuch* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 113), which means, “you who are my child, my son.” But the difference in Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* is the use of words related to the activity the child should perform. For example, when the father teaches his son about the humble life to be followed, he not only names his child as outlined in Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli*, but also adds the words *xolotze*, which means “page” (in Spanish *paje*), boy or young man, and *xoloatze*, which means “servant” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 105). The father also uses words such as *in tinoquauh, in tinocelouh, in tinopiltzin* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 107), which means, “you are my eagle, you are my jaguar, you are my child.” Or, if the discourse is for teaching the child matters related to sexual continence, he says the boy is like a maguey—*auh in mahan titlachictli, in mahan timetl*—which means, “and you are as the bored maguey, you are like a maguey.” When the boy is taken to the *calmecac*, parents and other caregivers address the child with *nopiltze, noxviuhtze, tzontle, iztitle, xocoiotle* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215); which means, “my child, my grandchild, hair, nail, youngest one.”

In the case of girls, Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* is about a ruler teaching his daughter the right way to behave. He calles her *tinopiltzin, tinocozquj, tinoquetzal, tinotlacachioal, in tinotlatlacatililil, in tinezio, in tinotlapallo, in tinonejximachiliz* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 93), which means, “you who are my child, you who are my necklace, you who are my quetzal feather, you who are my creation, you who are my design, my blood, my
color, my image.” He refers to his daughter as nochpultze, nopiltze (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 87), “my daughter, my child,” and nochpuchzte, cocotze, tepitze, (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 94), which means “my girl, dove, little,” and the mother calls her daughter cocotzin, tepitzin, conetzin, nochputzin (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 99–103), which means, “dove, little one, child, my daughter,” and is used with the words in different order, sometimes omitting the word “dove.” The father also refers to his daughter as ticioatzintli, tichalchivitl, titeuxivitl, tipitzaloc, timamalioac, teziotl, titlapollotl, tivitziotl, taoaiotl, titetzon, titeizti, titetzicueuhca, titetlapanca (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 93), which means, “you are a woman, you are a jade, a turquoise, you were forged, you were perforated, you are blood, you are color, you are a spine, you are a thorn, you are someone’s hair, one’s fingernail, one’s chip, one’s flake.” He still calls her toconetzin (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 96), meaning “our child.” When the girl is ready to go to the calmecac, she is addressed as nochputzin, cocotzin, tepetzin, xocoiotl (Sahagún 1953–1982: 216), which means “my daughter, dove, little one, youngest one.”

I have so far presented the meaning of the words used to refer to boys and girls according to the dictionaries and the elaborated discourses found in different huehuetlatolli. Nevertheless, when we compare the use of words for referring to children with civil documents, the elegance and multiple ways of naming the children is reduced. In the testaments there are only descriptive words. Parents identify their children with the words notlacoçopilhuan (my beloved children), nopilhuan (my children), nochpoch (my girl or my daughter), nopiltzin (my child). To illustrate the use of these words, it is necessary to use examples of testaments. Thus, Don Francisco Sanches from the town of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Tecamachalco, called his daughters nopilhuan, and
when he speaks specifically about his daughter Clara Ines, he calls her noxpotzin (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 83). In another example, Juana Francisca also calls her daughters nopilhuan (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 173). Finally, in his testament, Don Juan de San Sebastián referred to his son Lucas as notelpoch, and to his daughters as cihuatototi—literally, “little women” (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 241). They may be identified as small children because he expresses the hope that they will grow to maturity:

_Auh ypapa cualcapa nictecpana nictenquixtia yn ipapa yn tlali cat el onca ca ynotelpoch yn Locas yila oninomiqili ca yehual conanas yn tla moscaliz yhua yn oca cate cihuatototi acón seme moscalitihue yn noc ixquich cahuitl nemohuas yn ipilhuan yn imixhuihua._ (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999b: 243)

So that I organize, I explain right, the land over there is for my boy Lucas. If I die, he will take it if he grows up. And the ones who are little girls, perhaps some of them will grow up, for the little girls for as long as they and their children, and their grandchildren live. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Thus, fathers and mothers do not use metaphors for referring to their children. Boys and girls are _tlacopilli, pilli, ichpochtli, piltzin, telpochtli, ichpochtli, cihuatotonti_, and _conetl_—nothing very elaborate compared with the words found in the ecclesiastic and ethnographic documents discussed above. Don Juan de San Sebastián gives another piece of information about the age of his children. He refers to his son Lucas and his daughters as _intla moscalis_ (singular) or _acón seme moscalitihue_ (plural). Both ideas refer to the possibility of growing. The root of _moscaliz_ and _moscalitihue_ is _izcalia_, which means “to grow.” Don Juan conjugated the two words in future tense, which implies that his children are still in need of care. He never says they need to leave childhood, but
expects they can grow to obtain their property, which is an economic reason for growing, for becoming capable of owning property, and with that, to have responsibilities.

Don Juan’s expectations are relevant in understanding childhood in colonial Mesoamerica. He expects his children to grow so they can perform roles related to owning land. This is relevant because in different ethnographic and ecclesiastic documents, there is a tendency to encourage the children to leave childhood, as it is a stage of immaturity. Examples are found in sources with discourses in which the father and the mother encourage their children to leave childhood. For girls, Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli states, “a unh in in ca ie tiuhcatzintli in: ma xiciollocacopavi, ma te xicxitinj, ma moiollocopa xicvelo in monetol: ca aiocmo cenca ticonetl, ca aiocmo cenca tipiltontli, ca ie timotlacaquitia” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 216), which means “moreover, this being how you are now, put your heart to it, do not destroy, do not willingly break your vow. You are no longer a child, you are no longer a little one; you already listen.” The boy also is asked to leave childhood at the time he enters the calmecac, and is admonished with the following words: “O nopiltze, notelpuchtze: ca aocmo cenca titototzintli, ca ie timotlachialtia, ca ie timotlacaquitia” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215), which means, “O my child, my son, you are no longer really a little bird, you already see, you already listen.”

Ye tiyollo, ye tixe, ye tinaçace, otlapouh in mix in moyollo, ma çan yuhtie in tlahtlacolli, in camanalli, in huezquiztli, in tlahuelilolocayotl, xiccahua, xictelechihuia in tlapohteminiliztli in tapalcaneahuitlitztli18, ye otlaimmantic inic toconcahuaz in coconeyotl in pipillotl, xoconixcahu

17 Tiestos de basura: potsherds.
18 Untranslated, maybe the word is tepalcanemiliztli.
Yet you have a heart, eyes, ears. Your eyes, your heart have been opened. Let jokes and laughter and wickedness be like sins. Leave, scorn playing with dirt, playing with potsherds! It is time for you to leave the life of a child, childhood. Devote yourself to what God’s beloved interpreters tell you and give you. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: Translation of page 4)

These lines are part of Espejo divino, in which the child Juan is encouraged by his worried father to have a qualtica, yectica life. In the case of the quote above, the most important condition the father tries to impose is to leave childhood and worship God instead. The father said to his child, “Leave, scorn playing with dirt, playing with potsherds!” (Mijangos 1607: 4). The meaning of this stage in the friar’s and Nahua scholar’s text is described as a moment of immaturity where jokes, laughter, and wickedness are part of the meaning of childhood. Nonproductive behaviors are not desired in the life of a person, the productive behavior in the case of Espejo divino is reduced to worshipping God. In Nahuatl discourse, play was referred as an action done with dirt and potsherds. It was a common metaphor in the huehuetlatolli registered by Sahagún (1979: Book VI) and Bautista (1600b), although the different huehuetlatolli also includes excrement in the children’s play. This idea is used to explain the condition of the child; they do not refer to age but to the activities of children. The activities then are related to play, to the cross-cultural activity in which children create, socialize and learn. Nevertheless, most of the time, there is no mention of play, and they emphasize the idea of leaving childhood, leaving the game they perform with potsherds and excrement so they can become productive, and educated in faith and morality.
For example, in the *huehuetlatolli* of the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1979: Book VI, 89), a father also recriminates his eldest son for the stage where he practices *pillotl* or *coneyotl*, which means childishness. Similar to the ethnographic sources, in ecclesiastic documents, childhood is represented as a stage that should be scorned. There is a metaphor found in ethnographic materials that indicates that childhood must be rejected in order to perform a more participative role in society. In the ecclesiastic documents, despising childhood was one of the things children had to do so they would become productive for their religious duties. The age in which the children should scorn childhood is imprecise; it goes from the moment in which the child enters school to the day of their marriage. This is the case of a newly wed woman who is encouraged to leave childhood so she can embrace motherhood and become a woman in charge of her house. Thus, in the Bancroft dialogues, we can read the following speech:

_Auh in tēhuātl nochpōchtze ca čan ye nō ūhui inic tonyez inic tocompiáz in quāhuatl in ithualli in tlācatl in totēcuíyo, ca aocmo in pīpīlōtl in cōcōnēyōtl ticmomacaz, ca yē huel īpan tixtočōz timotlacuitlahuīz in quēnin tichuīcax ticōltatoctiz in mocalītic._ (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 110–111)

And you, my daughter, you are to be the same way in guarding the household of our Lord. You are no longer to give yourself to childishness, for you are to be wakeful and take care of how you conduct and manage things in your house. (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 110–112)

Thus, childhood should be left behind to perform activities where the person is responsible for achieving a specific endeavor. There is a difference between the ethnographic and the ecclesiastic discourse that encourages children to leave childhood. The first one is the willingness to prepare the child for a more participative role in
society, for worshiping the Mesoamerican gods, and for learning to perform gendered activities inside or outside the household. The ecclesiastic discourse encourages children to leave childhood, pointing at the obligation to worship the Christian God. Thus, the role of the child is reduced to becoming a good Christian, leaving behind the obligation of parents to encourage the participation of the children in the daily tasks for reproducing the households. This is observed in Espejo divino, when the father tells his son to avoid *pillotl* or *coneyotl*—that is, childishness.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, *tonalli* was described as an important element that should be cared for so the child could grow and reach equilibrium in his or her life. In this sense, López Austin (2004: 59) speaks about the Mesoamerican tendency to conceive their world in a binary way, in which the existence of a dualistic opposition explained the cosmos through the understanding of movement, order, and diversity. Thus, the opposite of cold was hot, the opposite of light was darkness, the opposite of man was woman, etc.; the existence of oppositions, though, was necessary for maintaining equilibrium in the cosmos. However, in ecclesiastic texts, there was a tendency to keeping differentiated the good and bad behaviors that a child could perform. Thus, the idea of leaving childhood had different purposes. While the ethnographic material represents caregivers encouraging their children to leave childhood because they were mature enough to perform new chores, leaving childhood in the ecclesiastic discourses was important in order to avoid evil.

In the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1979: Book X), there is a section in which the friar and the Nahua scholars constructed a typology of the good and the bad children.
First, a male child is defined by his consanguineal group\textsuperscript{19}—emphasizing the legitimacy of the child—and by difference in age.\textsuperscript{20} The good child was obedient, humble, thankful, and reverent; he followed the example of his father and looked like his parents.\textsuperscript{21} In another section of Book X of the Florentine Codex, Sahagún and the Nahua scholars describe the good boy for his condition of age, and he was again described as obedient, but also happy, peaceful, careful, and diligent.\textsuperscript{22} The bad boy was described as vicious, wicked, rebellious, disobedient, crazy, one who does not pay attention to the good advice that his parents give to him, and spanking of whom would not make any difference on his behavior.\textsuperscript{23} He also was crazy, dissolute, and used to joking and to insulting people.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} Nahuatl: \textit{In tepiltzin tlaçopilli, calitic cunetl chanecaconetl teuiotica tepiltzin} (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 2). Translation to English: One’s child [that is,] the legitimate child, the child born within the household, the child within the habitation, the legitimate child. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 2).

\textsuperscript{20} Nahuatl: \textit{In telpuchtli, iectlooquichtli: qualloquichtli, qualnezqui, qualtepul, tzomuctic, tzicuictic, popuxtli, camanale, tlaquetzale} (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12). Translation to English: The youth is a good man, a genteel man, pleasing of appearance, goodly, active, agile, energetic, witty; a storyteller (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).

\textsuperscript{21} Nahuatl: \textit{In qualli tepiltzin, tlatlacamati, mocnomatini, mocnotecani, tlatlaçocamatini tlamauztiliani, tlamauztildia, tlatlacamati, mocnoteca, mocnopilmati, mocnelilmati, tequixtia, tenemiliztoca} (Sahagún 1979: Book X, 1v–2r). Translation to English: The good child is obedient, humble, modest, thankful, and reverent. He honors things, he is obedient, humble, grateful, thankful, resembles others, follows somebody’s example (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart).

