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‘A remarkably patterned life’: Domestic and public in the Aztec household city

The history of the Aztecs has been haunted by the spectre of human sacrifice, and their capital city of Tenochtitlan is painted in the popular imagination as a realm of spectacular violence and dramatic ritual. But beyond the grand precincts, temples and palaces, which formed the ‘official’ topography, this was also a world of markets, households, and workshops, a city of homes and families, men and women; and in all of these spaces and places, gender identities were demonstrated, elaborated and negotiated. Gender was at the root of not only personal identity but also practical responsibility in Aztec thought. In this highly-developed urban society, at the centre of a growing region of influence, ideals of communality and complementarity were vital, and the contributions of every citizen, male and female, were regarded as essential for the city’s continuing success. Men and women fulfilled distinctive functions in a dual structure designed to ensure both local and national prosperity, and Tenochtitlan was a model and mirror for the household relationships which epitomized male and female roles. In the Aztec city, gender shaped the physical and social worlds, fashioning individual lives and participation in urban life, and also underpinning ideologies and practices of politics, economy and religion. The city was a site for the perpetuation of gendered ideologies and the ground upon which masculinity and femininity were exhibited and emphasized.

At the heart of the busy Valley of Mexico, on the site of modern-day Mexico City, Tenochtitlan was a relatively-recent foundation which rose to dominance in the fifteenth century, before being violently conquered by Hernando Cortés and his conquistadors in 1521.¹ Based on demographic classifications, there has been debate as to the extent to which Mesoamerican settlements were truly ‘urban’, but by any definition the Aztec capital of

Tenochtitlan was a major city.ⁱⁱ A densely-populated and bustling centre of around 200,000 people in the early sixteenth century,ⁱⁱⁱ this indigenous altepetl or city-state was larger than most early modern capitals, and was the hub of a complex network with economic, political, religious and social functions. Although the capital shared many cultural values with its subject and allied cities in Central Mexico, Tenochtitlan was a unique metropolis; its size not only vastly exceeded (by perhaps ten times) the population of any other Late Postclassic Mexican city, but it was deliberately designed as an imperial capital, carefully planned on a grid scheme which expressed distinctive functions, structures and philosophies.^{iv} Some gender ideologies and practices were undoubtedly common to other indigenous Mexican and Mesoamerican groups, but Tenochtitlan was exceptional in its gendered constructions and context, and the nature of this great conurbation was vital to the distinctive perceptions and practices of masculinity and femininity which prevailed at the height of its influence.

Throughout this article, the term 'Aztec' refers particularly to the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan, and my discussion will focus on the city during the period immediately preceding the Spanish conquest, when it was at the peak of its urban development. ('Nahua' refers to the wider cultural grouping which shared the Aztec language of Nahuatl.)^v Tenochtitlan's rapid rise to ascendancy in the region provided powerful economic and political imperatives for state intervention in social organisation, which combined with religious ideologies to create a pervasively-gendered city structure. Although individual experiences varied widely, gender ideals shaped both physical and social behaviours, and were a key determining factor in urban settings and practices.

Tenochtitlan can appear, at first glance, to be a 'typical' pre-modern patriarchy. Women performed domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking, the processing of food, and the production of textiles, and were lauded most highly for giving birth to the babies who would

become future warriors and workers for the state. Men held roles as administrators, soldiers and priests, were principally responsible for farming,^{vi} hunting and government, and appear prominently in the documents as rulers, leaders and narrators. Given the military focus of Aztec culture, and the male-dominated Spanish-American context in which the sources were created, it is perhaps not surprising that June Nash saw Aztec society as focused on a sacred mission of conquest which ‘glorified the cult of male dominance’.^{vii}

On closer examination however, anomalies become clear in this pattern. Women held concrete markers of influence and esteem in Tenochtitlan – they were full citizens before the law and shared with their husbands and brothers the right to hold and inherit property, to divorce, and to appeal to the courts. Both sexes could retain influential posts as marketplace overseers, doctors, merchants, traders, painters, poets, craftspeople, and teachers, and were held equally culpable and punishable for crimes such as adultery. In addition, female figures were prominent in the community as midwives and matchmakers. In Tenochtitlan, men and women fulfilled highly distinctive roles in a parallel system of gender which was rooted in concepts of reciprocity and complementarity. Although male and female were clearly not ‘equal’ in this dual structure, both sexes possessed agency and effectiveness, albeit in very different spheres, and both masculine and feminine contributions were seen as vital to prosperity and success. This binary model of gender complementarity or parallelism first came to prominence in the 1990s in the work of scholars such as Inga Clendinnen, Louise M. Burkhart and Susan Kellogg, and is now probably the dominant paradigm in specialist studies of Mesoamerican gender relations.^{viii} Despite this, the underlying picture of a strongly patriarchal and warrior society remains a surprisingly common theme in general histories of Tenochtitlan, as well as in some scholarly publications.^{ix} My work builds on the groundbreaking research of colleagues, but challenges assumptions that the binary mode was

principally a superficial or symbolic structure, designed to ‘stabilize normative genders against a contradictory philosophical background of gender fluidity’.^x I argue that the dual division of gender roles and responsibilities was a powerful and profound structure which deeply influenced not only Aztec identity and ideology, but also everyday life. Both shaping and shaped by lived experience, this structure (or, to borrow Bourdieu’s terminology, habitus) of parallelism was implicit in expectations, acts and personal relationships. This is not to deny the Aztecs individuality, agency or originality; men and women were not faceless prisoners of this structure, but their lives were shaped by an expectation of gendered duality which conditioned their actions, responses and interactions, even when they challenged this embracing edifice.^{xi} The division of life into male and female spheres seemed just good common sense to Aztec men and women. The male/female binary was exemplified in the married household, and both the divisions and the complementarities of this model gendered partnership were demonstrated throughout the Aztec city.

The founding principle of Tenochca society may broadly be defined as a division between ‘public’ and ‘domestic’ spheres, which reflected male and female influence respectively. But whilst I would argue that feminine power was primarily associated with the ‘domestic’, this term lacks the limiting overtones which often link the domestic sphere to ‘those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children’.^{xii} In fact, perhaps the most dramatic example of gender parallelism in Aztec culture is found in attitudes to childcare. Aztec women were certainly feted as mothers, and were strongly bonded to their babies during infancy, but after weaning fathers and mothers shared in the rearing of their children. From an early age, children’s upbringing was determined by their sex; at work and in the home, girls accompanied their mothers and boys their fathers, learning their future roles by example.^{xiii} Women were thus relieved of the sole

burden of childcare, and Aztec society was removed from models which establish gendered behaviour as a product of the mother's role as primary carer for children of both sexes.

