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The Wet Nurses of Jocotenango: Gender, Science, and Politics in Late-Colonial Guatemala¹

STEPHEN WEBRE

A controversy, like so many others that over the years disturbed the political life of the Spanish colony of Central America, erupted on 22 August 1797. A prominent physician, Don José Antonio de Córdoba, complained to the president of the *audiencia*, Don José Domás y Valle, about the behavior of the parish priest of Jocotenango, an indigenous suburb of Guatemala City.² According to Córdoba—interim *protomédico*, or chief medical officer, of the province—the priest, Don Manuel José de Pineda, had sent a party of native constables to his residence in the city for the purpose of removing a woman of Jocotenango who, on orders from the president

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Kimberly S. Hanger, who was an influential scholar of colonial Latin America and especially of issues such as gender, race, and exploitation, which are reflected in this work.

² The community referred to here is the new town of Jocotenango, established on the northern edge of the central grid of Guatemala City when the latter was laid out in the 1770s. Although it was a contiguous suburb, Jocotenango was also a self-governing indigenous *pueblo*, which in 1784 reported a population of 3,100 inhabitants, the majority of them Kaqchikel-speaking Maya. Domingo Juarros, *Compendio de la historia del reino de Guatemala, 1500-1800* (Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa, 1981), 58. As a result of steady urbanization during the nineteenth century, Guatemala City completely absorbed Jocotenango. Deprived of its autonomous municipal status in 1879, the former *pueblo* became the historical core of the district known today as Zona 2, about six blocks north of the old *plaza mayor* (today's Parque Central). Gisela Gellert and Julio César Pinto Soria, *Ciudad de Guatemala: dos estudios sobre su evolución urbana, 1524-1950* (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, 1990), 17. The new town of Jocotenango should not be confused with its namesake, Asunción Jocotenango (today the municipality of Jocotenango in the department of Sacatepéquez), a conquest-era *reducción* from which many of Jocotenango's inhabitants or their parents had migrated following the 1773 earthquake that destroyed the original Spanish capital, Santiago de Guatemala (today Antigua Guatemala). Also, there is no connection between either of these communities and the municipality of San Bartolomé Jocotenango in the department of El Quiché.

himself, was employed in the Córdoba household as a wet nurse. The woman in question, María de los Santos Guerra, had left behind an infant son of her own in Jocotenango, who was, in turn, being nursed by a female cousin.³

During the two years that followed the confrontational scene that took place in the Córdoba entryway, the parish priest of Jocotenango waged a determined campaign to end the coerced employment of indigenous wet nurses by the elite families of Guatemala City, a practice which, although without much effect, had been forbidden by royal decree since 1609. Although the dispute began over the employment of María de los Santos Guerra in the Córdoba household, it soon focused on another similar case: that of María del Carmen Contán, wet nurse to the infant son of Don Pedro de Ay-cinena y Larraín, one of the city's wealthiest and most influential Spanish residents.

The controversy over the wet nurses of Jocotenango served to highlight the role played in the colonial system of domination by the categories of race, class, and gender. Scholars of colonial Spanish America are accustomed to negotiating the complexities of a social structure that incorporated both race and class-based hierarchies. The challenge of representing the interaction between them is increased when one adds gender as a third axis of differentiation, making it imperative to take account of the experiences of women, a group whose members not only constituted roughly half of the colonial population but who also were distributed broadly throughout the other two hierarchies. The theoretical literature on the intersection of race, class, and gender is extensive, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to resolve its difficulties. What appears certain, however, is that in colonial society power and influence belonged to those who were white, propertied, and male. If one speaks of a triad of interlocking systems of oppression, as many writers do, then the poor indigenous women of Jocotenango found themselves at the disadvantaged end of all three.⁴

³ Don José Domás y Valle to Don Manuel José de Pineda, Nueva Guatemala, 23 August 1797, Archivo General de Centroamérica, Guatemala City (hereinafter cited as AGCA), A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 2. Folio numbers are given where they exist.

⁴ The earliest theoretical work on the intersection of race, class, and gender appeared in the context of the social sciences and focused on the experience of African American women in the United States. On the growing significance of this perspective

The wet nursing dispute also pointed to the limitations as forces for social justice in the late-colonial period of both royal paternalism and Enlightenment reformism. Although paternalism and reformism belonged to two distinctive discursive traditions—one which for purposes of convenience can be called "traditionalist" and the other "modernist"—both were essentially male-centered. The parties to the quarrel, all of them male, drew indiscriminately upon both traditions to support their mutually antagonistic positions. For example, actors in the controversy deployed not only a traditionalist rhetoric which emphasized legalism and personal honor, but also a modernizing discourse whose tropes included the application of human reason and the concepts of natural rights, empirical science, and medical authority. In the end, however, the defenders of the established order succeeded in personalizing the conflict, centering the narrative not on the plight of women and children victimized by colonial exploitation, but on the behavior of their pastoral advocate, Don Manuel José de Pineda. As often occurred during the colonial period, the issue was never fully resolved.

The employment of wet nurses—that is, the entrusting of recently born infants to be breast-fed by women other than their own mothers—was a practice known in one form or another in all human societies since remotest antiquity.⁵ Before the twentieth century, there were no safe, effective artificial means of infant nutrition. Therefore, in cases of a mother's death or physical inability to breast-feed, recourse to a wet nurse was a vital necessity. However, in Europe during the late-Middle Ages and early-modern period, it also became fashionable for elite women to employ wet nurses, even when there was no medical need to do so.⁶ In some cases, because of a desire to avoid the inconvenience and restriction on her own activities that

for Latin American history since the mid-1980s, see Sueann Caulfield, "The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81 (2001):451-90.

⁵ For an introduction to the history of wet nursing, see Valerie A. Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Also useful is Janet Lynne Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), esp. 1-63. There is no work of similar substance for Latin America, but a brief discussion appears in Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118-19.