\textsuperscript{22} Nahuatl: \textit{In uelca yiollo telpuchtli, tlatlacamatini, paccanemini, iocuxcanemini, hatlaquelmatini yiel, tetlacamati, tlatequipanoa, chipaoacanemi, mimatcanemi} (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12). Translation to English: The good hearted youth is obedient, happy, peaceful, careful, diligent. He obeys, works, lives in chastity and modesty (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).

\textsuperscript{23} Nahuatl: \textit{In tlaueliloc tepiltzin tlatlaueliloc, çan tlatlaueliloc, tzontetl, iollochico, iollotlaueliloc, cuexcocheycoc, hatecacqui} (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 2). Translation to English: The wicked child is wicked, really wicked, obstinate, crooked-hearted, wicked-hearted, does not listen to anybody, he/she breaks things with his/her hands.
Another characteristic that defined a bad boy was his origin. The good and the bad boy were also conceptualized by their in/ability to follow a discipline that lacked any relationship with the religiosity of the child.

The same criteria for defining the good or bad girl is present in Book X of the Florentine Codex. For her lineage, the virtuous girl was defined as virginal, obedient, intelligent, with good memory, respectful, revered, cautious, chaste, circumspect, and “capable to perform things” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).25 Other characteristics the girl should have are honesty, gentility, good raising, well-taught, well-trained, and prudence. In the Florentine Codex, there is also a description related to the age of the girl (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).26 With regard to a girl being able to perform roles within her household, she is described as reserved, a person who guards her virtue and

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Translation to English: The bad young male is mixitl, tlapatl, is a mushroom, he goes around making craziness, he goes about becoming crazy; he is dissolute, mad; he goes about mocking, telling tales, being rude, repeating insults (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart).

Translation to English: One’s daughter: the daughter is untouched, pure, a virgin. The good daughter is obedient, honest, intelligent, discreet, of good memory, modest, respectful, revered, well reared, well taught, well trained, well instructed, prudent, chaste, circumspect (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).

Translation to English: The good woman is modest, pure, pleasing of appearance, honest. She is one’s child—one’s daughter She is not the subject of ridicule. The virtuous maiden is reserved, jealous of her virtue, chaste, continent, just, pious, pure of heart. She guards herself, guards her honor; she is jealous of her virtue; she is not to be ridiculed (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 12).
her honor; she is immaculate, clean, correct, devout, and unpolluted of heart. She is jealous of her integrity and avoids being mocked. Because she is a noble girl, she should know how to speak well and how to make things right. There was another definition of the good maiden referred to in the Spanish text as *la hija de claro*, who should be nice, lovely, polite, respected, and thankful. The bad daughter, as it was related to lineage, is cruel, vile, stubborn, malicious, dissolute, a prostitute, a girl who likes to dress arrogantly, and who tends to like pleasure. The definition related to age describes

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Translation to English: The maiden is noble, a noble among nobles, a child of nobility. She is one from whom noble lineage issues, or she is of noble birth, worthy of being loved, worthy of preferred treatment. The good maiden is yet a virgin, mature, clean, unblemished, pious, pure of heart, benign, chaste, candid, well disposed. She is benign; she loves; she shows reverence; she is peaceful; she bows in reverence; she is humble, reserved; she speaks well, calmly (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 46).


Translation to English: The maiden is of the nobility—courteous, loved, esteemed, beloved. The good maiden is loving, pleasing, reverent, respectful, retiring. She is pleasing, appreciative, admiring of things (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 47).

29 Nahuatl: *Tecuneuh in amo qualli in amo iectli, in tlaueliloc, teuhio tlaçollo cuecuech, cuecuel, ciuatlaueliloc, mihimati, moquequecimmati, moieiecquetza, muchihiua, apan vpan nemi, auilnemi, auilquiztinemi, mahauiltia, ahauiltzoncaloa cucueucocini, iuinti* (Sahagún 1979: Book X, 2v).

Translation to English: One’s daughter [who is] bad, evil, perverse, [is] full of vice, dissolute, proud; a whore, she is showy, pompous, gaudy of dress, garish, she is a loiterer, given to pleasure; a courtesan, given to amusement, always vicious, crazed, besotted (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 3).

a girl who likes to yell, a whore, corrupt, who likes to embellish herself; someone who does not care about embarrassment; she is insolent and conspicuous (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 13). Yet another classification is related to a girl’s social position (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 46). A good girl is the daughter of noble parents; the social position can also make her a bad person. Her behavior as a commoner makes her rude, of low status, and violent, repugnant, dissolute; the text indicates that she does not care for her honor, or her virginity, and is impulsive. The classification of a bad girl in the section “la hija de claro” describes the bad girl as sinful, hopeless, disloyal, foolish, dishonored, and shamed.

For the perception of what a good or bad child was in the ecclesiastic documents, Espejo divino (Mijangos 1607: Chapter 1) gives insights on this topic. A bad boy is also the one who eats and drinks things that make him disorganized; he is a child who overeats, who has a pleasant life, who shows joy. He is a child who likes to laugh, to fool around, and to covet things. In general, the bad boy is considered a person with an inhuman life. Interestingly, he is also a boy who likes childhood or babyhood. Because of

Translation to English: The bad maiden is one who yields herself to others—a prostitute, a seller of herself, dishonored, gaudi. She goes about shamelessly, presumptuously, conspicuously washed and combed, pompously (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 13).

Translation to English: The bad maiden is a descendant of commoners—a belittler, a rude person, of lowly birth. She acts like a commoner; she is furious, hateful, dishonored, dissolute, given to carnal pleasure, impetuous (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 46).

Translation to English: The bad maiden is corrupt, incorrigible, rebellious—a proud woman, shameless, brazen, treacherous, stupid. She is inconsiderate, imbecile, stupid, she brings dishonor, disgrace (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book X, 47).
that, he does not follow the life of the temple. He does not obey; he does not listen to his father’s commands, which actually are God’s commands.

The list of a good boy is much shorter. He should not sin. This implies living a spiritual life. He is the one who is at the service of God’s will. He must do things to praise God because of the clothes and food He provides. The good boy is like the biblical boy Tobias, who scorned childhood in order to adore God. Finally, the boy must accept his father’s punishments, beatings and painful words without any argument. The different ways to address a boy or a girl are extremely metaphoric in terms that Nahuas used to express beautifulness, and worthiness. The bad child is also lazy. Such behavior brought the use of metaphors. Mijangos also uses the comparison of the pig with a lazy person, but also introduces the metaphoric ways of speaking of laziness in Nahua terms, which is with the rabbit and the deer.

The use of hybrid metaphors is also an important ingredient in the explanation of the characteristics of the bad son. On page 13 of *Espejo divino*, the father says to his son,

...(notlazopiltze) macamo ximopitzocuepa, macamo ximomaçatili, ximotochtili, macamo xiquinnemilitzoca in pitzome, manenenque, ximeuhtehua, xipopoxiuhtehua, xitztehua. (Mijangos 1607: 13)

...(my beloved child) do not become a pig! Do not become a deer! Do not become a rabbit! Do not follow the life of the pigs, of the animals, get up! Go to work! Get up! (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: Translation of page 13)

In this passage, there is a conjugation between the meaning of the pig (which represents the Spanish notions of dirtiness, gluttony, and laziness) with the Nahua meaning of the deer and the rabbit, which, according to Burkhart (1989), represent wild
and immoral behavior. As for the deer, it is considered an easily frightened animal that falls into the trap, where it finds death.

*Ye ticmati ca immazatl in ihquac in quitoca, ca ixmauhtiuh, ahmo quimati inic yauh, inic matlac huetzitiuh, in oncan mictilo. ¿Auh in tehuatl cuix timazatl inic ahmo ticmatiz in campa tiauh? Ca tittilo in ohtli in tictocaz; monehuiyan ticmochichihuiliz, intla xicpolo.* (Bautista 1988: 336)

You already know that when the deer is followed, it is scared, it does not know where to go, it falls into the trap, and there it is killed. And you; are you a deer that you will not know where to go? You have been shown the road that you are to follow; you will set traps for your ownself if you lose it. (Translation by Marin-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

The ideas expressed in the above passages about the good and the bad girls and boys follow a tendency permeated by the European dichotomist way to try to understand the morality that a child should practice, while at the same time encouraging the child to leave childhood. However, the words and metaphors were used for the construction of an ecclesiastic discourse that classified the child as good or bad. No matter how parents or caregivers referred to boys or girls, the important thing was to record the practices related to children’s behavior and the appropriation of the language. And the qualities of nobility, economic status, and the age were the criteria followed by Nahua scholars and friars for constructing images of colonial indigenous children, something that was far from the expectation of the inhabitants.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, the diversity of words used to refer to children other than babies, and the criteria for considering a boy or a girl good or bad, are numerous. Although the words denoting a series of stages in the life of children are not
very precise, what is found is the use of the terms based on the documents we are studying. If it was a recollection of terms, the dictionaries gave a great amount of them, and it was possible to find the Nahuatl name for these stages according to gender. The impossibility for using the term *adolescence* for referring to children was also clear, since the emotional or psychological disorder that current occidental theories propose do not match with the descriptions of children in the Nahuatl sources. Instead, we can use terms such as *ichpochcatepitoytol*, *ichpochcaconeyotl*, *ichpochpiltonyotl*, *ichpochpiltzinyotl*, and *ichpochtepityotl* for girlhood; and *telpocayotl*, *telpocaconeyotl*, *telpocapiltoyotl*, *telpochcaconeyotl*, and *telpochconeyotl* or *telpochpiltoyotl* for boyhood. All the metaphors used in the *huehuetlatolli*, like dove, nail, hair, necklace, quetzal feather, jaguar, eagle, and maguey, among others, are metaphors that are only found in elaborated ethnographic and ecclesiastic discourse. Nahua people who left information in their testaments did not use them. Due to the amount of property and because they were called *Don* or *Doña*, they belonged to a group of people with high social class. Nevertheless, they did not use those words for referring to children.

Scorning childhood gives us insight into the colonial tendencies of conceptualizing childhood. Maturity in children was desired, but while in the ethnographic documents it was an important stage that would shape the character of the children in the future, in the Christian religion, children should reach maturity to get close to God through worshipping Him. This first approach to the difference in the colonial discourses related to rearing children who already passed the stage of total dependence brings the topic of the type of discipline the colonial society wanted to imprint in the personality of Nahua girls and boys. In the following sections, there is a discussion about
the different roles children were expected to play in the colonial context. We will see appropriations and rejections of the indigenous ways of raising their girls and boys who were in the stage of *ichpochcatepitoyotl* and *telpochatepitoyotl* respectively.

2. How to Rear Children in Colonial Mesoamerica

In this section, we look at children through the practices of childrearing that friars and Nahuas wanted to keep for the colonial indigenous society. In this sense, matters of work and the worshipping of gods are the pieces of Nahua culture through which changes in childrearing practices are analyzed.

2.1. Detesting Child Work

The criteria for examining babyhood and childhood as two stages in the life of the colonial indigenous children are related to their ability to contribute to the daily activities of reproduction inside their household. Thus, in order to understand how they were raised inside and outside the house, it is relevant to start identifying the activity girls and boys were expected to perform in the Nahua houses.

Burkhart (1989: 132; cf. also López Austin 2004: I, 210) explains that work was important so that laziness would not contaminate the liver; laziness would drive the child to wicked action. Since a very early age, girls and boys were expected to learn their roles that, according to their gender, contributed in some way to the daily survival of the household. Nevertheless, as I will explain later, the acceptance or rejection of children performing their economic activities became a battlefield since the ecclesiastic discourses encouraged the children to spend their time worshiping God.
Studies in different parts of the world have shown that children’s work has been relevant for the reproduction of their household (see Whiting and Whiting 1979; Kramer 2005). The economic value of such work made girls and boys important elements for the social group; in other words, they were active actors constantly contributing to give shape to their households and communities. For colonial Mesoamerica, the different huehuetlatolli (Sahagún 1979; Bautista 1988), the Bancroft dialogues (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987), Sahagún’s sermons (1563), and the Codex Mendoza (1996) are the sources in which it is possible to see the activities performed by children according to their gender. They are depicted within the household or within the indigenous educational institutions.