So, although women (as we will see) were closely associated with the home, 'domestic' in this context should be read in the broadly political sense, implying an opposition to 'foreign', rather than 'public', spaces. Women in Aztec culture possessed independent influence and tangible respect in household-, community- and city-based activities, and feminine influence was represented even at the highest level of 'domestic' politics.^{xiv} I argue that Tenochtitlan should be understood as a series of 'public' and 'domestic' contexts, in which masculine and feminine influences were clearly distinguished. In the Aztec city, 'public' and 'private' were functions rather than definitions of space, and the 'domestic' was not a fixed territory but an intellectual and social concept, applied to certain places, institutions and structures at particular times. In understanding the development of urban space and society, the conceptualization of male/public and female/domestic might helpfully be developed into a distinction between 'exterior' and 'interior' activity. The domestic/public, interior/exterior division helped to construct flexible geographies of gender which both reflected and reinforced underlying principles of masculinity and femininity.

The problem of sources

Accessing the principles and practices which shaped Aztec society is far from straightforward due to the lack of pre-conquest sources, the majority of which were destroyed in a blaze of missionary zeal by the early Spanish arrivals. Archaeology and pictorial codices are essential for our understanding of Aztec culture, but they do not offer the personal perspective which is so central to gendered experience.^{xv} In attempting to understand, so far as is possible, the Aztec experience of daily life, we are therefore reliant on the early colonial alphabetic texts,

which were inevitably filtered through the Spaniards' Judaeo-Christian, patriarchal perspectives and their tentative, imperfect, initial attempts to understand the alien society which confronted them. The problem is compounded for the gender historian, because the vast majority of both chroniclers and informants were men, resulting in a relatively low visibility for domestic and female activities and concerns.^{xvi} Most frustratingly for a cultural historian, these documents lack the individual voices and testimonies which enable us to balance ideology and reality.

Created at a moment of flux, compiled by scholars concerned to record cultural and 'historical' norms, and advised by indigenous informants experiencing an extreme disjuncture from their recent past, the early colonial texts tend to present an idealised picture of Aztec society which tells us about collective, rather than individual, lives.^{xvii} Nonetheless, although it is undoubtedly much easier to detect 'official' philosophies than everyday experiences, this does not mean that we should abandon all hope of understanding Aztec emotions and attitudes. Although far from perfect, the codices offer important and valuable insights which can help us to access personal and social interactions. This is a vital undertaking, because the remarkable Tenochca society has frequently been the subject of studies which dehumanize or at least desensitize their personal interactions, accounting for their spectacular bloodshed by focusing on the public, political and impersonal nature of their society. These texts cannot be treated uncritically, but with sensitive reading, alert to contextual issues, it is possible to shed light on relationships and realities. For example, the great ritual dialogues of the huehuetlahtolli, 'speeches of the elders' or 'ancient word', which make up much of Book 6 of the Florentine Codex, are undoubtedly formal discourses which convey solemn wisdom and official ideology, but they also provide rare glimpses of emotion and intimacy which speak to the personal and domestic context of their transmission and

reception.^{xviii} In these speeches, the struggles, joys and tragedies of life peep through the formal rhetoric. We see a couple ‘holding hands’ as they contemplate the possibility that their child may ‘be stillborn; our lord will leave us [still] desiring a child’; a mother advises her teenage daughter at her coming of age, remembering how she lulled her to sleep in the cradle, dandled her on her knee, and gave her strength with her milk; and the same mother, in less sympathetic tones, urges her daughter to ‘Jump at thy jumping place in order that thou wilt not become a fat one, an inflated one.’^{xix} These are not impersonal ideals, they are compassionate, expressive and very human characters. The lack of personal testimonies is undoubtedly problematic, especially in understanding women, but it is not prohibitive.^{xx}

We must be constantly alert to the pitfalls of these documents, critical of their potential Christian bias (positive or negative) and alert to the likely omissions, presumptions and misunderstandings, which inevitably vary between sources. But despite their difficulties, they offer us a chance to try and reconstruct Aztec lives and identities. Personally, I find it particularly compelling that the picture of gendered complementarity and compassionate cooperation presented by the missionary sources seems highly unlikely to have been imposed by the Spanish, either by invention or omission.^{xxi} And if we ever hope to detect Aztec lives and experiences, and to hear their voices (albeit faintly), then we must make sensitive and empathetic, albeit cautious, use of these unique texts.

Male and female roles and the complex calli household

From the day of their birth, baby boys and girls were destined for very specific and different roles. The words of the midwife who welcomed them into the world allocated them immediately to sharply contrasting realms. A baby boy was heralded as a potential warrior, ‘assigned’ to ‘the center, the middle, the plains... And thus there within the battlefield, thy

name will be inscribed, will be registered in order that thy renown will not be forgotten, will not be lost.^{xxii} At the naming, a few days after the birth, a small shield, bow and arrows were placed into his tiny hands by the midwife, and he was exhorted to look toward ‘the place of contentment, the place of happiness’, the realm of ‘those who died in war’.^{xxiii} As infants, boys were already set onto a path which would lead to that most ‘public’ and ‘masculine’ of duties – warfare. The parallel ceremonies for baby girls implied a very different future. Handed miniature replicas of ‘the equipment of women’, ‘a distaff with its spindle and its basket, and a broom’, girls were shown clearly in the domestic items they were assigned that their ‘very task was the home life, life by the fire, by the grinding stone’.^{xxiv}

The distinction between the male and female realms was made most explicit at the conclusion of the birth ceremonies; the umbilical cord, carefully preserved, provided a physical pledge which sealed the children’s fate. The boy’s cord was ‘stolen’ by local youths, who carried it off, crying out the baby’s name and dedicating him to the battlefield, where he would ‘gladden the sun’ by providing ‘food’, ‘drink’ and ‘offerings’, the human flesh, blood and hearts so vital to the gods. As representatives of ‘those who had died in war’, these childish warriors bound the baby to their alter egos and to a future afterlife with their departed brethren who had given their lives sustaining the sun.^{xxv} After the deadly play was over, experienced warriors of the city assured the boy’s martial destiny by burying his umbilical cord on a battlefield, tying him physically and perpetually to a future of warfare in distant lands.^{xxvi} In stark contrast to this remote resting place, a girl’s umbilical cord was buried by the hearth, linking her intrinsically to the ‘heart of the home’. Tethering the woman physically to the house not only emphasized archetypal ‘feminine’ domestic duties, but held a much wider significance, designating and restricting the female sphere. ‘It was said that by this she [the midwife] signified that the little woman would nowhere wander. Her dwelling

place was only within the house; her home was only within the house; it was not necessary for her to go anywhere.^{xxvii} Here we see a powerfully tangible demonstration of the exterior/interior division which characterized male/female divisions in Tenochtitlan; the man was to 'issue forth in war in all parts', whilst 'the woman was to go nowhere'.^{xxviii}