⁶ Golden, *Wet Nursing in America*, 11-13.

breast-feeding the child would require, it may have been the mother who decided to place a newborn infant to nurse. More commonly, however, the choice appears to have been that of the father, either because breast-feeding was understood to inhibit ovulation and therefore to delay the next pregnancy, or because custom enjoined sexual abstinence during lactation.⁷

The relationship between a wet nurse and her employers could be long or short-term. The wet nurse relationship could be contractual, involving payment in return for services rendered, or it could be an informal arrangement, in which a friend, neighbor, or relative lent her assistance in time of need. In societies characterized by extreme power differences, such as ancient Greece or Rome or the slaveholding South in the United States, the relationship could also be coercive. In the specific case of Spanish America, evidence exists of the widespread employment during the sixteenth century of the *repartimiento*, or *mandamiento*, to recruit native wet nurses involuntarily.⁸ In 1570, for example, the regular labor obligation of the town of Asunción Jocotenango in the valley of Panchoy, original home to the ancestors of many of Jocotenango's residents, included a requirement to supply three wet nurses per week.⁹

Contemporary observers complained that the use of the compulsory labor draft to recruit wet nurses forced indigenous women to neglect their own children and husbands, which, in turn, threatened the integrity of families and entire communities.¹⁰ It was also suggested that forced wet nursing contributed to the massive native population decline that characterized the early colonial period—a decline that is conventionally estimated from 90 to 95 percent for central Mexico, with similar ratios for other major provinces, in-

⁷ Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, 83.

⁸ Manuela Cristina García Bernal, "Los servicios personales en Yucatán durante el siglo XVI," *Revista de la Universidad de Yucatán* 19 (1977):80-82.

⁹ Christopher H. Lutz, *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 22-23. Given the nature of wet nursing as an occupation, it is not clear how a weekly draft would have been organized or what clientele it might have served. It is possible that the women drafted for this service were assigned to the care of orphaned and abandoned infants.

¹⁰ See, for example, petition by Fray Alonso de la Calle, O.F.M., ca. 1618, Archivo General de Indias (hereinafter cited as AGI), Seville, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 7, reporting on conditions in the diocese of León, Nicaragua.

cluding Guatemala.¹¹ Citing reports of such "grave consequences," in 1609 King Philip III ordered that indigenous women with living children of their own were not to be employed as wet nurses in Spanish households.¹² However, judging by complaints made several years later by Franciscan friars in such widely separated provinces as Guadalajara and Nicaragua, this prohibition had little effect.¹³

Based on his own work on Guadalajara, historian Thomas Calvo has proposed a chronology for the Spanish colonies, according to which, by the end of the sixteenth century, the decline of the native population had begun to force Spanish American families to find other sources for wet nursing services. During the seventeenth century, Calvo argues, African slave women appeared to have assumed this function, while in the eighteenth century families relied upon *casta* (mixed race) women who contracted their services freely in return for a cash wage. Contrary to practices in other areas, notably in England and the English colonies in North America, it was not customary in Spanish America to send infants away from home to rural communities to be nursed; rather, the common expectation was that wet nurses would maintain residence in the homes of their employers.¹⁴

¹¹ Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, "The Population of Colonial Spanish America," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1995), 2:3-35, provides a good introduction to the sixteenth-century demographic catastrophe. For data from Guatemala, see also W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, *Demography and Empire: A Guide to the Population History of Spanish Central America, 1500-1821* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), esp. 9-12.

¹² Ley 13, título 17, libro 6, *Recopilación de las leyes de los reynos de las Indias* (Madrid: Julián de Paredes, 1681), II, fol. 271.

¹³ Thomas Calvo, "The Warmth of the Hearth: Seventeenth-Century Guadalajara Families," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 290-91; and Petition by Fray Alonso de la Calle, O.F.M., ca. 1618, AGI, Guatemala, leg. 7.

¹⁴ Calvo, "Warmth of the Hearth," 291. Calvo suggests that the difference may have been cultural, that is, that the practice of sending children away to be nursed was characteristic of northern Europe, whereas the practice of employing live-in wet nurses was more common to the Mediterranean, from which Spanish America presumably inherited it. It appears more likely, however, that the explanation lies in economic means and relative social position. Throughout Europe, members of royalty and the aristocracy insisted on their children being nursed at home under parental supervision, and the Spanish American elite were probably emulating this behavior. Consigning infants to the care of peasant women in the countryside appears to have been a product of the "democratization" of wet nursing that occurred with the expan-

If this general model is applied to Guatemala, the end of the eighteenth century would seem late to still be relying on forced wet nursing. Nevertheless, in September 1797, according to a report prepared by Diego Casanga, the native governor of Jocotenango, there were twenty-one women of that community employed as nurses in Guatemala City households. The majority, or perhaps all, of these women had been drafted for such service against their will. Among them, they had twenty-eight children of their own, ranging in age from three months to ten years. In the absence of their mothers, these children had been entrusted to the care of grandmothers, aunts, or other relatives.¹⁵ Considering that only a woman who had herself recently given birth could serve as a wet nurse, such separations were inevitable. In the cases of some women, their children had died, but the majority had living children who had to be placed in the care of other indigenous women. In other words, these wet nurses had to find wet nurses of their own. As would become clear from testimony given during the Jocotenango wet nursing dispute of the late 1790s, the only alternative was for the nurse to divide her milk between her own child and that of her employer. Fearing that their children would be denied adequate nutrition, Spanish parents generally discouraged this practice. By contrast, it was an arrangement that indigenous women commonly had no choice but to accept for their own infants, when their employment as wet nurses required them to leave their children in the care of others.¹⁶

In the Jocotenango controversy, Father Pineda cited several instances in which he alleged that the health, or even the life, of an indigenous child had been placed at risk to attend to the needs of a Spanish infant. He placed the greatest emphasis on the case of Luis José López, infant son of María del Carmen Contán. In October

sion of the bourgeois and artisan classes in European cities in the early-modern period. See Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, "Innovation et comportement parental en milieu urbain (XVe-XIXe siècles)," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 40 (1985):1024.

¹⁵ Diego Casanga, report on women employed as wet nurses in Guatemala City, Jocotenango, ca. 30 September 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 13-13v.

¹⁶ Several examples of a wet nurse's own child being nursed *a media leche*, that is, sharing with other children the services of a single substitute nurse, are reported by Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 72v-75.