The Bancroft dialogues (Lockhart and Karttunen 1987: 148–155) describe how the well-raised girls—those from the nobility—were instructed inside their households, where they learned to sweep; to cook; to prepare beverages, tortillas, and tamales; and the arts of spinning, weaving, and embroidering. They also learned to dye the material they used to weave, as well as the fur of rabbits (Lockhart and Karttunen 1987: 148–155). Essentially, they learned the women’s work. Bautista (1600b: 312, 320–321) refers to this phenomenon as follows: “ye ticcuithuetziz immalacatl, in tzotzopaztli, yhuan in atl, immetlatl, yhuan immolcaxitl, in chiquihuitl,” which means, “soon you will take the spindle whorl, the weaving batten, the water, the grinding stone, the grater bowl and the basket.” At home, girls learned from their mothers and other women of the household to use the water, the grinding stone, the basket, and the sauce bowl. Such activities were important because they were elements that helped to build the identity of Nahua women. The activities were complemented with specific procedures for performing them. For
example, girls were expected to learn the proper way to lay down the grinding stone, the sauce bowl, and the basket in front of people, which should not be in a rush, but performed very calmly:

*Ah in tehuatl ma timoxiccauh, ma timonencauh, ma timoteputzcauh, in tinocozqui, in tinoquetzal; ma ontlamì immitzin, immoyollotzin yhuan immacoltzin, immocuitlapantzin, immomolictzin, moteteponzin, intla itlan ximaquiti in tlachpanalitztli, in tlacuicuilitztli, in tematequilitztli, in teixamilitzti, in tecamapaqilitzti. Ahu ma no itlan ximaquilti in atl, immetlat yhun xictzitzqui, xuel xicacocui imolcaxitl, in chiquihuitl. Xuel xicmana, xuel xiquiquani in teixpan, in tenahuac. Ma ticchachalantimayauh, ma ilihuiz ticman; zan ihuiyan, zan iyolic ticmanaz.* (Bautista 1988: 312–314)

And as for you, don’t be careless, don’t be negligent, don’t fall behind, you who are my jewel, you who are my quetzal feather. Don’t let your eyes and heart come to an end, and your shoulders, your back, your elbows, and your knees, if you attend carefully to the sweeping, the cleaning, the washing of people’s hands, faces, and mouths. And also attend carefully to the water and the grinding stone. And take hold of and lift up the sauce bowl and the basket. Lay them and carry them in front of people, next to people. Don’t throw them down and break them, don’t lay them down recklessly. You’re to lay them down carefully and calmly. (Burkhart n.d.: 1)

Three folios of Codex Mendoza also report activities that children used to learn inside their households. Beautiful pictures depict children and parents; the children are represented from the age of 3 years old until they were ready for marriage. The codex is divided in two columns, and the life of the children is represented by gender. At the left side of the folios, a father is represented teaching his son the art of performing male activities. At the right side, the mother is depicted teaching her daughter the arts that she
should learn as a female (see illustrations 1, 2, and 3). The three folios are accompanied by text written in Spanish, which is useful for the interpretation of the images. Different than other codices that do not have alphabetic text, images in Codex Mendoza are accompanied by texts describing the activities parents and children are performing. In this respect, the text explicitly confirms the relationship between the adults and the children.

Declaración de la plana siguientede despues desta de las figuras en ella contenýdas en que se platica el tiempo y modo en que los naturales davan consejo a sus hijos de como abyan de biuir. (Codex Mendoza 1992: 57v)

The explanation of the drawings contained on the following page: it deals with the time and means the naturales used in instructing their children in how they should live. (Berdan and Anawalt 1992: Volume IV, 120)

Thus, it is the mother and the father the individuals used to represent how children were raised. The text makes clear the participation of parents in the images. Thus, we have representations of a father-son and a mother-daughter relationship that gives an account of the everyday life within the household, everything related to the economic activities in which children participated, and the process parents and children used so children could grasp the different activities related to their gender.

Here, a 3-year-old girl is with her mother, who is extending a hand to the little child, who is walking toward her. One year later, the girl is able to start learning the art of spinning with the spindle. She masters this knowledge one year later. When she turns 8, 9, 10, and 11 years old, the adult female administers punishments with thorns and burning hot pepper. Other activities start when the girl is 12 years old, as she is depicted
receiving instruction from the adult woman for sweeping. When she is 13, the girl is depicted using the grinding stone and the *comal* to make tortillas. Finally when the girl is 15 years old, the mother is shown teaching her how to weave cloth using a backstrap loom (see Illustrations 1, 2, and 3).

In the Codex Mendoza, the boy is also represented with the father at the age of 3, but he is giving instructions to the child, who walks in the opposite direction of the man. When the child is 4 years old, the father gives him instructions for carrying bowls of water. When he is 5, the boy is shown receiving instruction from the father figure, presumably about the activities he is performing: carrying wood with a *mecapal* and carrying other things while holding a broom. At the age of 6, the boy is depicted eating in a sitting position. When the child turns 7, the man teaches him to use a net to fish. As in the case of the girl, the boys is shown along with the types of punishments administered to him. For example, the man pricks the child with thorns. He also hits the boy’s hands, or the man takes him to the fire when he is burning hot pepper, or he is left outside on the ground all day with his hands and feet tied. After that, the 13-year-old child is carrying a great load of green wood, using a canoe, and using the net while standing on a canoe.
Illustration 1. Parents teaching their children to do chores according to their gender. (Codex Mendoza 1992: 58r).
Illustration 2. Parents teaching their children to do chores and administering punishments according to their gender (Codex Mendoza 1992: 59r).
Illustration 3. Parents teaching their children to do chores and administering punishments according to their gender (Codex Mendoza 1992: 60r).
In Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli*, when the father admonishes his son, he tells the child to perform the activities that are proper for his gender: gathering wood for the fireplace, working the land, and growing *nopales* and magueys. The text emphasizes the importance of performing the activities so that the boy could gain a higher social status for being responsible in his group.

No matter the relevance of the work children performed within the household, the ecclesiastic sources encouraged the boys and girls to participate in the life of the community in different ways. They did not want the children to spend their time participating in economical activities, and they emphasized the importance of children as individuals, who had the obligation of worshipping the Christian God; children should essentially be devoted to religious activities. Furthermore, these texts encouraged caregivers to stop giving chores to children, since they should be indoctrinated in the Christian religion, and their time should be spent worshipping God.

For example, in *Espejo divino* (Mijangos 1607), there is a section in which child labor within the household is specifically addressed. It is the only passage in chapter one in which daughters are explicitly described, when the father refers to the activities related to the beater and the spindle whorl. For the boys, the author references the use of the digging stick and the tumpline:

*In tettahuan (notlzopiltze) cuix ye ic oquimonomiliztique in teotenahuatili inic çan inmac in intelpochhuan oquicaucuque, oquitlalique in huictli, in mecapalli auh in yehuan cuix çan ica in momaquixtizque? auh in tenahuan cuix çan ye ic oquimonomeliztique in itlatlaliltzin in toTecuiyo dios, inic inmac in ipilhuan oquicaucuque, oquitlalique in tzotzopaztli, in malacatl? auh in yehuan cuix ica quimohuellamachtilizque in Teotl Tlatohuani Dios? cuix çan ica in momaquixtizque*
The spindle whorl and the digging stick were still the best representative of objects referring to the work of children by gender. But in the text of Espejo divino, those objects obstruct the main work that children should perform so they can be raised in a good and proper way. What is good and proper for Christians, then, is to avoid excessive loads of work and to use that time to learn about God and to praise Him. In another passage of Espejo divino, the father speaks to his child about bad parents who make their children work excessively: “Quintequiuhtia quintequimaca inic ahuel oncalaquizque teopancalco” (Mijangos 1607: 8), which translates to, “they make them work, they give them work, so that they cannot go to church.”

When children were born, adults gave them little instruments that coincided with the gender roles they would perform in the future within the household and community. If the child were a girl, she would be given a spindle whorl, a workbasket, and a broom. If the child were a boy, he would receive emblems of war—a shield and spears, along
with the tools of a carpenter, feather worker, or tlacuilo (goldsmith.) When the children were older, they also began worshiping their gods.

In this way, the conceptualization of childhood is defined through economics, as the adults introduced their gendered activities within the household as soon as the children were born. The conceptualization of the child as having an economic value is also shown in Bautista’s huehuetlatolli, when the parent asks the child to work as a hard as a slave. In comparing the child to a drop of water, a little bird, a little corn plant, a jade, a turquoise, or a quetzal feather, parents made the child know that his or her first purpose in life is to work hard in their chores that, true to his or her gender, the community expects him or her to perform:

\[ \text{Ma ye oc xontlacoti, xontequiti xiptzintli, inahuactzinco, ca oc tatizintli, titootzintli; ca oc tixiloti, timitayuati. Imma zan yuhqui tichalchiuhztzintli, titeoxiuhztzintli; imma zan yuhqui tiquetzalztzintli, ma monehuiyan timotetezo, timohuahuazo. (Bautista 1988: 294–295)} \]

Make an effort as if you were a slave, work in front of him, next to him, because you are still water, a little bird, because you are still becoming an ear of corn, you are becoming a corn tassel. Although you are like a jade, a turquoise, although you are like a quetzal feather, do not feel great. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Another difference between sources is that while Mijangos emphasizes that children have to be in good terms with God, the admonition in Bautista’s (1600b: 296) huehuetlatolli is to make the child understand that he or she has to be in good standing with the community, with the father, with the mother, and with the gods. Thus, the boy needs to respect others and to work hard.
To whom will you give honor if I am your mother, your father, and you shame me in front of people? It is good, it is proper that you take care of the mundane things, do things, work, go and gather wood, work the land, grow nopales, grow magueyes. Thereby you will drink, eat, and clothe yourself. Thereby you will stand up, you will live, you will be spoken of, you will be honored, they will know you, your water, your food, your kin. (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Thus, there is no meaning of individuality because the child is part of the community, and his or her acts must serve the well-being of the entire community. The contradiction here is clear when the friars are introducing concepts of individualism, and of instruction outside the household that substitute for the children’s economic participation in the household. In contrast to father Agustín’s worries about going to hell (Mijangos 1607), in Bautista’s huehuetlatolli, the Nahua father’s only worry is about his child, who has to be accepted by the community: “Zan ihuiyan, icemele, in nimitzoncauhtiax in tetloc, in tenahuac” (Bautista 1988: 298–299), which translates to, “only with tranquility, only with happiness I will leave you with the people, next to the people” (Bautista 1988: 299).

In Sahagún’s sermons there is an admonition to make the child understand that one has to be in good standing with the community, with the father, the mother, and with God. He has to respect others and work hard. However, “work” is understood in different
ways. While the ethnographic sources indicate that work was necessary so that the child would grow in the right and proper way, the ecclesiastic sources encourage parents to show their children how to do things right too, but in different manner; here, children should stop working altogether or they should avoid excessive labor because they should be worshipping God. Thus, children worshiping the Mesoamerican gods and doing housework was the model reported in the ethnographic documents, but it was not sufficient for the friars and the Nahua scholars.

2.2. Colonial Incompatibilities of Children’s Work and Worship?

Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* illustrates how, starting from babyhood, boys and girls were promised by their parents to go to schools in order to receive instructions from the priests or priestesses, respectively (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 213). Parents were considered to have borrowed their children from the gods and goddesses to raise them (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI). At a specific age, girls and boys were nurtured, molded, pierced,33 and cultivated within the temples (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 214). In Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* about the children who are taken to the calmecac, it says that a child should understand he or she should be far from the household and the community during his or her instruction. The activities children should perform within the temple were actually learned at home, and when they are brought to the temple, elders ask the

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33 In Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* that tells about the ritual of offering the child at the institutions where they would receive education years later, the text refers to those perforations practiced on children in an early stage. If they would go to the telpochcalli, they would pierce the lower lip of the child to place a lip plug. It is not clear whether piercing was practiced with boys or girls (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 209). A different situation happened when the children were offered to the calmecac, they made scars on their daughters in their hips, and incised their chests. Sometime after that they were adorned with a necklace called yaqualli (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 210).
children to leave childhood, since they would start learning the arts related to the worshipping of gods, and a discipline that would harden their personalities.

In the Bancroft dialogues (Lockhart and Karttunen 1987: 148–155), with great nostalgia, an old lady speaks about the way children were educated “before.” Different than Sahagún’s huehuexchtlatolli, she says that girls were educated within the household and she does not give information about their education with the women of the temples. Nevertheless, she remembers that, inside the educational institutions, children were taught different arts through rigorous discipline. The old lady gives a detailed description of the activities noble boys did in the temples. They were awoken at midnight. Their first duty was to clean the temple; they had to sweep and go gather fir branches for adorning the temples where they worshipped Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli, Tlaloc, and other gods. This is a phenomenon also described by Sahagún. The actions boys had to perform were to sweep the temple, to hold vigil, and to bring offerings of incense (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 121).