As I have already hinted however, women's limitation to the 'domestic' sphere actually gave them far more scope than one might expect from this rather stark restriction; 'going nowhere' in this context seems to have meant 'not going outside the city', an interpretation which is underlined by closer scrutiny of the Nahuatl terms in this passage. The woman's place is here identified as *calitic* or 'within the house', the root word for 'house' being *calli*.^{xxix} This term is usually translated as *casa* in Spanish, but both 'house' and *casa* suggest a domestic household setting which is not necessarily implied by the Nahuatl. The sixteenth-century Florentine Codex, an unparalleled corpus of ethnographic information compiled by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, contains a section on 'the various manners of houses' in the eleventh of thirteen volumes, the book of Earthly Things. In it, 34 terms are given for various types of structure and, of these, 25 are *calli*.^{xxx} Many of the *calli* are clearly domestic buildings for various types of household, including rulers, nobles, merchants, stewards and commoners, but they also include: the *teocalli* (temple, or house of the god); *tlapixcacalli* (hut in which the harvest watchers or maize field guards hide); and the *temazcalli* (house where they bathe, or underground cave for roasting meat). Sahagún's *calli* encompasses a wide range of structures, from the straightforward *nelli calli* (well-made house) to the extended compounds of the *calhuiuilaxtli* (houses extending one after another...many houses which are as just one).^{xxxi} The accompanying images bear out this diversity, showing a wide range of sizes and forms of structure. [Fig. 1]^{xxxii} If we look beyond the list in Earthly Things, our understanding of the *calli* becomes still broader. The Florentine

Codex (to take only one source, albeit a major one) also contains references to the altepecalli (government house), ayauhcalli (mist house), cuicacalli (house of song), ihhuicalli (house of feathers), telpochcalli (house of youths), teocuitlacalli (house of gold), and tlaocolcalli (house of tears), amongst others.^{xxxiii}

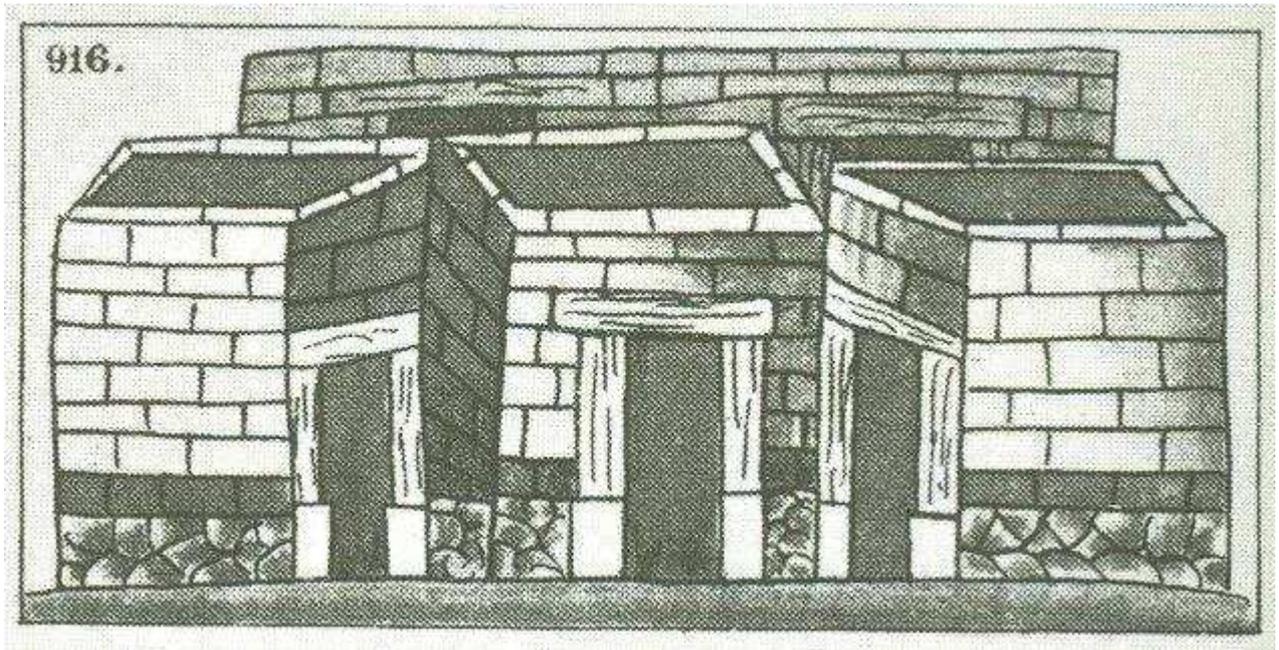


Figure 1. The calhuiuilaxtli from the Florentine Codex (11: Illustration 916)

The conceptualization of the calli as the woman's place becomes rather more complex when we realise that 'house' was not only home. Female 'interior', calli, activities principally occurred within the household, community and city, whilst men were engaged with the 'exterior', travelling as warriors and merchants, communicating with the wider public as rulers and priests, and engaging with foreign neighbours through negotiation and war.

Although certainly 'domestic' (in both political and household senses), feminine roles were delimited not by their home, but by the city as a whole and by expectations that they would be principally 'inward-facing', looking toward the welfare of their family and community, rather than to exterior expansion or propagation of influence. Warfare, 'international' politics

and the ‘public’ were the male preserve. This internal/external division, although certainly idealized in the early colonial sources, also seems to have been reflected in lived realities; ideas of duality provided an underlying structure for social expectations. The contrast of male and female roles was explicit: whilst a woman was to ‘be in the heart of the home’, to become ‘the banked fire, the hearth stones’,^{xxxiv} a man who lived a safe, comfortable life by his fireside could expect to be ridiculed in his old age. The elderly merchants ‘made light of, scoffed at, exposed, revealed, abused, and tortured those who knew no places, who had gone nowhere, who nowhere in any degree had set foot anywhere; who only by the ashes of his fire called himself a warrior’.^{xxxv}

As women’s prominent roles as midwives, matchmakers and traders attest, however, the dual gendered structure of public/domestic did not result in a clear-cut public/private division.^{xxxvi} Even at the family level, many Aztecs lived in extended households which problematize the idea of ‘private’ space. Family life was a shared experience, typically lived in walled domestic compounds surrounding an open patio;^{xxxvii} these are presumably the calhuiuilaxtli referred to by Sahagún [Fig. 2]. Married couples seem to have possessed their own dwellings within the complex, but the household was ordinarily comprised of a larger family group. There was considerable flexibility in the precise living arrangements of cognatic kin groups; households were most commonly created through patrilocal or virilocal marriages, but we also see uxorilocal structures, as well as other arrangements such as sibling ties when space or convenience dictated.^{xxxviii} Kellogg’s analysis of households described in early colonial legal cases suggests that these extended kin structures were preferred by indigenous families: ‘complex’ households constituted about 47% of the total, whilst ‘consanguineal’ and ‘nuclear’ family households (at c.13% and c.17% respectively) tended also to become complex during their developmental cycles. These composite domestic units were of

particular significance in the crowded urban environment of Tenochtitlan, where immigration and growth saw constantly-increasing population density in the island city and led to some of the largest and most tightly-packed households in Central Mexico.^{xxxix} In the Aztec capital, private space was often also shared space, and domestic spaces were not always private.