1797, Pineda complained that for more than a year Contán, as she herself explained, had been employed against her will as a wet nurse in the household of Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín and his wife, Doña Javiera de Barrutia. Because of Contán's service in the city, she had left her own child in Jocotenango, where he was passed from woman to woman, causing him to weaken and remain poorly developed for his age. At the time of Pineda's complaint, Luis José was in the care of his maternal grandmother, María Magdalena Cojtí, a woman in her mid-forties who was attempting to nurse him along with an infant child of her own. In his appeal to the authorities, the priest decried what he called a "sad spectacle, for in addition to María del Carmen Contán's violated liberty and the separation from her child, there is her widowed mother, burdened with eight children and grandchildren, two of them at the cost of her own milk, which, given her age, must be of little substance."¹⁷ Meanwhile, because of the obligation placed on them to care for Luis José, once again according to Pineda, three of the substitute wet nurses had lost their own children to malnutrition.¹⁸

As in any case of forced wet nursing, the interests of the Spanish colonial elite tended to conflict with those of native women and children. What gave the matter of Luis José López its special significance was that it involved the province's wealthiest and most influential family. In late-eighteenth-century Guatemala, colonial authorities would have been well aware of the need to manage any dispute involving an Aycinena with care and discretion.¹⁹

¹⁷ The original wording is: "se representa un espectáculo ciertam^{te} lastimoso, pues á mas de la libertad quebrantada de María Contán, y despojo que sufrió de su hijo, se descubre por una parte á la Viuda, Madre de esta, encargada entre hijos, y nietos de ocho criaturas, dos de ellas a expensas de su leche, q^e como de muger anciana sera de muy poca sustancia." Don Manuel José de Pineda to Don José Domás y Valle, Jocotenango, 2 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 18. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from archival sources are by the author. The original Spanish orthography has been maintained in the quotations from archival documents.

¹⁸ Don Manuel José de Pineda to Don José Domás y Valle, Jocotenango, 2 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 17-17v.

¹⁹ Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín was the nephew and partner of the recently deceased Don Juan Fermín de Aycinena, first marquis of Aycinena. On this family and its role in Central American history, see Richmond F. Brown, *Juan Fermín de Aycinena: Central American Colonial Entrepreneur, 1729-1796* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

According to Don Pedro de Aycinena's own version of events, early in 1796 his wife had given birth to a male child. Because of Doña Javiera's physical incapacity to breast-feed, which Aycinena described as "well known, as is all she has suffered and continues to suffer,"²⁰ the couple had engaged the services of a wet nurse, of whom Aycinena stated only that she was not from Jocotenango. When this nurse became ill and could no longer perform her duties, Aycinena, in need of a prompt replacement, had asked Diego Casanga, the native governor of Jocotenango, to send him a woman from that community to take her place. In reply, Casanga selected María del Carmen Contán, who then left her own small son, Luis José López, in the care of another woman. Aycinena stated that it was initially his intention that the employment of Contán should be temporary, but the original wet nurse took so long to recover that, by the time she was able to return to work, she had ceased to lactate. At this point, Contán agreed—voluntarily according to Aycinena—to continue in service, while her own child was entrusted to the care of a series of substitute nurses.²¹ At the time of Aycinena's declaration, as Father Pineda had previously made known, the infant Luis José was being kept by his grandmother, María Magdalena Cojtí, the sixth woman to nurse him since his birth.

In defense of his position, Aycinena presented a detailed account of how much it had cost him to maintain the services of Contán. In addition to a wage of four pesos monthly, which was more generous than the three pesos mentioned frequently in the documents as the customary rate, the Spaniard had permitted Contán the sum of 18 *reales* each month for various necessities. Aycinena claimed also to have covered certain extraordinary expenses, including eight pesos to help purchase a thatched dwelling (*rancho*) in Jocotenango and an unspecified sum to satisfy the tribute owed by Contán's husband, Antonio López, who had abandoned her and fled Jocotenango some time before. Because Contán lived with him and his family, Aycinena calculated that she had few material needs and that, therefore, most of

²⁰ The original wording is: "su total impocibilidad para criar, que es vien publica, como tambien lo mucho que ha padecido, y padece de continuo." Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 5 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 22.

²¹ Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 5 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 22-23v.

her income must go to the maintenance of her mother, María Magdalena Cojtí, of Cojtí's own minor children, and, of course, of Contán's son, Luis José López. In fact, Aycinena insisted, Contán's family was "supported entirely at my cost, as is that of her mother, as they will themselves testify."²²

One difficulty in attempting to make sense of conflicting accounts concerning the employment of María del Carmen Contán in the Aycinena household, and indeed of the entire Jocotenango wet nurse controversy, is the multiplicity, diversity, and overlying nature of the narratives constructed by the various interested parties. Contested versions of reality emerged both from distinct personal experiences and from the differently situated perspectives of the principal protagonists. Also, given the importance attached by contemporary society to distinctions of gender, class, and race, some voices were heard more loudly and clearly than others. In general, the voices least heard were those of women, a significant omission considering that, in the dispute over the wet nurses of Jocotenango, it was the women and children on both sides whose interests were most directly affected. Also, matters of household management, including the employment of servants and the rearing of children, were traditionally considered to belong to women's sphere of responsibility, as Don Pedro de Aycinena himself acknowledged when he explained that he had solicited the pertinent information for his statement from his wife because the engagement and supervision of wet nurses was a "matter that women handle."²³ Significantly, although Doña Javiera may have been the one with specific knowledge of the case, it was Don Pedro's function, as the man of the house, to interact with public authorities.

Although most of the interventions in the Jocotenango wet nursing controversy were by men, a rare instance of a woman being allowed to speak for herself in a public proceeding did occur on 17 October 1797, when colonial authorities interviewed María del Carmen Contán. Even so, Contán's words were not recorded verbatim; rather a male notary paraphrased them in the third person, as

²² The original wording is: "de forma que a mi costa se manttiente de en todo a su familia, y a la de su madre, como ellas mismas lo confezaran." Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 5 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 22-23v.

²³ The original wording is: "es asumpto que manejan las Mugerres." Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 5 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 24.

was routinely done with statements by deponents of either gender. Identified as the legitimate wife of Antonio López, also of Jocotenango, Contán appears in the documentation as a woman of approximately thirty years of age and *bien ladina*, which in contemporary Guatemalan usage meant that she spoke Spanish well enough not to require an interpreter. Although she was interrogated in the presence of elite males, Contán did not hesitate to declare that

she did not want to serve [as a wet nurse] in the household where she was employed, because she has three children [of her own], one of them still nursing, and the other two older...but that the governor [Casanga] had ordered her to hire herself out, and, because she did not want to give the governor cause to chastise her, she had agreed to do so.²⁴

Despite Contán's unambiguous declaration that her placement in the Aycinena household was against her will, she did confirm the essential details of her employer's statement, especially with regard to the Aycinenas' generosity toward her. It was true, Contán said, that, when the original nurse proved unable to resume her duties, she had willingly agreed to remain in the Aycinena household. She had done so because the Aycinenas had always treated her well, but, more importantly, because she needed the income "to dress herself, because she had no clothing and her husband had abandoned her the year before."²⁵ Contán expressed no bitterness toward Antonio López, her missing husband, whose flight she blamed on Governor Casanga, who, she said, had made his life unbearable by forcing him to work in Spanish households in Guatemala City. In López's absence, however, Contán had found herself vulnerable to exploitation by Casanga, who, she said, had systematically defrauded her, ordering her *rancho* in

²⁴ The original wording is: "que ella, no queria venir a servir de Chichigua a la Cassa donde esta, por que tiene tres hijos, el uno, de pecho, y los otros dos grandesitos.... Pero que el Governador le mando, obligar a servir y ella, Por que no le dijera algo el Governador se obligo a servir." Declaration of María del Carmen Contán, Nueva Guatemala, 17 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 28v-29. "Chichigua" is another term for "wet nurse."