The old lady of the Bancroft dialogues (Lockhart and Karttunen 1987: 148–155) also says that, at school, boys had to bathe with cold water. At sunrise, the temple was already adorned. At that time, they had few old tortillas for breakfast. Then, boys had classes of moral lessons. But during the afternoon, the priests in charge sent the boys to the woods to gather firewood. When they returned, the priests again fed the boys with tortillas. It was after this activity that children were taught to fight, to hunt, to use blowguns, and to toss objects such as stones, darts, and spears. They also were taught to use shields and swords, in addition to being taught to make nets and traps. They might also learn to make crafts with feathers and mosaics; they learned the art of the goldsmith,
or how to cut and polish metals and jewels. Or, they might learn the art of painting, of working wood, among other artisan activities. They might also learn to create songs, oratory, music (although they do not use a word for “music,” but a diphrase which is *huehuetl ayacaxtli*, “the drum and the rattle”), astronomy, and the use of codices called *ilhuicatlatamatzitli*.

Such discipline, all related to worshipping the gods, that the boy should follow at home was also expected at the *calmecac*, and, according to Sahagún, this discipline also applied to Nahua girls. For them, the elders would say that they were no longer babies but intelligent people who would enter the temple, instead of the house where people go to enjoy prostitutes. Actually, just as it was said to the boy, the girl enters a house of lamentation and tears, of unhappiness, where she would need to learn to perform penance (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 217):

*C ca amo avilpan, ca amo camanalpan in tiauh: ca ichan in totecju, ca vmna tlatolchialo, ca vmna notzalo, tzatzilo, ca choquzcali, ca ixaiocali, ca tlaoculcali: ca vnca ixillantzinco, itozcatlantzinco mamaiiaooa in totecju: vnca itlanjilo, vnca temolilo in jhijotzin, in jitaloltzin, vnca tlamaecolal.* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 216–217)

You are not going to the place of pleasure, the place of jokes. This is the house of our Lord, where his orders are awaited, where he is called to, cried out to. It is the house of weeping, the house of tears, the house of sadness. There, things are removed from our lord’s belly, from his throat. There, his breath, his words are requested, are sought. There, one does penance. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart)

Thus, if the girl follows a life of lament, of grief, and of modesty, God would see her. If she does not follow this behavior, then God would make the girl suffer with
putrefaction, with blindness, or with paralysis, along with living in scarcity, wearing rags, and dying in agony. Thus, the girl should follow the life of those who live in the temple and are called *tlamaceuhque, chocani, and tlaocoianj*, which translates to, “the penitents, the weepers, the sad ones” (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 217).

In this respect, within the school, the boy or the girl should also need, not to learn, but to practice activities they learned at home. In the temple, boys should sweep, clean, organize things, practice vigil during the night, and practice celibacy. Boys should quickly arise to perform the biddings of the priest at the first call (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 214). Besides those activities, the child also should learn to practice sacrifice on their own body, preparing the materials, the moments and the space for practicing it. The boy should learn to bath in the river, to break the maguey thorns, to cut pine branches, and to insert the thorns in his body. Such practices should be accompanied by moderation in eating; abstinence would bring him healthiness (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215).

The activities girls should practice were also the sweeping and cleaning. However, there was no detail about self-sacrifice for girls in Sahagún’s *huheuetlatolli* when the children are taken to the *calmecac* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 211–218), and there is also an emphasis on the gendered activities they learn beginning at an early age within their households.

The knowledge passed down from elder women not only emphasized the correct use of the *malacatl* (spindle whorl) and the *tzotzopaztli* (weaving batten), but also of the *atl* (water), the *metlatl* (grinding stone), the *chiquihuitl* (basket), and the *molcaxitl* (sauce bowl) (Bautista 1988: 312, 314; also Burkhart n.d: 1) as activities in which the girl should avoid throwing and breaking her tools used to make food. She should learn to put them
At school, the discipline girls should learn was around the objects they should master. The preparation of food, weaving, and the offering of food to people was a knowledge acquired at home. Such knowledge was transported to spaces outside the household in order to worship the gods. In the calmecac, they were responsible for preparing the food, not for people, but for the offerings they should give to their gods. In this respect, they should be very prepared to use the grinding stone to cook for the gods. If girls perform such activities in a correct form, they would embody their female nobility; it would make them different from the macehualtin, and they would be acquiring the personality expected for a Mexica noble woman. Practicing this doctrine implied discretion, worshiping, and fear. According to Sahagún’s (1953–1982: Book VI, 217) huehuetlatolli, girls would find peace in their lives and would be recognized as noble by adhering to those rules.

Thou art to think only of, to be diligent in, to take care of the sweeping, the cleaning, and then of the drink, of the food of the lord of the near, of the nigh. Is it true that our lord is fed as a person? Is it rather only offerings? Be diligent with the grinding stone, the chocolate, the making of offerings. And be obedient; do not be summoned twice. Nobility is the good doctrine, the way of prudence, the way of
reverence, the way of fear, and then the way of peace. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 217)

Thus, the activities learned and practiced at home were also activities performed at school but with the difference of space, purposes, and meanings. During the time when friars and Nahua scholars were writing the huehuetlatolli, there was a disagreement in Europe about children practicing ascetic discipline inside their households. However, in Mesoamerica, friars found indigenous children practicing such extreme discipline within the household and within the calmecac and telpochcalli. This situation was observed and taken advantage of by the friars and the Nahua scholars to aid in their goal of homogenizing the way children should be reared. For them, Nahua instruction at home and at school was accepted. Furthermore, they appropriated the discourses gathered in the ethnographic materials, and applied them to the strategies they were using for shaping the colonial children as part of their ecclesiastic project (Burkhart 1989; Kobayashi 2007).

The perpetuation of a society in which children were conditioned to get up in the middle of the night to worship their gods was also appealing to the friars. During the 16th century, living a monastic life within the household became the subject of a debate in Europe. Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus of Rotterdam changed the perspective of the Christian education (Bataillon 2007). For Franciscan friars, raising children to live an ascetic life devoted to God was the life they encouraged, especially for boys. Thus, the push in New Spain was for the Nahuas to set similar daily routines around the worshipping of the Christian God, in addition to the vigils during the night and early morning. Parents should take their children to mass every Sunday, and they should also teach them the Ten Commandments, the 14 articles of faith, the sign of the cross, the Credo, the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, and the Salve Regina. With this, they would be
more knowledgeable of the Christian god, and in this way, fathers and mothers would show their love to their children. In this vein, Burkhart (1989: 24) explains that children attended daily catechism classes and yearly confessions, and boys of the noble class were taught intensively in the boarding schools located in the monasteries.

Children must lead a spiritual life in service to God. They must do things to praise Him in return for their clothes and food. The good boy is like the biblical boy Tobias, who scorned childhood in order to adore God. Finally (and perhaps most importantly), the boy must accept punishments, beatings, and painful words without any argument. Such behavior would make the child the model of acceptable behavior. In *Espejo divino*, the father questions the son as to why he is not ashamed for not following the lives of other children who live in the temple, whom the father describes as follows:

_In çan coneichiltin, ca yehuantin yolizmatcacopa oc hueca yohuac, oc huelyohuatzinco içatiquiça, meuhtiquiça, quintequipachohua in teopan nemiliztli, auh in teotlahtolnemachtilitzli çonilnamictiquiça yehuatl in quintequipachotiquiça quinyolcocotiquiza._ (Mijangos 1607: 4)

They are just little babies, and they, prudently, when it is still night, when it is very early, they wake up quickly and get up quickly. The life of the temple always worries them, and they are remembering very quickly the teaching of the holy words. That is what concerns them; that is what worries them. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: translation of page 4)

In the same way, the *Florentine Codex* reports the obligations that parents had for teaching their children to wake up early in the night and pray (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 120–126). The sixth admonition of *Apéndice a la Postilla* (Sahagún 1993: 106–107) also describes children as the ones who have to wake up first. Like the children of the
temple in *Espejo divino*, in the *Apéndice a la Postilla* children have to wake up in the night to sigh and pray so they will not fall into mortal sin. The *Apéndice a la Postilla* is more descriptive in the list of good behavior that children must follow. It goes from how to pray to even how to dress or how to speak, how to serve the elders who are Christians, and how to avoid adultery. The interesting point in this list of good attributes is that those are the morals that noble parents used to admonish their sons. They should also learn how to behave when they were passing by the shrines; proper behavior consisted of touching the earth with the finger and bringing it to their mouth. Parents say children have to avoid excessive sleeping because it was not necessary, and actually would harm people’s bodies and souls, and would bring illnesses. Instead of wasting time sleeping, children should wake up when it was still very early in the morning. Then, they had to wash their face, dress themselves, and comb their hair. Then, they would go do their work (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 120–126). The sixth admonition in the *Apéndice a la Postilla* also speaks about those procedures for disciplining the child, and actually the instruction of not oversleeping was mentioned similarly in the Florentine Codex. If they do all those things, the Lord would help them to do their work well, but if not, they would be punished with words or with actions.

The knowledge children should master was reduced to the Christian aspects of knowing God well, and then adoring and praising the deity. According to Sahagún’s (1563) sermon *On the Sunday Within the Octave of Epiphany*, parents should teach children to recognize the image of the mother of God, and bow wherever there was an image of the Virgin Mary, to know the images of the saints and the angels so the children would not bow before ordinary images or people. They should recognize the spiritual
fathers, the bishops, and priests so they can honor them wherever they see them. They should respect them through kissing their hands while bending their knees. They should identify the rulers and nobles who govern people, and the constables to honor them. They should respect people and honor them and not offend them. For this matter, parents should teach the children what is right and proper, and what is bad and evil. Children should take great care of their obedience to God’s designs, and please God, not offending him for any reason and not breaking God’s commandments for anyone, even for any great ruler, relatives or friends, or for the priest, or for the father, or the mother.

In *Espejo divino* (Mijangos 1607: first chapter) the father was the one who brings the word of God to the child, who had to grasp the knowledge, not from the word of the ancients, but from a book (a new source of knowledge for the Nahuas). It is through these means that friars expected that children would receive their education. Colonial powers preferred that children receive their education from the book, instead of from knowledge passed down from elders, mothers, and fathers. The theme emphasized here, then, is not for the children to respect their elders and worship the gods, but instead to reach God’s glory. Besides, the glory would be reached in heaven, not by the community as it is expressed in the ethnographic material.

Finally, a struggle in explaining who was capable to worship God happened when friars used the biblical child Tobias and the Virgin Mary to encourage children to worship God because those figures are depicted living at the temple, waking up early to follow the life of those involved with the temple, and remembering what was learned from the bible as their only worry. The description given at the beginning of this section, where the children need to wake up during the night, to offer things to the Mesoamerican gods and
to sigh and cry, contrasts with this section of *Espejo divino*, which states that they only need to wake up early and remember what was learned from the Bible (Mijangos 1607: 4).

Just as parents asked their children entering the *calmecac* or the *telpochcalli* to leave childhood behind and to stop playing with potsherds, in *Espejo divino*, father Agustín also asks his child Juan to abandon childhood. However, the way the father addresses the child is different; besides the father asks his son to devote his life to God, he encourages Juan to leave behind his wicked life (Mijangos 1607: 4). To reinforce this argument, Agustín brings the biblical child Tobias into the dialogue to exemplify the behavior he is expecting from his own child. He wanted to raise a child who would scorn childhood, who would rather run to the temple to pray instead of playing with other children. No games and no happiness derived from the interaction with other children was expected; father Agustín wanted his child Juan to follow strict rules and go to church. Although the topic of children as worshippers is emphasized in *Espejo divino* (Mijangos 1607: 4), in the *Apéndice a la Postilla* (Sahagún 1993: 90–93) little children are considered not suitable for worshipping God because they are so young.

Thus, it is an idea that not only intended to break up the elders’ roles as advisors but also to pull apart the children from the community. Such separations were based on the desire for imposing the colonial ideology specifically based on moral and religious beliefs. They trespassed the intimate spaces of caring and instructing the children by the Mesoamerican network for raise girls and boys. Stoler (2009), Burkhart (1989), and Lockhart (2007) agree that, although the existence of documents show the interest in executing changes in the colonial society, it does not mean that their content were
actually real or executed. In colonial Mesoamerica, the existence of books with content related to the Christian doctrine was used as a bridge between the child, the parents, and the Christian institutions to show the morality and ideology that friars and Nahua scholars intended to impose. In this way, what is found in the ecclesiastic documents related to childrearing are indications of intentions for altering the way children were raised, as they pulled apart the traditional ways of passing down knowledge from elders to children and the understanding of children as the responsibility of the community and not only of parents.