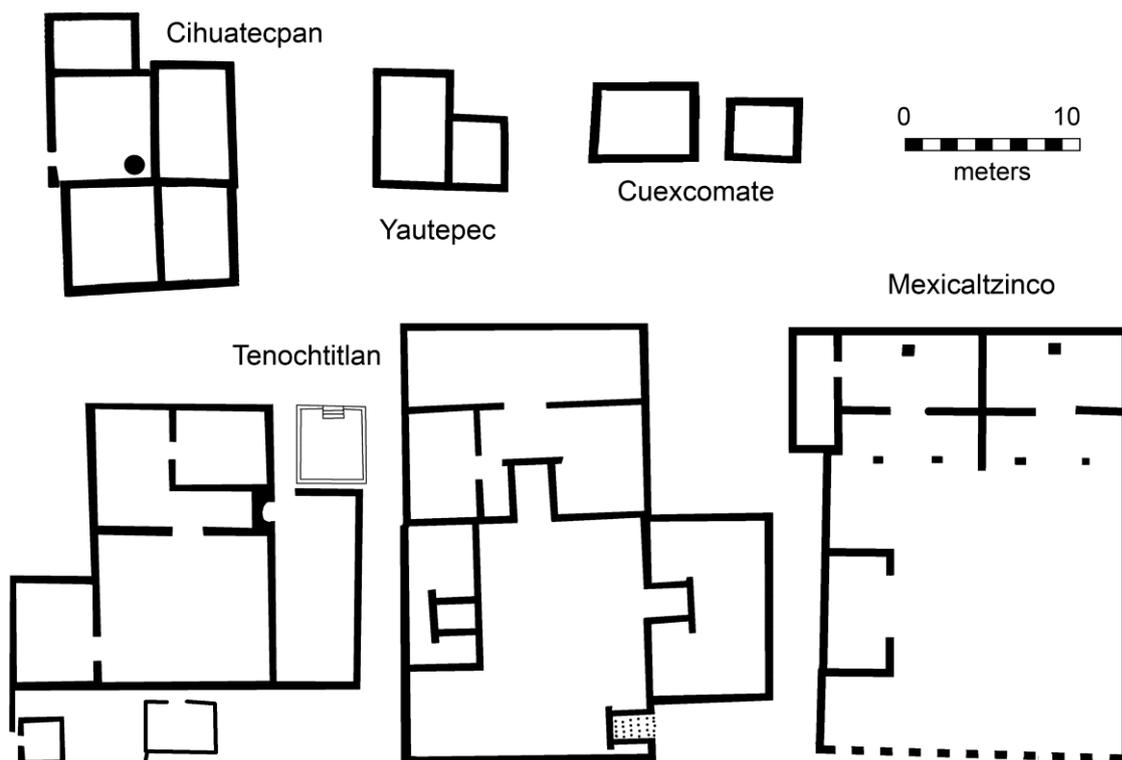


Figure 2. Commoner house plans from Tenochtitlan and other central Mexican cities. Scale applies to all plans except for Tenochtitlan which is drawn from documents without a secure scale. I am indebted to Michael E. Smith for providing the image and for his permission to reproduce it.

Tenochtitlan's complex households are vital to understanding Aztec ideas of the domestic, because notions of family were intrinsically connected to concepts of household. Molina's sixteenth-century dictionary of Classical Nahuatl lists five terms under the Spanish familia (family): cenzeliztli, cencalli, cencaltin, cemithualtin, and techan tlaca,^{xl} which may be respectively translated as 'being together', 'one house', 'those in one house', those in one

patio’, and ‘people in someone’s home’.^{xli} It is clear that, for the Aztecs, shared space was critical to relationships, and this flexible understanding of domestic space lends particular significance to understandings of home and the feminine sphere. The sense of clustering around the home implied by the language of calli relationships was critical to Aztec understandings of family and femininity – in Tenochtitlan, the ‘house’ reached beyond direct kin groups into wider social contexts and, along with it, so did the domestic sphere. Camilla Townsend goes so far as to suggest that ‘there was no real word for “family”’: various words and phrases essentially meaning “people living together in a house” were used to convey what “family” usually means to us’.^{xlii} This analysis may be taken even further if we recognize that the idea of ‘house’ or calli possessed implications in Tenochtitlan which reached beyond any individual building.

Household structures at city level

The concept of the calli was reflected at every level of Tenochca geography and society. The sub-divisions of the city were known as the calpolli or tlaxilacalli.^{xliii} Calpolli (often spelt calpulli in English and Spanish) literally means ‘big house’. The etymology of tlaxilacalli is obscure; translated by Molina as ‘barrio’, the word’s only clear root is the house or calli.^{xliv} Thus, Tenochtitlan was geographically and administratively organized into ‘houses’, and this reflection of the calli into the wider city created a structure which provided clear spaces of masculine and feminine responsibility, mirroring male and female roles within marriage. Just as a married couple provided the basis to a successful and productive home, so the parallel responsibilities of men and women, echoed throughout the social and political structure, formed the foundations of a thriving city. Louise Burkhart wrote: ‘One could see the Mexica house as a model of the cosmos, writ small, but perhaps it would be better to see the Mexican

cosmos as a house write large.^{xliv} I would go further – Tenochtitlan was more than a house, it was a household.

The essence of the household was reflected throughout city hierarchy and structure. Power and lineage (as well as property) were passed through both male and female lines in a cognatic kinship system and, although birth was important in opening opportunities, neither primogeniture nor patrilineage dictated the inheritance of authority. Women were only occasionally rulers or regents in their own right^{xlvi} (although there are cases of senior female officeholders), but feminine influence was represented at the highest echelons of government. The prominence of the figure of Moctezuma II, the so-called ‘emperor’, during the encounter with the Spanish conquistadors has led to an overwhelming focus on the role of the tlatoani (literally ‘he who speaks’, or ‘he who possesses speech’) as the Aztec sovereign leader, but in reality an ‘omnipotent dyad’ ruled in Tenochtitlan.^{xlvii} The tlatoani operated in a dual system of power alongside the cihuacoatl or ‘woman snake’, a figure whose role is made explicit in his feminine designation, as well as his symbolic transvestism when he dressed as the goddess Cihuacoatl on ritual occasions: the cihuacoatl was the ‘interior minister’ to the tlatoani’s ‘foreign minister’.^{xlviii} Kay Read characterized the cihuacoatl as the male ‘matron’ to the tlatoani’s ‘lord’.^{xliv} The first cihuacoatl was appointed by Moctezuma I (ruled 1440-68), who sought to share power with his influential elder brother Tlacaeleltzin, and ‘these two brothers were the first who ruled together and with equal power in Mexico Tenochtitlan’.¹ The distribution of authority varied depending on the individuals who held the posts, but a general division of influence became established over the succeeding years, with the tlatoani principally associated with external, foreign affairs, and the cihuacoatl with internal, domestic matters.^{li} As a husband and wife shared the duties of the household, so the tlatoani-cihuacoatl pairing balanced the responsibilities of their city. Following Marshall Becker’s