²⁵ The original wording is: "por vestirse, pues estaba desnuda, y el Marido hase un año que la ha dexado." Declaration of María del Carmen Contán, Nueva Guatemala, 17 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 29v.

Jocotenango sold to satisfy a debt that she claimed her husband had already paid. Upon learning of this abuse, Contán said, her mistress, Doña Javiera de Barrutia, had given her eight pesos, of which she gave six to the governor, who, "far from agreeing to restore her *ranchito*, kept the money himself, saying that her husband owed it to him, leaving her without the one or the other."²⁶

Because of the urgent need to employ a wet nurse and because it was often difficult to find a healthy, lactating woman of clean personal habits, it was in the interest of employers to keep their nurses as content as possible. Contán's description of the solicitude shown her by the Aycinenas agrees reasonably well with what is known of the wet nursing relationship elsewhere, and particularly with the declarations of other women of Jocotenango. When, a year later, the colonial authorities decided to interview all of the Jocotenango wet nurses, they had a chance to speak on their own behalf, and several of them took advantage of it to acknowledge the beneficence of their employers.²⁷

The employment of wet nurses in the absence of a genuine physical necessity always had its critics, going back to ancient Greece and perhaps beyond.²⁸ In modern times, and especially during the century of the Enlightenment, such opposition increased, as a new emphasis developed on maternal love and duty, which stressed the mother's role as the custodian of her child's health and moral and civil education.²⁹ This opposition can be seen internationally in the writings of such diverse moral authorities as Cotton Mather and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both of whom equated wet nursing with maternal neglect. In 1773, Guatemalan archbishop Don Pedro Cortés y Larraz

²⁶ The original wording is: "lejos de concurrir, a la restauracion del rancho, se los tomo disiendo que el Marido le devia a él, y se quedò, sin uno, y sin otro." Declaration of María del Carmen Contán, Nueva Guatemala, 17 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 30.

²⁷ Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, report of medical examinations conducted on several women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 72-75.

²⁸ Pedro Navarro, "Lactancia mercenaria: hipocresía y explotación," *Asclepio: Archivo Iberoamericano de Historia de la Medicina y Antropología Médica* 35 (1983):376.

²⁹ Golden, *Wet Nursing in America*, 11-13; Socolow, *Women of Colonial Latin America*, 171; and Marysa Navarro and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, with Kecia Ali, *Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 56-57.

instructed confessors in his diocese to stress to their female parishioners the mother's obligation to breast-feed her own children.³⁰ In general, physicians of the period tended to agree with this moralist critique, citing the dangers of the unnecessary reliance on wet nurses to both the children of the nurses and the children of their employers. In general, medical anti-wet nursing discourse appeared to assume that children were sent away from home to be nursed, a practice which, while it did not appear to prevail in Spanish America, was increasingly common in Europe and was known to be accompanied by elevated mortality rates.³¹ For their part, whatever the dominant employment practice, Spanish American physicians in the eighteenth century also attributed much of the infant death rate to "ignorant" wet nurses.³² Guatemalan medical professionals, for example, cited the questionable health, hygiene, and personal habits of so-called "mercenary" wet nurses, that is, women who sold their services voluntarily. Although the custom of local elite families was to have their children attended in their own homes, physicians also noted that such employment arrangements led inevitably to the neglect of the nurses' own offspring.³³

Therefore, the parish priest of Jocotenango had a considerable accumulation of authority on his side when he spoke out against the forced recruitment of wet nurses. To make his case against what he denounced as a "Pharaonic captivity,"³⁴ Don Manuel José de Pineda relied heavily on traditionalist rhetoric, appealing to the existing legislation of 1609, as well as to the king's paternal duty to protect his

³⁰ Don Juan de Collado, opinion, Nueva Guatemala, 14 May 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 57. In Spain and Spanish America, the issue of possible negative effects of wet nursing came up with some regularity in the writings of contemporary essayists. See Johanna S.R. Mendelson, "The Feminine Press: The View of Women in the Colonial Journals of Spanish America, 1790-1810," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), 208-09.

³¹ Fauve-Chamoux, "Innovation et comportement parental," 1027.

³² Socolow, *Women of Colonial Latin America*, 171.

³³ Don José Antonio de Córdoba to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 11 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 54, exp. 3063, fol. 27v. Apparently, one of the reasons for the popularity of Jocotenango women as wet nurses was their reputation for good health and clean habits.

³⁴ The original wording is "aq¹ cautiverio Faraonico." Don Manuel José de Pineda, petition, ca. 29 August 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 162, exp. 4883, fol. 15.

indigenous vassals.³⁵ It is clear, however, that as much as he stressed the letter of the law, Pineda believed that the king's personal responsibility superseded it and that he saw himself as the king's agent in this matter should civil officials fail to act. As he explained to *audiencia* president Domás y Valle, when the latter criticized him for lack of respect, "the matter of respect applying differently to him who functions as a judge [as opposed] to him who acts as a father and a pastor, it should surprise no one that I discharge the office that is mine, without prejudice to the respect that, in my understanding, the actions of Your Lordship merit."³⁶ At the same time, Pineda revealed a familiarity with more contemporary intellectual trends and, in particular, an enthusiasm for the discourse of natural rights. There could be, he argued, no right in statute law superior to the innate claim of a child to his own mother's milk.³⁷ In one particularly forceful appeal to the *audiencia*, Pineda conflated all of his rhetorical strategies on behalf of the infant son of the wet nurse María de los Santos Guerra, employed in the household of the physician Córdoba. Here, he said, was a child who "cries out from the cradle for the protection of Your Highness [against] the violent dispossession he has suffered, of his sustenance, of the tender attentions of his mother, and of the most powerful rights [that are his] by nature, blood, and law."³⁸

Pineda's opponents among the colonial elite also adopted a variety of rhetorical strategies, availing themselves not only of traditionalist appeals but also of more modern discourses, notably that of medical authority, which in the late-eighteenth century was gaining prestige and influence and which combined such contemporary values

³⁵ Among many instances, Pineda, petition, ca. 12 February 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 42v.