Through the chapter, I have touched upon aspects related to the conceptualization of children and of work, as well as of worshipping, as three elements of colonial struggle and reconfiguration. In this section, the different codes of conduct are separated in order to build an ideal manual of the good behavior that children should perform. The elements considered for this purpose are the contested respect that children should give to the elders; the intellectual abilities; the accepted way for sleeping or laying down their bodies; the way they should move around, controlling body parts such as the ears and mouth; manner of dressing, eating, drinking, and continence. Those elements, as Burkhart argued (1989: 134), had to be carefully managed so Nahuas could reach equilibrium in their lives. The difference with Christian discourse was the censure of pleasure.
3.1. Respect to the Elders

Lies were actions that confused people. In colonial texts, a liar was very hateful and disgraceful. Children must learn to speak the truth, and that was the responsibility of their parents. The first lies to avoid were the religion and beliefs that Nahua ancestors left to them. With the colonial discourses, friars and Nahua scholars made a cruel campaign against the ancestors’ beliefs. To these colonial powers, the soothsayers and the elders who knew pagan practices and beliefs were considered liars. According to Sahagún’s sermons, the elders made up the stories in order to gain honor within their group. Therefore, the Nahua religious ideology was something laughable—something for the drunkards—since the truth was written in the Holy Scriptures (Sahagún 1563: 4–6). Parents, then, should teach their children to think about their ancestors as liars (Sahagún 1563: 4–6).

Sahagún’s sermons encouraged parents to tell their children not to believe in what their ancestors thought about the origin of the stars and the sun. He says that these celestial entities were made by God to have light, and they were not gods or goddesses. The morals and the discipline that the ancestors taught to their children were a very acceptable procedure for childrearing. However, the ancestors’ devotion to the gods of the Mexica pantheon sent them to the Christian hell; the Church appropriated the Nahua moral characteristics as well as the discipline that elders used to pass on orally to the young.

Wisdom was a thing children should search for, but it was different among Mesoamericans and Spaniards. The Apêndice a la Postilla (Sahagún 1993: XIII, XIV) evidently states the disagreements with the Mesoamerican culture. Nothing was clearer
than the confrontation that friars and Nahua scholars had with the knowledge taught by
the elders. It is relevant since the morality and practices in which the Mesoamerican
society found support was in the elders’ wisdom. The fifth admonition describes the type
of things that the elders wanted the small children to perform; in the subtitle as well as in
the text, those practices and beliefs were considered products of sin (Sahagún 1993: 91).
In the Apéndice a la Postilla, it is explained that the god Tezcatlipoca is neither satisfied
with children’s penance, nor does he give mercy to the parents who make their children
practice contrition. The document also labels the elders’ knowledge as lies. The text
states that unborn children did not go to the tree of sustenance, and since they are not
baptized, they were “servants of the devil” who cannot think, who do not know the
difference between good and bad, and who do not know the good things they can do for
God because they do not think with prudence (Sahagún 1993: 93). As was explained in
chapter three, elders placed the little children who died in the Tonacatecutli Ichan, or the
house of the lord of sustenance. Those little children, as well as all the ancestors who died
believing in their gods, were living in hell. Although they were good people, their final
destiny was hell because they worshipped Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, Chalchiutlicue, etc.

Sahagún also disagreed in respect to worshipping the Mesoamerican gods. Elders
claimed that the gods loved them a lot and were their friends because they had mercy for
the people. Thus, the priests whom the elders held as the bridge with the gods were
illegitimate. The sermon related to the Second Sunday of Advent says,

Tla xiccaquican, izcatqui cencamatzintli in axcan
vel ic anquinnonotazque amopilhua; in icuac
otlaqualoc, anquimilhuizque. Notlaçopilhuane tle
anquimati ma vel ximimatcanemjcan; ca cequintin
onnemi vevetque ilamatque in miectlamantli quitoa
ye vecauh omochiuh: quitoa, Ca otechihuitevaque
in tocolhuan in tociiva: çan amo nelli quitoa çan quipiqui, çan ic mochachamava, macamo xiquinneltocacan. Auh cequintin nemi tonalpouhque, moyohnonotzani, atl ittoani tlapovani, atlan teittani etc. quiteilhuiya in quinmochivaz: auh in quiteilhuiya, amo quimati çan quipiqui. (Sahagún 1563: Second Sunday of Advent of the Lord)

Listen. Here is a word [of advice] now with which you will admonish your children well. When all have eaten you will say to them: my beloved children, pay attention! Live very prudently, for there are some old men and old women who say many things [about what] happened long ago. They say: Our ancestors left this [life] telling us this. What they say is absolutely not true; they are just making it up; they are only flattering themselves. Do not believe them! And there are some soothsayers, self-opinionated readers of omens, diviners who peer into water, etc, who tell people what will happen in the future. They do not know [anything about] what they tell them. (Sell and Anderson n.d.: 4)

The friars and Nahua scholars wrote that all the Mesoamerican religious ideas were lies and insisted that the priests really worshipped the devil. For example, the beliefs the elders held on the superpowers that people had when they were struck by lightning were also erroneous. In the Mesoamerican tradition, those people became special persons who could intervene and bring rain. In Apéndice a la Postilla, elders were idolaters, betrayers, and offended the Christian God by their practices.

All these ideas were always accompanied by a paragraph explaining that if they still worship the ancient gods, they would die and would be punished by the Christian God to whom they owe everything they had. The friars and the Nahua scholars recognized that the elders’ recommendations of moral behavior for children to follow was good; however, their belief in other deities made them sinners and people whom children
should not follow and should instead disobey. Such assertions perpetuated an ideological battlefield in which Nahua beliefs were reconfigured.

3.2. Controlling the Body

Sleeping little was praised in the traditional Nahua rules and by the friars. Girls were encouraged to limit sleeping, lying down, and staying in the sun or in the shadows without being productive. They should always avoid these behaviors because they would cause wickedness and laziness. To socialize with other people, to understand the codes of the good and the proper, to learn the activities the girls should perform for the gods or for people, were the reasons why they should avoid placing their bodies in unproductive activities (Bautista 1988: 314; Burkhart n.d: 1). Thus, the activities of girls and boys were an important part of the daily reproduction of their society. It did not matter that they were children; they had obligations that were performed through a process of learning and performing specific tasks through a specific code of behavior.

In the ecclesiastic sources, this characteristic is appropriated, which not only encourages but also demands the child to avoid sleeping, comparing the child with pigs; animals used to exemplify laziness, wickedness, and overeating. Such idea is paralleled by a Mesoamerican diphrase that positions the deer and the rabbit as bad examples due to their unstable lives:

*Iyo (notlaçolpitzinè Ioanè) guenmach in atiça ye tlaca, yehueca ca in Tonatiuh, auh noma ticochtoc? Ma mocopac moquetz in cochiztli. Aço çan timocochcamenequi, xihualmoquetza, xihualica, xictlatzihiui, xictelchihua in cochiztli, in netequiztli, ma tictzopelicama, ma ticahuiaacama: Ca çan iyoque in pitzome, yhuan in occequentin manenencatotontin, connequi, quimicoltia,
Hey (my beloved child Juan)! How can it be that you are not awake? It is already late, the sun is already high and you are still lying sleeping? Get your sleepiness out of your mouth! Are you only pretending to be asleep? Get up! Wake up! Detest it! Drive the sleepiness away! Drive the bedtime away! Do not find sleep to be sweet. Do not consider sleeping as pleasant: Only the pigs and other (not nice) little animals want, covet, love sleeping, laziness. They only devote themselves to overeating, sleeping, and laziness: and they make people know, they make people see wickedness, what should not be done. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d.: translation of page 3)

Instead of sleeping or resting, the child should be working, detesting laziness. This is a theme found in the different huehuehtlatolli written in Bautista and Sahagún’s versions. This was a common point of discussion. If the friars wanted an ascetic life for the children, they needed parents and elders to discipline their children in ways that would reinforce the desired behavior.

The huehuehtlatolli and Espejo divino differ in the language used to depict parents addressing their children. While the first texts are adorned with words of respect for their children, Espejo divino shows the father seeing the child sleeping and reacting by yelling at his child. Finding his son sleeping also makes the father think his child is under the influence of a beverage or food that induces sleep.


Listen to what I want to say to you. You truly worry me, you are hurting my heart with your inhuman life, with your craziness, what are you doing? What is wrong with you? What are you thinking? Are you confused? What on earth did you eat? What on earth did you drink? What is making you drunk? Making you confused? Why did you emerge on Earth? Did you only come to enjoy yourself? (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: translation of page 3)

Thus, the text presents a model not for advising but for punishing the child due to bad behavior the father notices. The father questions the child for his bad behavior, in contrast with the huehuetlatolli, in which the children get advice from the fathers, mothers, and elders. The theme in Espejo divino is that of reprimand. The father asks his child whether he is on earth solely to enjoy himself. The boy’s behavior is compared to the way a child used to sleep, to enjoy and to laugh, to eat, to go around during the night, to be happy, to fool around, and to enjoy (Mijangos 1607: 3–4), which are the characteristics the father wants his child to get rid of. These elements are explained in the following paragraphs as characteristics that neither Nahuas nor friars wanted for their children before or after the colonization.

Boys and girls should also be discreet in the way they move. In the household, girls were expected to avoid craziness and laughing (Bautista 1988: 312; Burkhart n.d.: 1). Similarly, in the calmecac, people expected that she should incline her body so she can transmit humbleness. All this behavior should be performed so that God would care for the girl (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 218).

As for the boy, his movements should be tranquil. The way the boy should move
is very descriptive. For example, he should not drag his feet or raise them high; hopping was also prohibited. Every bad habit has a consequence, and walking incorrectly implied that people would look at him as a violent and overweight person who also goes waddling around—a vision that incites mockery. The boy would be compared to a mouse, a firefly, or a pregnant woman, an old object or an unashamed person (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 121–122).

Beside the way the boy should move his body, the way he should stand up was also important. His head should be straight, without dangling the head. While standing up, the boy should stay still and gaze. The punishment for standing incorrectly was that people would think he was a unwise person—someone who lacked counseling—and they would compare him with a commoner or an orphan (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 122).

The way boys should speak was regulated, too. The boy should speak slowly, without rushing or breathlessness; the speech should be unblemished. He should avoid shouting. If the boy does not comply with these rules, then the community would consider him a “groaner, a growler and a squeaker,” stupid, and a person without shame (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 122).

Manipulating one’s gaze was another feature girls and boys should learn. Girls should not gaze at the people around her. Bautista’s huehuetlatolli (1600b: 312–314; cf. also Burkhart n.d: 1) describes the advice the mother normally gives to the girl: She should go straight ahead without looking at people’s faces. In that way, the girl would avoid bothering them, and her life would be conducted in a moderate way. In this way, noble girls would gain admiration and honor among their community. This advice was not necessary within the calmecac, but it was given within the household. Another
version of the way girls should move their head is also in Bautista’s same huehuetlatolli, in which awful and covetous glances should be avoided by the girl (Bautista 1988: 316; Burkhart n.d.: 2). Thus, she should have her head low, and should make a curtsy, bowing in front of the people. This attitude would help the girl to become highly esteemed by others, and she would make this movement peacefully and quietly; with that behavior, the girl would be able to ask people for favors.

The boy should not try to see what is done by others neither, and he should not look into the eyes of the persons whom he should respect, and even less so into the eyes of women, especially if they are married, since it was considered adultery and the offender was imprisoned (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 122).

Ears were another part of the body that should be controlled. As the bodily instrument from where people acquire knowledge about any topic, the rule was to take care of the ears; in order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to ignore conversations and not to gossip. In Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli, it was explained with the words xitlatlalcavui, macaxicmocaccanequini tlatolli, which means that the boy should ignore what was heard (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 122). Again, such advice was accompanied by the consequence of disobeying, which was a punishment imposed by the community, who would seize the boy. If the boy repeated what he overheard, he would be punished—not necessarily the person who originally uttered the words. Thus, prudence was recommended. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 122). It was also important to teach the boy and girl to obey at the first call, and the order should be accomplished in no time.

The boy should move like the wind, fast and light; iuhquin ehecatl tinemiz, which
translates to, “like the wind you will go.” The punishment for being slow would be another communal sentence: People would think he was idle, perverse, lazy, negligent, and rebellious, and he would be stoned and hit with sticks (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 123).