designations of the tlatoani and cihuacoatl as the ‘internal affairs chief’ and ‘external affairs chief’ respectively, Richard Townsend points out that ‘dual leadership was not simply a sharing of power, because the roles were distinct in function and reciprocal in operation’.^{lii} Although Townsend is not referring to gendered division, this powerfully reflects the complementarity of the masculine and feminine spheres. Although, as in the household, precise boundaries of influence could be blurred at times, areas of responsibility were clearly designated, and this image of the city as structured along household lines is evocatively endorsed by the frequent personification of the tlatoani as ‘the mother, the father’ of his people. In the speech given to welcome a new ruler, he was eloquently portrayed as a loving parent to the ‘common folk’: ‘On thy back, on thy lap, in thy arms our lord placeth the governed, the vassals, the common folk, the capricious, the peevish. For yet a while thou wilt fondle them as children; thou wilt rock the cradle. Thou art yet to place the city upon thy thing, in thy embrace. Thou wilt yet for a while continue to fondle it, to dandle it.’^{liii} The ruler was the parent in the urban household.

Gender ideals and Aztec education

Gender roles in Tenochtitlan rested on a belief of the unique, impermeable, and complementary nature of male- and femaleness.^{liv} As strongly indicated in the birth rituals, the most fundamentally masculine role was that of warrior. Military service was an almost universal male obligation – every citizen, be they farmer, labourer or noble, was obliged to train as a youth and to take up arms in the service of Tenochtitlan.^{lv} The only exceptions to this rule were priests and possibly the pochteca, or merchants, who conducted long-distance trade, which possessed many of the characteristics of warfare, as the traders often travelled armed and in disguise into dangerous and foreign regions.^{lvi} The root of this courageous masculinity in Aztec culture was the ‘blood debt’, which tied the Aztecs to their gods in a

relationship of mutual sustenance. As part of the mythical history, male gods let blood from their genitals in order to create the latest generation of humanity, binding Aztec men into a reciprocal obligation to supply the blood necessary to nourish their pantheon and sustain the world.^{lvii} This compelling duty underlay male roles in Tenochtitlan – as warriors, Aztec men were responsible for securing the supply of blood and flesh through captive-directed warfare, and as priests they fed the gods the precious water of life. Men were farmers, artisans, administrators, traders and labourers, but at heart they were warriors in a divine cause.

Women's roles also originated in their relationship with the gods, but they possessed a direct channel to the divine which contrasts sharply with the supportive status played by men.

During every act of childbirth, the primal force of the Earth Mother was believed to be made flesh in the body of the pregnant woman. This great natural deity of many guises, best known as Cihuacoatl (Woman Snake), was a goddess of intoxicating and threatening power.^{lviii}

Women's connection with Cihuacoatl was both tangible and ominous; a woman who died during childbirth was permanently embodied with divine force, and pieces of her corpse became powerful martial talismans.^{lix} This intimate connection with perilous forces defined femininity in Tenochtitlan. For Aztec men and women, the idea that 'one is not born... a woman'^{lx} would have seemed both illogical and irrational – gender was an innate and essentialized property, embodied in male and female physicalities and capacities, and particularly in women's intoxicating 'natural' energy.^{lxi}

The fundamental building blocks of life in Tenochtitlan were the family, the household, and the calpolli. The majority of arable land was communally-owned in Tenochtitlan; plots were allocated and held in usufruct, and this collective organisation is typical of the principles of collaboration and reciprocity which guided Aztec society. This central social tenet of

communal success strongly influenced the construction of gender roles, and male and female functions and responsibilities were carefully defined. From the moment of birth, life in Tenochtitlan was fundamentally gendered, but intriguingly, despite the inherently sexed status of all bodies in the Aztec mind, the demonstration and perpetuation of official gendered ideologies was a constant and primary concern.^{lxii} Perhaps surprisingly, in a city collectively convinced of the innate biology of sexual identity, the social imprinting of ideals of masculinity and femininity was critical to urban life. Following the parallelism of parental upbringing, formal teaching was strongly gendered, with boys and girls living and learning separately during their teenage years. Municipal education in Aztec culture was universal, with boys and girls of all classes attending school from their teens.^{lxiii} There are significant discrepancies between accounts, probably reflecting variation in practice, but it is clear that education was structured around three key 'houses': the *calmecac* (house of tears), the *telpochcalli* (house of youths), and the *cuicacalli* (house of song). The *calmecac* was an all-male school, usually centrally organised, which provided a religious, philosophical and historical training designed for noble and talented children likely to become priests and high officials. The *telpochcalli* was run at local level and was principally a military school where young men trained for their future as warriors, although there are also hints in the sources that some of them may have been specialized craft schools for both boys and girls. The *calmecac* and the *telpochcalli* were 'public' institutions which specialized in preparing young men for their 'public' roles, whilst young women principally learned their domestic skills in the household. This gender distinction conspicuously identifies the male and female spheres, but it is in the third house that gender parallelism is confirmed.

In the early evening, the *teaanque* (men who conduct boys) and *cihuatepixque* (keepers of maidens) collected young men and women from their homes, cloisters and schools, and

accompanied them in vigilantly-separated groups to the cuicacalli. There, the teenagers remained carefully segregated whilst studying, before being permitted to mingle together in the courtyard where ‘they danced until the evening was well advanced; and after having sung and danced with great contentment and joy, the boys returned to their places and the girls to theirs’. According to the sixteenth-century Dominican friar and chronicler Diego Durán, in the cuicacalli ‘nothing was taught... to youths and maidens but singing, dancing and the playing of musical instruments’, but this rather dismissive phrase completely fails to recognise the significance of music as a medium for the transmission of ideology and philosophy.^{lxiv} The ‘house of song’ was a vital link in the chain which tied the Aztecs to their city and fashioned their identity. Through music and chanting, children were taught the essentials of their faith, their history and their heritage; through the huehuetlahtolli discourses these teenagers learnt the principles and rituals which shaped their lives. Attendance was rigorously enforced by law, and this universal education ensured that every individual was firmly integrated into the expectations and obligations of city life, as well as providing young people with a rare chance to form social bonds outside their calli. Although many of the principles which underlay Aztec life were mirrored in rural Mexican communities, this highly-ordered organisational structure was unique to Tenochtitlan. The densely-urban nature of the capital both permitted and required a high degree of societal control, and gender ideologies played a key part in both city-wide and local strategies to ensure coherence and co-operation. In his description of the cuicacalli, Durán astutely commented: ‘these natives possessed a remarkably patterned life’, and this fascinatingly echoes the care with which ideals were established and maintained in Tenochtitlan. The household ‘pattern’ was reflected and reinforced throughout the Aztec city.