³⁶ The original wording is: "q^e siendo diversos los respectos de qⁿ obra como Juez, y de qⁿ procede como Padre, y Pastor, no es extraño q^e yo exercite los oficios qe me corresponden en el particular, sin perjuicio del respecto q^e en mi concepto se merecen las determinaciones de VS." Don Manuel José de Pineda to Don José Domás y Valle, Jocotenango, 24 August 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 162, exp. 4883, fols. 9-9v.

³⁷ Don Manuel José de Pineda, petition, ca. 12 February 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 34v-35.

³⁸ The original wording is: "qⁿ desde la Cuna clama a la alta proteccion de V.A. su violento despojo, haciendo presente q^e pues lo ha experimentado en sus alimentos, en el tierno regazo de su Madre, y en los derechos mas poderosos de la naturaleza, de la sangre, y de la Ley." Pineda, petition, ca. 29 August 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 162, exp. 4883, fol. 15v.

as professionalism and scientific empiricism.³⁹ In an effort to reconcile conflicting testimony in the matter of the infants Aycinena and López, for example, in October 1797, *audiencia* president Don José Domás y Valle ordered a series of medical examinations. Among the individuals to be examined were the two affected children, the wife of Aycinena, the wet nurse Contán, and Contán's mother, María Magdalena Cojtí. Acting on the recommendation of *fiscal* of the *audiencia* Don Manuel del Campo y Rivas, Domás y Valle hoped that these examinations would help to resolve several questions. The president wanted to know whether or not it would be safe to separate the infant Aycinena from the wet nurse to whose breast he had become accustomed. Also, he wished to determine whether or not the absence of his own mother had adversely affected the health of Luis José López, as the parish priest of Jocotenango claimed. In addition, Domás y Valle desired advice from qualified physicians on whether, given her advanced age, it was wise for the grandmother Cojtí to continue nursing Luis José and whether it was true, as Aycinena alleged, that his own wife, Doña Javiera de Barrutia, was genuinely unable to nurse her infant son.⁴⁰

At least one of the two physicians who carried out the mandated examinations, Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo, was fully informed of the most recent developments in European medicine. A native of Caracas, Venezuela, Esparragosa had received his doctorate in medicine at Guatemala's Universidad de San Carlos, where he later taught and gained international recognition for such clinical innovations as a new method for treating cataracts and a design for improved obstetrical forceps. A pioneer in the professionalization of surgery and obstetrics through their inclusion in the university curriculum, Esparragosa was also an early advocate of the use of Spanish rather than Latin for scientific writing. Some years after the

³⁹ On the reception of modern scientific ideas in Guatemala during the eighteenth century, and especially on the professionalization of medicine, see John Tate Lanning, *The Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment in the University of San Carlos de Guatemala* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 207-303.

⁴⁰ Don José Domás y Valle, endorsement to recommendations by *fiscal* Don Manuel del Campo y Rivas, Guatemala, 6 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 25v. The *fiscal*'s recommendations appear in fols. 24-25v.

wet nursing episode, he was instrumental in introducing the small pox vaccination in Spanish Central America.⁴¹

Although the original order for the examinations specified that midwives accompany Esparragosa and his colleague, Don José María Guerra, there is no evidence of their participation.⁴² Unlike many Enlightenment-era physicians, Esparragosa appears to have respected the knowledge and skills of midwives, whose collaboration he actively sought in his efforts to improve obstetrical practice.⁴³ Esparragosa's very efforts at obstetrical reform, however, were consistent with an eighteenth-century campaign to "medicalize" pregnancy and childbirth, a process through which male professional authority sought to displace that of unlicensed female practitioners.⁴⁴ Although it is likely that, given the small size of the professional community in late-colonial Guatemala,⁴⁵ even elite women continued to rely on midwives, the absence of the latter from the Jocotenango wet nurse proceedings—or, if present, their silence in the written record—reflected both male domination of the political process and the convergence of professionalism and patriarchy in the construction of modern scientific authority.⁴⁶ The Jocotenango wet nursing controversy occurred at a time when Esparragosa and other professionals were engaged in a political struggle to suppress, or at least regulate, the ac-

⁴¹ John Tate Lanning, *Dr. Narciso Esparragosa y Gallardo* (Caracas: Vargas, 1953), 26-27. See also the extended biographical sketch in Carlos Martínez Durán, *Las ciencias médicas en Guatemala: origen y evolución* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1964), 433-512. By contrast, Esparragosa's colleague, Don José María Guerra, was a more obscure figure who is mentioned only rarely in the secondary literature.

⁴² Don José Antonio de Córdoba to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 11 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 26-28. As acting *protomédico*, Córdoba responded to President Domás y Valle's order by commissioning Esparragosa and Guerra to conduct the required examinations. In this document, he reports their findings to the civil authorities.

⁴³ Lanning, *Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment in Guatemala*, 278.

⁴⁴ Socolow, *Women of Colonial Latin America*, 171-72.

⁴⁵ According to John Tate Lanning, *The University in the Kingdom of Guatemala* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), 202-04, only forty-two medical degrees were awarded in Guatemala during the entire eighteenth century.