Similarly, girls are taught to obey at the first call. In Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli* (1600b: 316; cf. also Burkhart n.d.: 2), the mother encourages her daughter to obey at the first call in order to avoid punishments and anger. The gender differences seen through the consequences for not obeying at the first call are interesting. Both boys and girls would receive a punishment, but, for the boy, what people would think about him and the punishments the elders would administer to him are explicit. For the girl, the discourse is softer. The mother asks her to obey so she can avoid anger and non-specific punishments. But for the boy, what he is avoiding is to be called lazy, perverse, negligent, etc., and he would also be punished physically.

The girl also receives more instruction in the matter of obeying at the first call in two ways: First, if the person who is called does not respond to the request, then the girl should go instead; second, if she cannot perform the task, then she should communicate this to the people calmly. Thus, the girl is admonished with the favorable consequences that her good action would have, not with the punishments assigned to the boy. In the *huehuetlatolli* about the girl left at the *calmecac* by her parents, she is also encouraged to answer at the first call (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 217).

The matter of obeying an older person’s call was not limited to the tasks the child should perform. Actually, it was also to grasp the advice given by the elders to the children. In the case of the girls, Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli* explains that the girl should
absorb the teachings of others because from there she would learn the ways for living on earth, which should be put in practice and never be forgotten because that would become a bad omen in the life of the girl (Bautista 1988: 316; cf. also Burkhart n.d.: 2).

3.3. Dressing, Eating, and Drinking

Dressing was also regulated; the boy should not dress conspicuously and extravagantly, or with abundant embroidery. However, he should be careful not to wear worn-out and loosely woven clothes. The cape is the type of clothing mentioned different times in Sahagún’s *huehuetlatolli* and was a symbol of distinction that would differentiate the noble boys from the commoners. The boy should learn to use the cape. He should be able to discern between using cloaks with a lot of embroideries, which would make the boy look like a vain person, and using austere cloaks, which would make him look like the ideal type of boy (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 123).

Also, he should learn the correct way to wear the cloak: “*Inic timotlalpiliz, amo timotlaxopeoallalpiliz, amo no tictitichozi in monetlalpil*,” which translates to, “as to how you will tie the things for yourself, you are not to tie it so you step on it, nor are you to shorten your cape.” The boy should learn to cover his shoulder so it would not be visible. In Sahagún’s (1953–1982: Book VI, 123) *huehuetlatolli*, men who are mad—or who are looking to encounter death—as well as buffoons or dancers are prototypes of males who do not have a strict way of wearing the cloak. The behaviors attributed to those people are undesirable for a boy:

That Quachic, the so-called furious in war, he who goeth confidently encountering his death, and the entertainer, and perhaps the buffoon, or perhaps the dancer and the mad one, all snatch the cape of whatever kind; they drag it; they trip over it; they go about mocking, they go rudely, they go drawing it to the arm pit, shoulder bared; they go in conceit, graceless, dragging their feet, twisting and turning as they travel. And their sandals are wide and long, the straps dragging, and their excessively long sandal thongs [also] dragging. (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 123)

The boy should not wear the cape and the sandals like these men. He should wear those objects prudently, in a good and proper way (1953–1982: Book VI, 123). In Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli related to the delivery of the children to the calmecac, it is also emphasized that the child should dress for the time within the institution. Not being overly dressed was necessary because the goal within the calmecac was to learn to live with scarcity, since they were learning to honor the gods (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215).

The instructions for eating and drinking were described in Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli. The boy should eat with moderation. Courtesy and prudence should be driving the boy’s performance. The boy should not be impetuous; he should not bring a lot of tortillas to his mouth and gulp without chewing enough (1953–1982: Book VI,
To gather food from deep in the bowl or in the basket, or to laugh or provoke others to laugh was not correct behavior. If he eats like that, then he will choke, which would send the boy to the floor, and the people would mock him. This would demonstrate his lack of knowledge for eating or drinking correctly, which should be like the way he should speak: slowly and without excess (1953–1982: Book VI, 124).

In the calmecac, the boy should also bring the knowledge he learned at home, and food was one of the aspects children should learn to control by themselves. In Sahagún’s (1953–1982: Book VI, 215) huehuetlatolli, when the parents deliver the child to the calmecac, the boys should learn to practice fasting—they should learn to practice abstinence from food. They should learn that fasting was not intended to cause pain, but for the worshipping of the gods and for toughening their character (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215). Bautista’s huehuetlatolli about the mother who gives advice to her daughter indicates the obligation the girl had for cleaning parts of the body of elders. Specifically, she had to wash their hands, face, and mouth (Bautista 1988: 312; cf. also Burkhart’s translation n.d.: 1).

In Sahagún’s (1953–1982: Book VI, 124) huehuetlatolli, just as in the Bancroft dialogues (1987: 149–157), boys should wash their hands and face before eating. As a boy, the place he should occupy in the space designed for eating is a special one, because he should wash the hands of the people who are at that place, and after eating, the young boy should wash the hands and the mouths of the others. The boy also should sweep up the crumbs, in addition to washing his own hands, mouth, and teeth.

Thus, a boy was expected to perform activities related to cleaning. The boy
should use the broom for cleaning the eating place, he also was responsible for taking care of himself and others. The activities related to cleaning and sweeping were related not only to the rituals they should perform for the temple or for the gods, but for the elders (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 124); it was a cultural behavior totally different than the established in Europe where boys may be responsible for the cleaning of the temple, but not for the cleaning of the household.

To take care of what they say, or what they eat, of the space their bodies occupy, how they place objects on their bodies, their sexuality, or the way they should venerate the gods were all instructions left by the elders. They were the ones who gave the series of codes that Nahua boys and girls should follow.

3.4. Chastity

For friars, chastity was an important characteristic children should keep. Friars practiced chastity, and they wanted the Nahuas to practice it as well. The huehuetlatolli they collected placed more emphasis on the chastity of young males than that of young girls since information were gathered from men instead of women. Thus, as it was customary for men to advise boys, and women to advise girls, the result was a larger amount of information about indigenous males (Burkhart 2012: personal communication).

Ethnographic documents indicate that girls and boys were warned against getting involved with married men or women (Bautista 1988: 426). Sahagún’s huehuetlatolli advised boys to avoid involvement with women, whom they should fear—especially wicked women (1953–1982: Book VI, 125). The pleasure produced by those females
would make the boy lose so much of his “fluids” that he would dry up. As Burkhart (1989: Ch. 5) states, Nahuas pursue moderation in their lives. But if a man had sexual intercourse with different women (the text says, specifically four, five, or 10 women), he would be in great danger, because he dry and may die soon (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 125).

In the case of girls, they are invited to live in chipaoacanemiliztli, which means in purity. They must not practice or desire any vice or filth. Metaphorically, it was said that the girl should make her heart a greenstone, a precious turquoise. She should detest all earthliness or carnal things. For example, Sahagún’s (1953–1982: Book VI, 217) huehuetlatolli says, “chalchiuhtiz, teuxiuhtiz in moiollo, ticchichiliz in moiollo, in monacaio, tiqujlcaoaz, ticpoloz injc tlalticpac, injc timaceoalti,” which translates to, “your heart will be a green stone, a turquoise. You will exert your heart, your body. You will forget, leave the things from the earth so you can gain merit” (Translation by Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart).

Keeping their bodies free from carnal desires demanded more than mere continence. It came along with a series of behaviors children should fulfill. In the case of the girls, the huehuetlatolli in Bautista’s (1600b: 318–320) book shows a mother admonishing her daughter. The girl should be a harmless person, not make fun of others, and avoid wickedness. Besides, if she would neglect the role of her mother and father as her teachers, she would be committing a great fault. Girls were also encouraged to be careful about the company they chose to keep. The mother in Bautista’s huehuetlatolli prohibited her daughter from having thieves, prostitutes, liars, and vagabonds as friends. Indeed, the girl is also advised to avoid places such as the market, the waterways, and
The girl should stay home if she does not want to be called “deer.”

The mother also gives advice on the strategies the girl should follow when encountering a disrespectful man who might want to abuse her. In that case, she should ignore him, and focus on thoughts far from filth. And her presence in the house of relatives should be that of a serious girl showing respect and gathering whatever they would need (Bautista 1988: 318–320). Similarly, the huehuetlatolli advises the boy to “guard himself,” and to ask suspicious people who offer him food or drinks to try the food themselves first (1953–1982: Book VI, 126). Thus, moderation, as Burkhart (1989) explains extensively, is a behavior both boys and girls should practice in order to keep their tonalli strong (López Austin 2004). In the huehuetlatolli about the children who were delivered at the calmecac, boys were admonished for not being moderate. The text states that in the future, they would be honored, esteemed, and obeyed; but for that, they should live in austerity, practicing humbleness and sadness. The words in that huehuetlatolli induce the boy to punish himself in case he has perverted thoughts, or if he was coveting filth and vice, because it would distract his tonalli (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215).

3.5. Intellectual Abilities

Learning to paint and to read the codices was a matter exclusively for children who entered school (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI, 215). And I need to emphasize it was not exclusively for boys, but for girls too. Such statement shatters the notion of writing and reading as a man’s activity. These activities held the same importance as her responsibility to learn to cook or to learn to use the spinning whorl. In this respect,
Bautista’s *huehuetlatolli* says,  

*Yhuan immalacatl, in tzotzopaztli huel xicmocuitlahui...Yhuan in tlacuiloltzintli, immachiotzintli, in tlapaltzintli... Yc huel tetloc, tenahuac timonemitiz, inic ticmomahcehuiz in cana achtizin, atolatzintli, in tlamatzohualtzintli, in quiltzintli, in nopaltzintli; yhuan in can quexquitzin, xaxaltzintli, in popoltzintli immoquezpantzino, immoquechtlanitzco ompilcaz inic ontotoniaz, inic onyamaniaz immotlactzin, immonacayoztin inic ipan ticmotlazocamachitz in totecuyio in itetlaocolilitzin, in iteycnelilitzin. (Bautista 1988: 314)*

And attend well to the spinning whorl, the weaving batten, [...] and the writing, the symbols, the red ink. Thus you will be able to live with and near other people, so that you will deserve a little atole somewhere, a folded tortilla, some greens and cactus leaves, and a little grain, a little mildewed maize that will hang on your neck, from your neck, so that your trunk, your body is warm and comfortable, so that you will give thanks to our lord for his compassion and generosity. (Burkhart n.d.: 1)

Such activities would give the girl the chance of subsisting by mastering the weaving, reading, and writing; these activities would help her to subsist. Therefore, she would not have to wait for her husband to give her sustenance; she would already have the tools necessary for her subsistence.

Girls should learn to speak and sing correctly. Coherent speaking meant that the female child was able to address to others, to answer questions, to ask for favors. The inability to perform such tasks would make the girl look like a fool or a mute person, which were non-desirable characteristics.
And sing well, speak well, address people well, answer people well, make requests well. Speech is not something to be bought and sold. Don’t become like a mute person, or a fool. (Burkhart n.d.: 1)

Thus, this passage speaks to the necessity for girls to not only master household chores that would apply at the temples, but also to prepare for communicating with people, to present themselves as knowledgeable individuals who knew the rules of correct manners.

4. Punishment

Punishment in colonial contexts is a challenge to understand because there are two societies confronting each other’s cultural systems where even some sentiments are not quite the same. Foucault (1995: 128) explains that the punishment to be administered to people requires one to know the “principles of sensation, and of the sympathies;” however, sensations and sympathies would vary among cultures. The anthropological view has brought insight into the diversity of types of childrearing. While some cultures lack painful punishment for children, as in the case of the Samoan children studied by Margaret Mead (2001) and the Trobriand children reported by Malinowski (1961), in other societies, punishment was both corporal and verbal, in varying degrees, which was the case in Christian society from England (see Greven 1973 and 1992) to Spain. For the specific case of Mesoamerica, Spaniards found parallels in the practices of castigation with the Mexica culture. Strict discipline and verbal and physical punishment were
recorded in the ethnographic material as well as in the ecclesiastic documents written in Nahuatl.

As Burkhart states, friars found austerity in the Nahuas’ style of life, which was highly valued by the friars. Feeling that they had found the ideal society for teaching their religion, they also found in children the best group of the Nahuas with whom to begin their evangelization. They used the Christian procedures—punishments, beatings, and violent texts that were used in the Bible. In *Espejo divino*, a violent speech is used from Agustín to his son, and from God to address the fathers. Even though violent punishment was also practiced among the Nahuas (for example in Codex Mendoza and the Bancroft dialogues), this issue is presented in a very subtle manner in the different *huehuetlatolli*. There, even though there are descriptions of the type of punishment the children could have (which are related to the community, not to God), parents addressed their children, exalting the beauty of their offspring, as well as the manners must follow.