Male and female responsibilities in family and temple households

During their formal education, young men and women were largely separated, the boys living in the *calmecac* or *telpochcalli* during their training, whilst the girls remained in their homes. Upon his marriage, a man literally moved from the company of men into the female, domestic sphere, joining a family household where he became part of the reciprocal economy which structured activity in Tenochtitlan. The Nahuatl term for spouse, *namictli*, is related to the word *namiqui* meaning ‘to meet’, and this hints at the overtones of matching and balance which typify Aztec understandings of marriage. Marriage was the archetypal model of paired, complementary activity, and in many ways a married couple was seen as the smallest productive and administrative unit of the city. In Inca culture, which Silverblatt has identified as possessing comparable conceptions of gender parallelism, only married people were liable for tribute, suggesting that the household was regarded as the smallest unit possessing the potential for economic productivity.^{lxv} Similarly in Tenochtitlan, only upon marriage would a youth be recorded in the ‘register of married men’ as a full member of his *calpolli*, subject to its obligations and entitled to its privileges.^{lxvi} From this time, most men possessed a dual role, twinning their warrior vocation with the practical obligations of their trade. The majority of men worked outside the home, whilst the household was the responsibility of women.^{lxvii} As I have discussed, however, this role reached far beyond the home itself. As well as assuming traditional ‘domestic’ tasks such as cleaning and preparing food, women also possessed a vital economic importance. In addition to weaving the cloth which formed one of the cornerstones of barter in this pre-monetary society, women were vital as traders and as merchants.^{lxviii} On the occasion of their marriage, a husband gave his new wife five cotton capes, with which to ‘negotiate at the market place... procure the sustenance, the chilli, the salt, the torches, and some firewood, that thou mayest prepare food.’^{lxix} Thus, upon her marriage, a woman engaged with the cycles of exchange which underlay communal prosperity – her effectiveness as a trader and worker was vital to the effectiveness and

efficiency of her household. It is crucial to recognize that women were not important despite their domestic role, but because of it.^{lxx}

A woman born on one of the auspicious day signs of Ten Rabbit, Eleven Water, Twelve Dog or Thirteen Monkey ‘became wealthy and achieved honor; she prospered at the market places as a seller of merchandise; as one who served and showed pity for others’. A man born on these days was ‘famed and honoured... As a chieftain, he was strong, daring in battle, esteemed, intrepid, able sharp-witted, quick-acting, prudent, sage, learned and discreet; an able talker and attentive.’^{lxxi} The clear parallel between trade and warfare as feminine and masculine duties respectively is clear: whilst women were affluent, successful and compassionate traders, men were brave, wise and articulate warriors. Both were important and effective, but in very different capacities. This passage also reflects one of the father’s most important duties, and one we have not yet touched on – his obligation to act as a teacher and communicator to his family and calli. Official public rhetoric was usually a male role in Aztec culture, and there are few recorded examples of direct female speech. The homilies of the midwife during the birth rituals are a prominent exception to this, but perceptions of this act actually serve to underline the masculine nature of public speech. When a midwife welcomed a baby boy into the world, she ‘addressed him, cried out to him...the midwife spoke man’s talk’.^{lxxii} By acting in a publicly authoritative role, the midwife was stepping into a role traditionally acknowledged as masculine: she was speaking ‘man’s talk’. The male and female spheres were clearly designated, but their boundaries were occasionally permeable, as there were certain functions which neither a man nor a woman could completely fulfil. In the case of the midwife, only a woman could come into contact with the dangerous female power which embodied a mother at the moment of parturition, and only a woman could usher a newborn through the dangerous period of transience before their naming, but in doing this

she was required to take on a publicly vocal, and therefore ‘masculine’, role, albeit within a domestic context (for the rituals took place within the household courtyard). The gendered habitus of the Tenochca accommodated transgressions, but they remained logically framed within the binary model.^{lxxiii}

The dual structure shaped institutions throughout Tenochtitlan, mirroring the gendered household not only in secular and political contexts, but also in the religious hierarchy. Both sexes held explicit roles in the divine scheme, as victims, priests and celebrants. Male and female victims had sharply-distinguished functions, and women’s association with the earth gave them a particularly clear purpose as *ixiptla* (impersonators) of deities with strong ‘natural’ associations.^{lxxiv} But it is in the temple that the duties of male and female priests most powerfully demonstrate the household pattern in urban life.^{lxxv} Men’s responsibility for the provision of blood has already been discussed: male priests were the sole executioners during human sacrifice, and were the voice of the priesthood, playing prominent public roles in ritual and ceremony. Women led a more secluded existence in the temple, and the respective roles of priests and priestesses reinforce the public/domestic and exterior/interior gender binary of household organisation. The priestesses’ relative shelter from public view, combined with an obligation to chastity (which was shared with their male counterparts), has sometimes led both contemporaneous Spanish commentators and modern historians to make inappropriate comparisons with Catholic nuns. But although leading a comparatively cloistered existence, the *cihuatlamacazque* (literally ‘women priests’) possessed an active significance which underlines the binary structure of gender in Tenochtitlan. Whilst men played a public and bloody role in ritual practice, women supplied and supported the temple during the period of their dedication (which could be lifelong or for a fixed period). The ‘domestic’ role of the *cihuatlamacazque* was explicit: ‘their occupation was to spin and

weave worked and coloured blankets in the service of the temple. At midnight they went with their maestra [mistress or teacher] and threw incense in the braziers that were in front of the idols... Although most of these [priestesses] were poor, their parents gave them everything they needed to eat and to make blankets, and to make the food that later the following morning they offered hot, bread tortillas as well as chicken stew in some small casserole, and the heat or steam from this they said was received by the idols, and the rest [was eaten] by the ministers.^{lxxvi} Here we see the women of the temple in their archetypal role as food and fabric producers, taking an ‘interior’ role, provisioning and sustaining the religious ‘household’, whilst men possessed ‘exterior’ responsibilities to the community.

As in a family context, however, men and women also worked alongside one another to ensure the success of their sacred calli.^{lxxvii} Away from sacrificial ritual, priests and priestesses acted together and in parallel in their religious duties: ‘At the principal festivals they all went in procession as a group, with the ministers on the other side, until they gathered together in front of the idols, at the foot of the steps, and the men and the women both went with such silence and devotion that they did not raise their eyes from the ground nor did they speak a word... They had their part that they swept of the lower patios before the temples; the high part was always swept by the ministers.’^{lxxviii} This physical mirroring reflects the complementary roles played by male and female in Tenochtitlan. Although it is tempting to suggest that the ‘higher’ male patio indicates an implicit gender hierarchy, it is probably related more to the patio’s proximity to the looming sacrificial summit of the temple, an area of clearly masculine responsibility.