⁴⁶ On the relationship between masculinity and scientific—and especially medical—authority, a good recent introduction is Thetis M. Group and Joan J. Roberts, *Nursing, Physician Control, and the Medical Monopoly: Historical Perspectives on Gendered Inequality in Roles, Rights, and Range of Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 3-36.

tivities of unschooled healers (*curanderos*) of both genders. Whatever his attitude toward midwives, Esparragosa may well have been reluctant to admit them to a proceeding which might appear to concede formal recognition to their authority.⁴⁷

With regard to wet nurses, Esparragosa appeared to share his European colleagues' aversion to their engagement except in cases of medical necessity. His misgivings about the practice found some confirmation in his examination of the infant Luis José López, who, he concluded, as a consequence of being abandoned to the care of his grandmother, was suffering seriously from malnutrition. Despite this finding, however, Esparragosa did not hesitate to approve the continued employment of the child's mother in the Aycinena household. In agreement with his colleague Guerra, Esparragosa determined that the Aycinena infant was currently teething, a period of development during which contemporary medical opinion considered it too dangerous to attempt weaning. Also, Esparragosa and Guerra concluded upon examination that, due to the precarious state of her health, Aycinena's wife, Doña Javiera de Barrutia, was chronically incapacitated and would never be "able to fulfill the tender and important obligation of nursing at her own breast any children she might have."⁴⁸

Their reference to maternal breast-feeding as a "tender and important obligation" suggested Esparragosa and Guerra's sympathy with contemporary anti-wet nursing sentiment, but, in the case at hand, they concluded that the likelihood of negative consequences from any attempt to separate the Aycinena infant from his wet nurse, María del Carmen Contán, was so great that it would be too dangerous to disturb the arrangement already in place. The same logic did not apply, however, to Contán's own child, Luis José López, who Esparragosa and Guerra saw no difficulty in recommending be taken

⁴⁷ Lanning, *Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment in Guatemala*, 238-41. In a reform effort similar to that promoted by Esparragosa in Guatemala, in the late-colonial period an obstetrical school was established in Mexico City. Beginning in 1822, Mexican midwives became "professionalized" through a process of licensure but, according to Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 198, there was no corresponding improvement in their social status.

⁴⁸ The original wording is: "de poder desempeñar la tierna e importante obligacion de criar á sus pechos los hijos q^e pueda tener." Don José Antonio de Córdoba to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 11 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 27v.

from his grandmother, María Magdalena Cojtí, and entrusted to yet another nurse, albeit at the Aycinenas' expense. In an effort to moderate the effect of this recommendation upon the native child, the two physicians cautioned the Aycinenas that the new nurse and Contán's infant son should be installed and maintained at their residence, because, "disorderly habits being so common among mercenary wet nurses, and so detrimental to frail children, as is the case here, it [is] necessary...that the said Señora de Aycinena demonstrate zeal and vigilance in order to prevent [them]."⁴⁹

To justify their inequitable recommendation, Esparragosa and Guerra once again offered arguments that were at least superficially scientific in nature. Because the infant Aycinena had known no nurse but María del Carmen Contán and had consequently bonded with her, they claimed it would be harmful to separate them. By contrast, Contán's own child had been passed around among so many different women that, being "accustomed to a variety of arms and tastes, [he would] surely be happy to take any [breast] presented to him [as long as it was] swollen with milk."⁵⁰

On the whole, it is difficult in this case to conclude other than that Esparragosa and Guerra had subordinated their professed commitment to scientific objectivity to the interests of the province's most powerful family. Certainly, the parish priest of Jocotenango believed that the two professionals' recommendations reflected nothing more than the traditional relations of power, under the convenient guise of a pretended medical authority. According to Father Pineda, Esparragosa and Guerra were associates of the interim *protomédico*, Don José Antonio de Córdoba, who in his official capacity had commissioned them to perform the examinations. As this was the same Córdoba whose complaint against Pineda in August 1797 had initiated the wet nursing controversy, Pineda argued that he and his colleagues

⁴⁹ The original wording is: "siendo tan comunes los desordenes de las Nodrisas mersenarias y de tanto detrimento para los Niños q^e se hallan endebles, como el de q^e se trata; era nesario...q^e dicha Señora de Ayzinena contribuia con su celo y vigilancia à evitar dichos desordenes." Don José Antonio de Córdoba to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 11 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 27v.

⁵⁰ The original wording is: "acostumbrado a la variedad de brazos y leches tomará seguram^{te} gustoso aquel con q^e se le acarisie mas lleno de leche." Don José Antonio de Córdoba to Don José Domás y Valle, Nueva Guatemala, 11 October 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 27v.

should be disqualified as experts because they were, in fact, interested parties.⁵¹

Father Pineda's only ally among the colonial authorities, *audiencia fiscal* Don Juan de Collado, sought to impeach Esparragosa and Guerra's evidence by soliciting an independent scientific opinion from the renowned Mexican naturalist Don José Mariano Mociño y Losada, who had recently arrived in Guatemala as a member of the royal botanical expedition to New Spain. Although Mociño had graduated in medicine in Mexico City, he had dedicated himself to research and, therefore, lacked the clinical experience of Esparragosa and Guerra. Nonetheless, his affiliation with an imperial scientific project conferred upon him a certain prestige. Also, the fact that he had no ties to Guatemala's tightly-knit medical community made him well suited, in Collado's view, to render a qualified opinion.⁵²

Mociño's report is distinguished by the author's clear recognition of the effect of class differences on infant nutrition. Beginning with the assumption that the most appropriate sustenance for any child was the milk of its own mother, the Mexican scientist asserted that cases in which mothers were genuinely unable to breast-feed their own children were rare. According to Mociño, there was a correlation between the quality of the mother's own nutrition and the abundance of her milk production, for which reason it would be natural to presuppose that instances of physical incapacity to nurse would be most common among poor women. Nonetheless, Mociño claimed, it was common knowledge that in order to "exempt themselves from the obligation of nursing their own children," many women of the colonial elite alleged such chronic infirmities, while women of the popular classes seldom did so.⁵³

⁵¹ Don Manuel José de Pineda, petition, ca. 12 February 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 38v.

⁵² On Mociño and the botanical expedition, which visited various provinces of the viceroyalty of New Spain to collect and describe plants of possible medical utility, see René Grobet Palacio, *El peregrinar de las flores mexicanas: José Mariano Mociño y Losada, 1757-1822* (Xalapa: Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones sobre Recursos Bióticos, 1982); and especially Xavier Lozoya, *Plantas y luces en México: la real expedición científica a Nueva España, 1787-1803* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1984).

⁵³ The original wording is: "eximirse de la obligacion de criar a sus hijos." Don Juan de Collado, opinion, Nueva Guatemala, 14 May 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 56v-57.