Punishment toward their children was not something parents should fear, and was a tool for their education. Imprisonment, whipping, shame, and shaving the head were punishments parents would tell their children about so they might suffer if they did not avoid sins such as drunkenness, robbery, and murder. In the ethnographic material, children were punished because of their failure to perform their daily tasks. The depictions of punishments in the Mendoza codex are about forcing children to conform to proper behavior within the household. For example, women and men tying their naked children was a discourse that made it impossible to know if they were true or false. In other words, it is not possible to know for sure if parents perform the list of punishment depicted in Codex Mendoza, or whether the representation were intended to show the
Among the instruments of punishment were metaphors—for example, *tzonpachpul, cujtlanexpul* (Sahagún 1953–1982: Book VI), which translates to, “disheveled, filthy”—and were used when parents reprimanded the child. They would say “*iuhqujn tzopachpul, cujtlanexpul tincemjtia in motatzin, anozo mocoltzin,*” which means, “you cause your beloved father, or your beloved grandparent, to live disheveled, filthy.”

An extreme corollary of punishments is documented in the Mendoza Codex as aforementioned, but in the ecclesiastic documents, there are also representations of the punishments administered to children. For example, in *Espejo divino*, father Agustín explains to his child Juan that punishment administered to children is a way to educate them spiritually. To stop the children doing things so they would learn to live in the spiritual way is the main objective a parent should have; thus, beating and punishing the child is permitted in order to reach that objective.

When Mijangos wrote “educate the children,” he still used the metaphor *xiquintlapalloti*, which literally means, “paint them,” and is translated as, “instruct them” or “educate them.” And in order for them to be inked or painted, parents should punish them with words and beatings (Mijangos 1607: 6). It was expected that the child should follow the instructions described in the Bible, and to guide and to punish the child is a role parents should address based on the ideology dictated by the Christian religion.

*Espejo divino* uses a metaphor for explaining the way parents should educate their children. The bad behavior is one type of sin, and sin is related to the serpent, to the *tequancoatl* (people-eating serpent). If the father sees his child playing with it and does
not do anything, then he is a bad father and does not love his child because he does not make the child understand his wrong behavior (Mijangos 1607: 6, 7).


It is just like if the father sees his son playing with the serpent, which means sins, and he does not make him stop, he is not a true father. He does not love his child; he only looks at him uselessly, he is neglecting his child; it is just like he kicks his son away; he makes him sick. Because of that (my precious child) if I do not prohibit you from what is bad, will I be called a true father? Will I be known as that? If I do not do what the deity, the ruler, God strongly commands me, won’t I be punished? Won’t I be tortured? Won’t it come back to me? Won’t I be blamed for everything? Yes! (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d: translation of page 7)

In the passage, father Agustín explains to his son that he needs to take care of him and to love him because if not, God would castigate him for being a bad father. Thus, beating and shouting at the child was a way to show his parental love; the sensations and sympathies mentioned by Foucault give understanding to the colonial love and ways of caring for their own children. This behavior is explained not as something the parent should perform to instruct the child, not because of his or her authoritative role inherited from the ancestors and the Mexica pantheon of gods, but because the father, in this case,
is afraid of God; he does not want to go to hell.

Thus, in *Espejo divino*, with different metaphors, the father tries to convince his son Juan that his punishments and teachings would help Juan to become a good boy. With that, the father would drive the child to the right road or the ladder to heaven, and the child would go to God’s house (Mijangos 1607: 9). The father also convinces the child that his corrective actions should not make him mad toward his father because it is the way to show the “chest, the coffer of God,” which is described as an object with precious items such as turquoise, jades, and pearls. The discourse includes the mother; the dialogue of Agustín indicates that such ideas apply to other parents (Mijangos 1607: 9). To justify the punishments the fathers or mothers administers to their children; in chapter 1 of *Espejo divino*, there are metaphoric passages where the parent is compared to a salter and a seasoner, and as a light that would teach the child not to offend God (Mijangos 1607: 10):

\begin{verbatim}
Yehica ca in tettahuan itlaztahuicahuan, itlapoyelicahuan, ihuan itetlachielticahuan, itlanexhuan, ipilhuan muchiuhticate, ipan pouticate in nican iTlaltiepaztineco in toTecuiyo Dios: huel intloc, intlan miquanizque, huel intech mopachozque, quimiztahuizque, quintlaciyaltizque, quintlatcacuitizque, inic ahmo quimoyolihtlacalhuizque in Teotzin in Tlahtocatzin Dios: ihuan quimmachtizque in izquitlamantli itech pouhtoc iyectlayecoltilocatzin, in cenquizcayectlayecoltiloni Dios. (Mijangos 1607: 10)
\end{verbatim}

Because fathers are his salters, his seasoners, and they are becoming, they are esteemed as his teachers, his lights, his children, here on our lord God’s earth: Fathers will separate themselves from being close to them, they will get close to them, they will salt them, they will make them see, they will punish them, so that they will not offend their
deity, their ruler God: and they will teach them all the things that pertain to the proper serving of he who is utterly deserving of proper service, God. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d.: translation of page 10)

To be a salter or a light would give parents the image that would be needed for punishing and advising their children. It was expected that the child accepted such discipline, a discipline that forgot the very elaborated forms of the Mesoamerican childrearing, and which would not have implications for learning and performing activities proper for the reproduction of the household and for the worshiping of the Mesoamerican gods.

In *Espejo divino*, the child is also described as a tree that should keep giving fruit, a tree that should resist freezing epochs, but if the tree does not resist, it is because it became dry, and the fruit would never grow again:

*In yuhqui xochiquahuitl in aocmo celia, aocmo itzmolini, intla celia, itzmolini, ca zan quitlahuelnamiqui in cetl, ca zan oncequalo, inic onhuaqui. Auh in tehuatl, intlacamo ihquac ticeliaz, tizmoliniz, in ihquac tlacelia, tlazmolini, ca zan monehuiyan in incamac timotlazaz tequanime.*

(Bautista 1988: 336)

It is like a fruit tree that does not produce fruit anymore, that does not turn green anymore. If it sprouts, it turns green, it just goes up against the frost, and it just gets frozen, and thus it dries up. As for you, if you do not sprout, if you do not turn green when it is time for things to sprout, to turn green, you will just throw yourself into the mouths of wild beasts. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart’s translation)

In this passage, if the child does not heed the advice of the elders, fathers, or mothers, he would die—he would become a person without principles. The words for
turning green again, *ticeliaz*, *titzmoliniz*, are used for teaching the child that he is responsible for growing by himself after he apprehends the teaching of the fathers, mothers, and elders.

In the case of *Espejo divino* (Mijangos 1607: 10), this metaphor is used not only to teach the child what is good and proper, but also to justify the corrective measures that parents should administer. The child is compared to a tree that is starting to have fruits; it is compared to the tree for its tenderness. And this condition gives the tree vulnerability. The tree is at risk of becoming crooked, of being knocked over, of cracking, which is why the fruit tree, or the tender child, needs someone who can take care of him or her. The fruit tree needs a gardener just as the child needs parents to grow. The gardener, like a parent, gives support and takes care of them. Like the gardener who uses a forked branch to hold the tree, parents also should hold the child. Caring for the tree would bring fruit; in the same way, the caring for the child would have as a consequence the grasping of the good and proper. However, as mentioned above, the good and proper was not the same in the ecclesiastic and the ethnographic documents. Thus, the fruits that the child would produce in the friars’ view were their services of God (Mijangos 1607: 10).

The parent, then, was also represented as a salter, a lighter, and a gardener, who nurtures the child. The metaphor of the salter is particularly interesting. Since salt enhances and preserves food, the parent should also be a salter, because in that way he would keep the child far from sins:

*Xiquitta (notlazopiltzè) ca in izzatl huel quitepitzohua, huel quihuatz in nacatl inic ahmo ihyayaz, ahmo polihuiz, ahmo potoniz’, ahmo palaniz, inic cenca huecahuaz. Ipampa in, in*
nehuatl ca niztatl, monequi in macaçan tinacatl nimitzhuatzaz, nimitztepitzoz, nimitzpipiniliz, inic ahmo tocuillohuaz, ahmo tipalaniz, tipotoniz tlahtlacoltica, inic cemihec ac ihucahuaz vmpa ichantzinco Dios in Ilhuicac. (Mijangos 1607: 11)

Look (my precious child)! Salt truly hardens and dries meat, so that it will not stink, it will not be destroyed, it will not stink, it will not get rotten. So that it will last a long time. Because I am salt, it is necessary that, as if you were meat, I will dry you up, I will harden you. I will make you strong, so that you will not get full of worms, so that you will not rot, so that you will not stink with sin, so that you will last forever there in God’s place in Heaven.

Another metaphor used is that of a blind person who needs the guidance of others.

Because of his disability he cannot follow roads. It is necessary that someone help the person, taking his or her hand.


And about light, listen! (my beloved son) one who is blind, who cannot see anything, cannot see. Can s/he walk around? Can s/he follow the road, find his way? Absolutely not! Why? Because her/his vision, eyes, completely disappeared, Since s/he lost her/his
eyes. And in order for her/him to be able to follow the road, in order for her/him to be able to walk around, in order for her/him to be able to go where s/he wants to go, thus, for her/him is very necessary that someone who has eyes, someone who sees, will guide her/him, will take her/him by the hand, accompany him/her where s/he wants to go. As it is said in the sacred word, the blind person, who lives in the darkness, in the shadows, does not know where s/he will go, cannot get where he wants to go, where s/he wants to get to, cannot follow the road. In the same way (my beloved child), in regard to boys, you will go to understand, you will go to know. Boys are like the blind, because they have no idea of how to follow the road in a sacred way. (Marín-Guadarrama and Burkhart n.d.: translation of page 11)

Thus, the parent is the one who guides the children, who are represented as blinded since they do not know where to go. From those shadows and darkness, parents would rescue the children so they can decide where and what to follow. Holding their hands, with their advice, the children would be guided, again, to the learning of the religious views that the ecclesiastic power sought to impose on them.

As was explained in this section, the mechanisms for correcting children’s behaviors were actually attempts to impose a new moral authority. As I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, because we are discussing texts written by friars, Nahua scholars, or even scribes, the work presented here speaks about the perspectives of the writers who were immersed in power relationships every time, and it would permeate the way they were explaining their methods of correcting the children.
5. Conclusions

This chapter began with the conflict of how to call children in colonial Nahuatl. There was a difference in trying to conceptualize the boy and the girl. In general, friars sought ways to refer to the virginity of girls, but this element was less important in conceptualizing the boy. For him, age was the only characteristic that determined his Nahua designation.

It is clear that the difference between the current occidental stages of infanthood and adolescence do not correspond to the colonial Nahua classification. Among the Nahuas, there was not such stage as adolescence. Nevertheless, there still is an evident difference between babies and children, who are capable of performing specific gender roles within their household. In the case of friars, although they did not use the Spanish word *adolescencia*, they still wanted to understand the Nahua world in terms of stages inside childhood. In the dictionaries, we can find for girls the words *ichpochcatepitoyotl*, *ichpochcaconeyotl*, *ichpochpiltonyotl*, *ichpochpiltzinyotl*, and *ichpochtepitonyotl*. In the case of boys, the words were *telpocayotl*, *telpocaconeyotl*, *telpocapitltoyotl*,

The use of words for referring not to the stage but to the actual children vary according to the type of discourse. It was clear that while for the ecclesiastic and the ethnographic documents the references for children went from compounded words to metaphors, this was not reflected in the civil documents, because in the testaments they were only *tlaçopilli*, *pilli*, *ichpochtli*, *piltzin*, *telpochtli*, *ichpochtli*, *cihuatonti*, and *conetl*.

A generalized theme is that of leaving childhood in order to become mature, responsible for owning lands, or for performing specific chores. However, while such
roles in the ethnographic documents are related to the gender roles and of great importance for the reproduction of the household, the ecclesiastic perspective scorned the household responsibilities of the children, or limited the time spent in such responsibilities since they took time away from adoring the Christian deity.

The love of mothers and fathers toward their children as a social construction was also depicted in the texts, and the teaching shown in the huehuetlatolli, was not enough to show love for the children. It was also necessary that parents show the colonial order of things to their children through the teaching of the Christian doctrine, which in some ways was similar to that followed in prehispanic times.