‘Complex equalities’ and domestic practicalities

Nonetheless, how do we explain the constraints of women's 'domestic' role if not through their innate or political inferiority? Binary schemes of gender have traditionally been associated with concepts of opposition, which inherently devalue women's contribution by placing it in deliberate and irretrievable opposition to the 'dominant' masculine topos.^{lxxxix} In order to understand Aztec concepts of masculinity and femininity, we must deconstruct the perpetual association between the gender binary and models of 'opposition'; this is a society which might better be understood through a system of what Michael Walzer called 'complex equalities'.^{lxxx} Kay Read first drew attention to the applicability of Walzer's model in the Aztec context, linking it to the dual leadership of the tlatoani and the cihuacoatl: in this system each 'distinctive sphere creates its own particular identity; harmony is maintained as long as the boundaries between spheres are maintained'.^{lxxxii} Whilst certainly applicable to the ruling dyad at the apex of Aztec politics, this concept of 'distinctive spheres',^{lxxxii} with clearly defined and necessary borders, is also a helpful lens through which to view broader issues of gender in the Tenochtitlan. Gender parallelism underpinned social, economic and political structures in the Aztec city, and shaped both individual and collective experience.

The public/domestic division which I have posited as the basis to this complementary parallelism was not one which was articulated in these terms in Aztec philosophy and, from a functionalist perspective, a degree of pragmatism must be conceded in the shaping of gender roles. It is often claimed that: 'Women become absorbed primarily in domestic activities because of their role as mothers.'^{lxxxiii} Whilst for the Aztecs it was not women's role in caring, but in birth itself, which shaped their role in ideology as powerful 'natural' figures, parallel childcare was not always a practical ideal. In a city which regularly experienced the departure of a significant proportion of its male population on foreign military campaigns, the reality was that family responsibilities must often have been thrust back into the hands of the

women. In some senses, this lent women greater autonomy and influence, providing them with opportunities for independent action, but it is clear that the ideal frequently differed from the reality.

Although women were not diminished by their domestic role, there is a case to be made that, in the last years of Tenochtitlan, the growing emphasis on empire and its associated military needs may have resulted in an increased focus on masculine, warrior concerns, at the expense of the feminine 'domestic' sphere. We know that a greater class consciousness arose as the Aztecs developed their military hierarchy, which was closely tied to social and political status: 'Each was to be treated in a manner appropriate to his rank, and thus it was possible to recognize who belonged to one level and who to another.'^{lxxxiv} In this progressively more stratified environment, with the emergence of a social structure based principally on military prestige, it seems likely that women, whose influence lay in other fields, may have been somewhat marginalized.^{lxxxv} Even in an atmosphere of increasing military tension however, the 'home front' possessed more than an auxiliary significance in Aztec thought, and there was a tangible connection between the household and the battlefield which strikingly illustrates the gendered duality of the interior/exterior pattern and brings together many of the themes which typify the household structure in Tenochtitlan, on both civic and domestic levels.^{lxxxvi}

In the highly militarized context of Tenochtitlan, warrior images and ideas abounded. In symbolic terms, the parallel between soldiers and mothers is explicit: women were personified as warriors during childbirth, seizing 'the small shield' and 'capturing' a baby, and those who died in the act attained a parallel afterlife to men who died in battle or on the sacrificial stone.^{lxxxvii} In practical terms too, women supported and supplied the army,

provisioning the troops and praying for their safe return. But the connection between household and battlefield went far beyond metaphor – actions within the home were believed literally to influence the fate of warriors on the battlefield. A man who dipped his food into the cooking pot would fail to take captives. If a man ate a tamale which had been stuck to the cooking pot ‘the arrow which was shot would not find its mark’. If he kicked the hearth stones, it would ‘deaden’ his feet when he went to war. And, perhaps most revealingly, if the grinding stone, classic emblem of female activity, broke, someone in the household was destined to die.^{lxxxviii} ‘Interior’ actions in the household lay at the heart of its inhabitants’ future, ‘exterior’, success and prosperity.

Clearly the tendrils of the ‘domestic sphere’ reached far beyond the home, and it is the nature of female power which lent the household this far-reaching influence. The hearth and the metlatl grinding stone were closely associated with feminine energy in the domestic context. Each of the three hearthstones was identified as a female deity, and household implements as well as activities were all touched with the foreboding promise of women’s creative, divine, force. Here we see a graphic demonstration of the parallel roles of men and women, as well as perhaps the most compelling reason for women’s ‘confinement’ to the domestic sphere. The household in Aztec culture was a pervasive organisational structure and the basis to female power and communal prosperity throughout Tenochtitlan, but a note of danger always underlay the ‘domestic’. The household, whether at the level of family or city, was not only a mechanism to harness women’s considerable capacity in complementary gendered partnership and production, but may also have been a symbolic prison for the threatening potential which reached into the city through the female bond to the gods. Tenochtitlan was a household which allowed women power and influence internally, but which officially left the foreign and the public in safer (one is tempted to say more harmless) male hands.

I am grateful to my colleague Martial Staub and the anonymous readers whose constructive comments enabled me to develop this article from its draft form.

ⁱ Traditional histories of Tenochtitlan place its foundation in 1325, although archaeology suggests some earlier settlement on the site. Michael E. Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), p. 84. This is not the place to rehearse the well-known story of the Spanish conquest, which is well summarised in Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest* (London: Longman, 1994).

ⁱⁱ For an excellent analysis of Aztec urbanism, which considers the debates over demography but also makes a compelling case for a functional approach, concluding that altepetl capitals were fully urban settlements, see Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Due to lack of sources, the population of Tenochtitlan has been a subject of heated debate. See, for example, S. F. Cook and W. Borah, *Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); and R. A. Zambardino, 'Mexico's Population in the Sixteenth Century: Demographic Anomaly or Mathematical Illusion?' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 11.1 (1980), pp. 1–27. Bearing in mind these caveats regarding population size, the density was perhaps 13,000 people per square kilometre. Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 18.

^{iv} Tenochtitlan is sometimes regarded as a 'model' for other Mesoamerican capitals, but Smith's *Aztec City-State Capitals* convincingly argues for its unique nature.

^v The people referred to here as the 'Aztecs' might more accurately be called the 'Mexica' or 'Tenochca' (meaning 'people of Tenochtitlan'). I recognize the difficulties and possible anachronisms of the term 'Aztec', but will use it as the most familiar term for a non-specialist audience. For an influential discussion of this terminology see Miguel León-Portilla, 'Los aztecas: Disquisiciones sobre un gentilico', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 31 (2000), pp. 307-13.

^{vi} There is some evidence that Aztec women occasionally worked in the fields, but this appears to have been more typical of less fertile, non-urban areas. Cecelia F. Klein, 'The Shield Women: Resolution of an Aztec Gender Paradox', in Alana Cordy-Collins and Douglas Sharon (eds), *Current Topics in Aztec Studies: Essays in Honor of Dr H. B. Nicholson* (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Man, 1993), p. 39.

^{vii} June Nash, 'The Aztecs and the Ideology of Male Dominance', *Signs*, 4.2 (Winter 1978), p. 359.