For his part, the parish priest of Jocotenango argued that the existence of the 1609 prohibition rendered this accumulation of conflicting scientific opinion meaningless. Although he maintained that the early-seventeenth-century decree forbidding native women from serving as wet nurses in Spanish households must be the basis for the final resolution of the controversy, Don Manuel José de Pineda was willing to accept a compromise, but only one based on a thorough review of the effects of forced servitude on the women of his parish and their families. Along with *fiscal* Collado, Pineda proposed an examination of all of the women of Jocotenango currently employed as wet nurses in Guatemala City, of their children, and of their children's nurses, if any. Distrustful of the colony's physicians—and considering their involvement unnecessary—Pineda and Collado recommended that the proposed examination be conducted by an *oidor* of the *audiencia*, accompanied by Pineda himself. Under this plan, these individuals would visit each affected family. In those cases where they found the wet nurse's own children to be healthy and she herself stated that she was content with her employment, no action would be taken. On the other hand, if the examiners found a wet nurse who desired to be released from her duties to return to her own family, her employers would be given a limited period during which to recruit a replacement from available candidates not subject to Philip III's decree of 1609.⁵⁴

Disregarding Pineda and Collado's recommendation, President Domás y Valle decided instead to order yet another medical examination, this time of all of the wet nurses of Jocotenango and their children, to be conducted by the same two medical professionals whose objectivity Father Pineda had recently questioned. Despite the misgivings of the women's pastor, the findings of this series of examinations, carried out during October 1798 by Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, offered considerable evidence to support Pineda's claim that the neglect of native children as a consequence of their mothers' employment as wet nurses in the capital did, indeed, endanger their health. Of the twenty-one women of Jocotenango named in September 1797 as working as wet nurses in Guatemala City, seven reported that nursing children of their own had died after being turned over to other women to care for

⁵⁴ Don Juan de Collado, opinion, Nueva Guatemala, 14 May 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 58.

them. What was more, upon inspection the physicians found an additional four nursing or recently weaned indigenous children to be suffering effects of malnutrition.⁵⁵

Apart from the single recommendation that Don Blas Rodríguez Zea, employer of the Jocotenango wet nurse María Matías Sacaj, provide a new substitute nurse for her infant son, José Atanasio, whom Esparragosa y Guerra found to be in a "somewhat deteriorated condition,"⁵⁶ their report does not appear to have led to corrective action by the colonial authorities. This may have been due to the fact that by October 1798 only seven of the twenty-one women were still employed as wet nurses, and, among them, only Sacaj had a child considered to be at risk. It may also be because the physicians found it difficult to draw a firm connection between the reported infant deaths and the mothers' employment as wet nurses. As the interim *protomédico* Don José Antonio de Córdoba pointed out when he transmitted Esparragosa and Guerra's report, most of the children had not died from neglect or abandonment, "as has been unjustly put forward in this proceeding, but rather of fever, as their own mothers for the most part acknowledge."⁵⁷ Córdoba did not appear to consider the possibility that malnutrition might have contributed to the mortality rate from the disease. Rather, he accepted the reports of fever in Jocotenango as evidence that, in his zeal, Father Pineda had resorted to distortions and exaggerations.⁵⁸

Don José Antonio de Córdoba's accusation suggests a third possible reason for the failure to resolve the controversy over the wet nurses of Jocotenango. As often happened during political quarrels in

⁵⁵ Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 72v-75.

⁵⁶ The original wording is: "algo desmedrado." Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 74v.

⁵⁷ The original wording is: "como injustam^{te} se ha procurado figurar en este expediente, sino de tabardillo, como p^r la mayor parte aseguran sus Madres." Don José Antonio de Córdoba, report of the interim *protomédico* on the examination conducted by Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 76.

⁵⁸ Don José Antonio de Córdoba, report of the interim *protomédico* on the examination conducted by Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 76.

the colonial era, in this case the most effective strategy adopted by the defenders of the established order proved to be to personalize the conflict, making it an issue not of the exploitation of indigenous women and children but of the conduct of the parish priest. The elite males who opposed Don Manuel José de Pineda's position on forced wet nursing accused the cleric of exceeding his jurisdiction and of dishonoring them personally by his failure to accord them the respect due their social position. For example, Córdoba, the high-ranking medical official in whose entryway the dispute had begun back in August 1797, and who, as late as October of the following year, continued to employ a Jocotenango wet nurse,⁵⁹ complained of Pineda's "ardor, boldness, and hot-headedness." He declared this had "not only distorted his vision and disfigured his narration of the facts, but also, and what is worse, led him to express himself...in terms very inappropriate to the great respect [due to the president], to the circumspection [expected of] a parish priest, and to the personal honor of those individuals whom he calls by name."⁶⁰ President Domás y Valle even requested that the archbishop of Guatemala, Don Juan Félix de Villegas, discipline Pineda for omitting in a letter addressed to Domás the abbreviation "m.y.s" for "muy ylustre señor," the customary salutation for a colonial chief magistrate.⁶¹

In an era in which great value was placed on personal honor and on the respect due to legitimately constituted authority, such accusations had the power to divert attention from other issues, regard-

⁵⁹ Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 73v. At the time of the examination, María de los Santos Guerra, the Jocotenango woman whom Father Pineda had originally attempted to remove from the Córdoba household, was still employed there. She had three children of her own, one of whom, a fifteen-month-old daughter, was still nursing and had been entrusted to an indigenous wet nurse from Mixco.

⁶⁰ The original wording is: "el demasiado calor, empeño, y fozozidad...no solo ha trastornado su vista, y desfigurado los echos q^e narra, sino lo q^e es mas, se ha precipitado a producirse en su representac^on...en unos terminos bastantem^e impropios, a los altos respectos de V.S., a la moderac^on de un Parrocho, y al honor de las personas de q^e hace menc^on." Don José Antonio de Córdoba, report of the interim *protomédico* on the examination conducted by Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 76v.

⁶¹ Don José Domás y Valle to Don Manuel José de Pineda, Nueva Guatemala, 24 August 1797, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 4-5.

less of their importance. Certainly, such elite concerns weighed more heavily in the political balance than did the interests of twenty-one native women and their children. It must have appeared so to the Spanish crown, because the documentary record of the wet nurse controversy came abruptly to an end following the arrival in Guatemala in June 1799 of a decree by King Charles IV. Although he took the opportunity to reiterate the prohibition of 1609, the monarch apparently responded only to the one-sided reports sent to Spain, devoting most of his attention to the allegations against Pineda. In the end, Pineda's reward for his efforts in defense of his female parishioners was to have the king of Spain instruct the archbishop of Guatemala to keep a close watch on his behavior because the priest had "incurred my royal displeasure."⁶²

In August 1798, ten months before the arrival in Guatemala of King Charles's decree, the wet nurse María del Carmen Contán returned to her *rancho* in Jocotenango, bringing to an end two years of service in the household of Don Pedro de Aycinena y Larraín. It is probable that by this time the infant Aycinena had been weaned, finally making it possible for Contán to care for her own son, Luis José López. Examining the latter in October 1798, as part of the general medical examinations ordered by President Domás y Valle, Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra concluded that Contán's son was now much stronger and better developed than he had been when they first saw him a year earlier, although at the age of two years and two months he was still not walking.⁶³

In the Contán case, as in those of other women of Jocotenango and their children, it is difficult to know what effect, if any, Don Manuel José de Pineda's campaign against forced wet nursing actually had. It is true, as noted above, that, of the twenty-one women listed in September 1797 as employed as wet nurses in the capital,

⁶² The original wording is: "por haber merecido mi Real desagrado." King Charles IV, real cédula, San Lorenzo, 1 December 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 162, exp. 4884, fol. 30.