Important parts of the discipline of colonial indigenous children were the values and Christian rituals and their teaching to the children were all part of the parents’ obligations. There was an important periodicity in learning the Christian faith, which was established in specific moments of their daily life, such as after eating, before sleeping, after waking up, and at midnight. The task of the parents was to prepare their offspring to receive the Christian sacraments from baptism to marriage, and that meant to reject the elders’ beliefs related to the prehispanic Nahua religion. Such parental behavior was the way to show their love toward their children.

Parents should also teach their children to live a prudent life. The prudent life meant to follow punctual behaviors and ways of thinking, while the abstract behaviors were to look for wisdom and for knowledge. The practical morals they should practice were those followed in the Christian precepts: for example, avoid lying, support the sick person and do not feel afraid of them, always avoid putting the body in risk of sexual diseases, remember the favors others have done for them and return the favor, forget
offenses, avoid hatred, avoid excessive sleeping, look for a good person to marry, and be a good-hearted person.

An important point that paralleled both cultures was obedience. In the colonial discourse, parents should teach their children the colonial social and political structure. It was the order: Obey the Christian God, then the priests, then the rulers, and later the mothers and fathers. But if to obey meant to defy God, parents also should teach their children not to obey those who were requesting wrong actions. For differentiating the good and bad actions, parents should teach their children what is right and proper and what is bad and evil, and the respective consequences of those actions. Even the fourth commandment, which orders one to honor the father and mother, would be rejected if the progenitors would not behave properly.

The analysis of colonial Nahua sources written by the friars and Nahua scholars demonstrates a process of reconfiguration that ended up in the impoverishment of the practices and moral patterns that, for centuries, the Mesoamerican cultures built. In the process of knowing the indigenous model for disciplining and punishing the child, friars and Nahua scholars reported numerous characteristics. However, in the process of appropriation of the discourse the ecclesiastic writings enclosed the Mesoamerican knowledge if childrearing into only one category: the religious devotion toward God. In other words, children should learn the Christian devotion.

In both worlds, punishment was used to castigate children who violated the rules of morality and behavior. In both parts, punishment consisted of hitting and shouting, and there was a constant interest in depicting the ways Nahuas punished their children, putting emphasis on the types of castigation followed according to gender. Such
reprimand was also represented in the ecclesiastic documents.

The cultural constructions of what boys and girls meant at that time were implicit in the discussions about the morality, and the daily practices of childrearing, for example, the obligations and the discipline mothers and fathers should teach to their children. These practices were adapted to the mixture of childrearing practices resulting from of the colonial processes in which Nahua and Spanish practices found a place of parallelisms. However, at the same time, there were places of dispute or appropriation of ideas. Such practices also perpetuated the meanings of childhood, and both factors shaped the cultural and generational strategies of the surviving of the Nahua.
General Conclusions

The reconstruction of childrearing in colonial Mesoamerica has revealed important findings. It is clear that the Spanish were quite interested in learning about and transforming the intimate spaces of the Nahuas. The way indigenous mothers or fathers should understand and practice their love toward their girls or boys of different ages and the role that children of different ages—from conetl (babies) to telpochtli (young boy) and ichpochtli (young girl)—played in society were the topics that allowed the reconstruction of childrearing. They contribute to the studies focused on children, gender, and reproduction, as well as colonialism. In this study, all these areas are intertwined to accomplish this dissertation’s purpose of bringing children studies to the ethnohistory of Mesoamerica. Here, I present the conclusions about children becoming writers for colonial purposes, but still having their own native voice. Then, there are some paragraphs about the role and value that indigenous parents played in the colonial documents. Later, the attention that friars and Nahuas put on babies and older children is described based on the similitude the Spanish and Nahuas had about pregnancy and the care for babies and older children, which in the end resulted in a contested field of ideologies and practices. Finally, I present a general conclusion.

Colonial indigenous and Spanish documents and the images created by indigenous or Spanish artists are the windows to understanding the sociocultural transformations of childrearing. This information is equivalent to that found by the ethnographer in the field. In the end, we are doing a historical ethnography that delves into complex social processes. The ethnographic work that the friars and the Nahua scholars developed shows the colonial desires for understanding those practices of
childrearing. The huehuetlatolli are outstanding documents that speak about rituals and admonitions in which children are the main actors. The huehuetlatolli, codices, and dictionaries present the influence of European culture, such as the dichotomistic thought of searching for the good and the bad in individuals according to the European perspective. The doctrinal literature had different purposes: Friars and Nahua scholars wanted to transform the way in which children were raised. Sermons, guides for confession, Christian doctrines, and plays were written by educated Nahuas under the supervision of the friars. Usually, they constructed their discourses based upon the information they found in ethnographic documents and using their own indigenous cultural knowledge. Legal documents are the closest information we have about the life of Nahuas. Testaments; lawsuits; censuses; and records of marriage, death, and baptism are all important sources of information in which the agenda for the study of children must focus in the very near future.

The documents are the result of the enculturation of Nahua scholars and friars. However, the ecclesiastic instruction that Nahua scholars and some Spaniards received during their childhood made them live in a cultural borderland where they were able to disguise themselves in the spaces of the colonizers and the spaces of the colonized. However, their influence over those spaces of power was different between the Spanish children and the indigenous children. Their ethnic background permitted the Spanish, such as Juan de Mijangos and Alonso de Molina, to become friars and publish books, which was not the reality for Nahua scholars, who, despite being raised under the supervision of the friars, were not able to be authors of ecclesiastic books. The credits they got were only of collaborators. They also could become governors, but only from the
indigenous localities; they never could aspire to other roles, which were only for Spanish people. Nevertheless, it seems that there was a kind of complicity between the friars and the Nahua scholars. In the books, codices, and manuscripts, Nahuas found a place to register their own voices. In short, Nahua scholars could become colonial instruments, but they still had agency to register and shape the way in which indigenous children were or should be raised.

Scholars in the anthropology of reproduction have stated that the study of reproduction makes possible the understanding of cultures. Colonial Mesoamerica is one example. The colonial interest for intervening in the most mundane spaces of social reproduction drove the writers to learn about the way Nahuas lived within their households. They were interested in learning about the roles and values that mothers and fathers had to practice and teach to their children.

Friars and Nahua scholars paid attention only to one part of the network created for raising the children. Although they registered in dictionaries and codices the existence of other caregivers, in the ecclesiastic literature they isolated fathers and mothers as the only ones responsible for creating the Nahua colonial children. The ethnographic sources reported information that considered girls and boys of different ages children of the community. Nevertheless, their male, ecclesiastic, and noble colonial perspectives drove them to consider mothers and fathers as the only responsible persons for raising children. Parents became the colonial strategy to change the daily life of the Nahua household, and the values and practices of mothers, fathers, girls, and boys. They focused on three analytical points, which were the intensity of parental sentiments, the attachment parents should have toward their children, and the meaning they—as mother or father—should
give to their role within the household. Mothers and fathers became metaphors that writers used to transform parental roles and values among the Nahuas. The aspect that conditioned the formation of the indigenous societies in Mesoamerica was the introduction of the patriarchal figure that conditioned a new hierarchical model inside and outside the household. Friars called themselves fathers of the indigenous population as a way to show authority over them.

The most interesting discourses of authority using parental terms were those used between the Spanish king and the Mexican ruler, where we can find a gender difference. Relationships with the citizens and the myths were different. Mesoamerican deities were a duality, the old mother and the old father were the ones who gave origin to humanity and to whom Nahuas should worship. The Christian religion introduced a god represented as a male. In the Christian religion, fathers and mothers were scorned for the sin committed by the first parents, Adam and Eve. The role mothers and parents played in reproduction were also different. Childbirth was no longer a space of power where a woman could become a warrior, or a goddess as in the Nahua society. The Christian religion associated the pain of childbirth with the punishment given to Eve for her sins, which she passed to all women.

In the relationship between rulers, such difference existed too. While it was expected that the Spanish king was obeyed and respected and people should behave as servants, the Nahua ruler always addressed himself as the father and the mother of his citizens. This ruler had the obligation of nurturing the population, rocking the cradle, and embracing the citizens—maternal terms that would not be used by the Spanish king. The existence of similar information in the Mayan area seems to reveal a Mesoamerican
pattern that would be interesting to investigate in the future as a way to understand another Mesoamerican cultural characteristic.

Thus, the gender complement where mothers and fathers had their own valuable roles was transformed. The colonial documents used in this dissertation only allow us to say that the changes were written intentions. It is necessary to make a historical study to know the repercussions of those discourses in their daily reality.

Natural maternal love was accepted in both cultures; however, the value attributed to mothers made it different. The Christian documents acknowledged her reproductive capability, but did not give her the value that such biological characteristics had in the Mesoamerican tradition. God gave her that punishment; she had to suffer. She still had the role of caregiver to the children, but she became an object. She had obligations for which she would not achieve any social appreciation. The role that the father played was also conflictive, because although it deposited a great load of power in his figure, he became the main instrument of colonial power. His representations in the ecclesiastic documents are that of a frightened father always worried about accomplishing his paternal work.

Babies were also subjects of colonial interest. The attention toward the youngest indigenous population demonstrates the degree in which the ecclesiastic and political powers wanted to get involved in the life of the household. For this matter, the use of Spanish and indigenous documents brought understanding to the world of colonial indigenous babies. There existed parallelisms between both cultures. In this dissertation, three were identified: behavior and feelings women should experience, giving advice to the pregnant woman, and avoiding miscarriage. Those cultural parallels did not have the
same meaning. For Nahuas, it was a matter of survival, and in case of death, they still became goddesses or children who stayed under the care of the nursing tree. For the Spanish, the culpability, sin, and punishments were the consequences of an unsuccessful childbirth. Thus, pregnancy in colonial Mesoamerica became a mechanism of control where the writers were deciding the intensity of sentiments and the procedures in which women should have their babies. In short, women’s bodies became property of the colonial state because they were interested in determining the way in which the colonial society was being disposed.

This dissertation makes clear the gendered assignation that babies had as soon as the midwife knew the sex of the child. Interestingly, this aspect questions the philological methodologies, since words did not give the meaning of baby girls and boys. It is necessary to use other methods in order to enter into better reconstructions of ethnohistorical realities. The male, indigenous, and noble discourses, in which this dissertation bases its findings, show that Nahua scholars appropriated European representations of Christian personages such as the Virgin Mary, baby Jesus, and Saint Joseph to create paintings about the daily life or rituals where midwives, mothers, soothsayers, and fathers were represented. However, putting the ethnographic documents in discussion with the ecclesiastic ones makes clear that there were intentions or desires for changing the rituals of initiation.

It was clear the diminishment of midwives and soothsayers. While midwives kept their responsibility for assisting childbirth, they and the soothsayers lost the spaces of power they formerly had. Now, initiating the child into society through a ritual was a responsibility of the friar, which meant that the indigenous gender and generational
complement was changing not only in households, but also in the individuals, where the responsibility for shaping the society was previously deposited. The ideological beliefs were also points of desired transformation since the friars and Nahua scholars rejected the practice of human sacrifice, which obligated them to change the Christian ways of preaching (with sermons specifically). The ideological conflict of how to grieve a baby’s death was the most contested one. The existence of another life for the dead babies near to Tezcatlipoca, the most important god of the Mesoamerican pantheon, was contrasted with the idea of unbaptized children going to Limbo, a place of obscurity, where nothing happened.

This dissertation has shown that childrearing practices entered into a process of reconfiguration that ended up in the impoverishment of the practices and moral patterns that the Mesoamerican cultures built over centuries. In the process of learning the indigenous model for disciplining and punishing the child, friars and scholars reported detailed characteristics about what the child should believe in and how the child should behave for the religious worshipping to gods, but also more generally in society. It seemed that writers appropriated the discourse and used it in the ecclesiastic documents; however, they enclosed such knowledge into only one category that was the children’s Christian devotion. If it was violated, they would proceed to castigate the boys and the girls with ideological mechanisms that would send them to hell.

The cultural constructions of what boys and girls meant at that time were implicit in the discussions about the morals and the daily practices of childrearing. However, it is evident the importance that the sources gave to the boys. There is little information to reconstruct the world of Nahua girls. The results seem obvious since the persons who
gathered the information were men, and were performing their actions based on what the Christian doctrine of the 16th and 17th centuries would allow them to do, which meant staying away from the women.

For now, we can conclude that although the exploration and intentions of changing childrearing practices and values were part of an ecclesiastic program for transforming the Nahua society, it was not successful in terms of domination. Nahua scholars started with representations of feminine spaces of power based on their own native Christianized male understandings. In the end, with intention or without intention, they were writing the history of Nahua childrearing, and at the same time they participated in its transformation.
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