⁶³ Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fol. 73.

only seven remained there one year later.⁶⁴ On the basis of the surviving documentary record, however, there is no way to determine the reason for this. Although the controversy may have induced some employers to send Jocotenango women home and replace them with wet nurses from other communities, it is just as likely that the Spanish children in their charge had been weaned and the women's services were, therefore, no longer required. The record also does not reveal whether this apparent relief was permanent or merely temporary. It is certainly possible that these women, or other women of Jocotenango, would soon be—or perhaps already had been—mobilized to serve once again as wet nurses in the capital. Finally, it is not known at this time how many women of other communities experienced similar kinds of exploitation but without the benefit of a zealous defender such as Father Pineda.

Although it constitutes no more than a brief chapter in the history of exploitation of women in Guatemala during the colonial period, the story of the wet nurses of Jocotenango can offer certain lessons of potential utility to future investigators. For example, it serves as a reminder that, for the colonial period, the study of women's experiences—and the related study of gender and its role in social constructions—must depend upon the analysis of documents produced, in the greater part, by men. Only rarely will one find documents in which women speak for themselves, and, even when they do speak, it is almost always through the mediation of male notaries. Apart from the riches to be found scattered through criminal and notarial records,⁶⁵ the best resource for historians who wish to pursue this field of study will continue to be the files produced in the course of isolated disputes such as this one. Such cases are anecdotal and they may appear to offer little possibility for generalization, but they

⁶⁴ Don Narciso de Esparragosa y Gallardo and Don José María Guerra, examination of the women of Jocotenango, Nueva Guatemala, 16 October 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 154, exp. 3063, fols. 72v-75.

⁶⁵ For two recent innovative studies on colonial Central America, see Martha Few, "Mujeres de mal vivir: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala, 1650-1750" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1997), which makes good use of Inquisition records; and Tatiana Lobo, *Entre Dios y el diablo: mujeres de la colonia: crónicas* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1993), which highlights distinct aspects of the female experience in colonial Costa Rica, using a series of brief histories based largely on notarial materials.

can and do open small windows upon a past which until now may rightly be described as "forgotten."⁶⁶

Reflection on the wet nurse controversy also points to the desirability of a more nuanced understanding of the reception of Enlightenment ideas and values, and especially of advances in the empirical sciences, the most important of which during the period in question undoubtedly occurred in the medical sciences. The episode described here suggests that the professionalization of medicine privileged masculine authority at the expense of that of midwives, who customarily played a central role in the care of women and children. It also suggests that it is a distortion of reality to frame the introduction of new scientific knowledge primarily as a rivalry between traditionalism and modernism. To judge from the behavior in this case of different members of the colonial elite, the two worlds appeared to co-exist without major conflict, while parties to political disputes freely deployed the characteristic discourses of both intellectual tendencies when and as they served their own particular ends.

The Jocotenango dispute also raises questions relevant to the deeper study of the politics of the late-colonial period. Taking place at the intersection of science and politics, two realms governed by their own, largely incompatible sets of rules, the contest set in opposition more than just the interests of Spanish elite families and indigenous families. It may also be possible to understand it as part of a confrontation between two "modernizing" forces active in the eighteenth century: the Bourbon campaign to centralize political power and the medical profession's efforts to monopolize public authority in questions of health and human biology. The *fiscal* Don Juan de Collado's support of Father Pineda's position—that specialized medical knowledge was not necessary to resolve the conflict—may certainly have reflected an interest in the impartial administration of justice, but it may also have been the product of a royal bureaucrat's understandable resistance to any claim to autonomous authority on the part of a body which, however "modern" the ideas it represented, traced its institutional roots to medieval corporate traditions.⁶⁷ In similar fashion, there may be more than one explanation for President Domás y

⁶⁶ On the history of women as a history lost to memory, see especially Julia Tuñón, *Mujeres en México: una historia olvidada* (Mexico City: Planeta, 1987).

⁶⁷ Particularly suggestive on this point is Lanning, *Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment in Guatemala*, 238-41.

Valle's insistence upon reliance on medical testimony, and even for Father Pineda's commitment to the wet nurses' cause.⁶⁸

Finally, the case of the Jocotenango women must be considered in the context of the larger history of changes in attitudes toward domestic life in general, and toward motherhood in particular. In doing so, it will be important to remember that, while this is clearly an issue of the social construction of gender roles, it also has racial and class dimensions. The record in the Jocotenango dispute indicates that authorities' expectations regarding the behavior of mothers, as well as the physiological and emotional needs of children, varied greatly, depending upon whether the frame of reference was the grand elite residences of Guatemala City or the thatched hovels of indigenous suburbs such as Jocotenango.

⁶⁸ The author has argued elsewhere that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, conflict over local elite interests and demands became almost inevitable between *audiencia* presidents, who were usually high-ranking military officers, and *oidores* and *fiscales*, who continued to be recruited from the ranks of *letrados* (law graduates). It is reasonable to suppose that this pattern prevailed for the remainder of the colonial period. Stephen Webre, "Poder e ideología: la consolidación del sistema colonial, 1542-1720," in *Historia general de Centroamérica*, ed. Edelberto Torres Rivas (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1993), 2:156, 198-200. The topic of indigenous community politics remains largely unexplored, but parish priests and native municipal officials were likely to be competitors for power and influence. Some of Father Pineda's critics apparently complained to the king that his own rivalry with the indigenous governor, Diego Casanga, was the real reason for the priest's intervention in the wet nurse question. King Charles IV, real cédula, San Lorenzo, 1 December 1798, AGCA, A1, leg. 162, exp. 4884, fol. 30.