^{viii} Although I am the first, so far as I know, to suggest that the 'household' model can be directly applied to the whole city of Tenochtitlan, my approach has much in common with scholars such as Inga Clendinnen, Susan

Kellogg, Louise Burkhart and Sharisse and Geoffrey McCafferty, whose work has influenced the development of my thinking. See, for example, Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Susan Kellogg, 'From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal: Tenochca Mexica Women, 1500-1700', in Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett (eds), *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), pp. 123-43.

^{ix} See, for example, María J. Rodríguez-Shadow, *La mujer azteca* (Toluca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1991).

^x Rosemary A. Joyce, 'Negotiating Sex and Gender in Classic Maya Society', in Cecelia F. Klein (ed.), *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: Washington, D.C., 2001), p.112.

^{xi} This concept of structure is influenced by Bourdieu's work on habitus: 'principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them'. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 53. Miranda Stockett similarly identified this 'tension between structure and agency' in the interpretation of Mesoamerican gender roles, and helpfully summarised: 'It is through practice that identities are enacted by persons and groups, which inevitably lends them an idiosyncratic flavor. Yet, the ways they are conceived and concretized are undeniably guided and influenced by existing social norms and collective views.' Miranda K. Stockett, 'On the Importance of Difference: Re-envisioning Sex and Gender in Ancient Mesoamerica', *World Archaeology*, 34.4 (Dec. 2005), pp. 573.

^{xii} Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture & Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 23.

^{xiii} See, for example, *The Codex Mendoza*, ed. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), fols. 57v-60r.

^{xiv} Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 116-18.

^{xv} No pre-conquest Nahua codices survive, but a handful from similar cultures, such as the Mixtec, have allowed scholars to access ideas and conventions from related traditions.

^{xvi} Intriguingly, women appear in the accompanying images more often and in a wider range of roles than the alphabetic texts would suggest. Betty Ann Brown, 'Seen but Not Heard: Women in Aztec Ritual – The Sahagún

Texts', in Janet C. Berlo (ed.), *Text and Image in Pre-Columbian Art: Essays on the Interrelationship of the Verbal and Visual Arts* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 119-53.

^{xvii} Although much of my work inevitably considers ceremonial and idealized concepts of gender as these are much more explicitly considered by the sources, the concept of the *habitus* inherently links such structures with both ordinary practice and individual agency.

^{xviii} Discourses which marked key moments in the individual and collective life of Tenochtitlan, the *huehuetlahtolli* have been the subject of considerable debate. Whilst they are clearly not verbatim records of pre-conquest speeches, similarities between the various transcriptions lend weight to their authenticity, and recent work has supported the likely pre-conquest origin of the genre. For more on the *huehuetlahtolli* see Miguel León-Portilla and Librado Silva Galeana, *Huehuetlahtolli: Testimonios de la Antigua Palabra* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), pp. 7-45; Joanne Harwood, 'Disguising Ritual: A Re-assessment of Part 3 of the Codex Mendoza' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 2002), pp. 138-40; Birgitta Leander, 'La educación de los jóvenes en la sociedad Azteca, según los *huehuetlahtolli* – "*Platicas de los viejos*"', in José Alinca Franch (ed.), *Azteca Mexica: Las culturas del México antiguo* (Madrid: Central Cultural de la Villa, 1992), pp. 265-9; and Elizabeth Hill Boone, 'Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico', in Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins (eds), *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), pp. 150-5.

^{xix} Florentine Codex, 6: 25: 147; 6: 19: 100.

^{xx} The major source for this article, the Florentine Codex, was compiled by the so-called 'Father of Anthropology', Bernardino de Sahagún, whose thirteen-volume manuscript stands as a remarkable testimony to his meticulous attempts to record every aspect of Aztec life. Although the in-built limitations of his perspective are unavoidable, there is persuasive evidence in support of the idea that Sahagún was diligent and scrupulous in his survey of Aztec society and (although this does not necessarily ensure the material's accuracy) that he himself believed his information to be true. Unfortunately, I lack the space here to consider fully the technical and methodological questions which necessarily apply to the use of these colonial documents. For a more detailed consideration of these issues see Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, especially pp. 2-11.

^{xxi} The Aristotelian traditions of sixteenth-century Spain, in which the household was clearly established as a hierarchical, patriarchal structure, also tend against the imposition of a parallel complementary ideology.

^{xxii} Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. and eds. C. E. Dibble and A. J. O. Anderson, 12 books in 13 vols. (Santa Fe: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), 6: 31: 172.

To prevent confusion between editions and enable cross-referencing to alternative versions, references are given in the form of book: chapter: page number. (Page references are to the revised edition where applicable.)

^{xxiii} Florentine Codex, 6: 37: 201-3.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, 6: 37: 201; Codex Mendoza, fol. 56v; Florentine Codex, 6: 31: 171.

^{xxv} *Ibid.*, 6: 37: 203-4.

^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, 6: 31: 171; 5, Appendix: 9: 186.

^{xxvii} *Ibid.*, 6: 31: 172-3. Placentas and pots containing the ashes of family members were also buried under the earth floor of the house (*Ibid.*, 6: 30: 169, 3: 1: 45). Excavations of houses have revealed considerable evidence for domestic religious ritual, an area which is murky in the textual sources. Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 241-3; Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals*, p. 168.

^{xxviii} Florentine Codex, 6: 31: 171.

^{xxix} The nature of Nahuatl is such that *calli* also carries the meaning of ‘structure’ or ‘container’ and is the root word for a number of other compounds.

^{xxx} This analysis is my own, but my attention was drawn to the diversity of structures characterized by the term *calli* by Susan Kellogg, ‘The Social Organization of Households Among the Tenochca Mexica Before and After Conquest’, in Robert S. Santley and Kenneth G. Hirth (eds), *Prehispanic Domestic Units in Western Mesoamerica: Studies of the Household, Compound and Residence* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1993), pp. 207-24.

^{xxxi} Florentine Codex, 11:12: 269-75.

^{xxxii} *Ibid.*, 11: illustrations 884-921. Lockhart suggests that we might ‘think of a *calli* as simply a building, the only definite expectations being, in this context, that it is primarily destined for human residence and has an independent doorway onto a patio’. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 61.

^{xxxiii} In compiling this list I consulted, amongst other sources, the enormously helpful ‘Florentine Codex Vocabulary’ (1997) compiled by R. Joe Campbell, which is available via the Nahuatl Gateway at <http://www2.potsdam.edu/schwaljf/Nahuatl/florent.txt> [accessed 22 July 2010].

^{xxxiv} Florentine Codex, 6: 31: 172. With the exception of dynastic marriages, women were unlikely to travel beyond the markets in their local area, and were directly involved in warfare only on occasions of great extremis.

^{xxxv} Florentine Codex, 4: 12: 45.

^{xxxvi} Louise Burkhart rightly challenges the applicability of these terms in Tenochtitlan because ‘discussions of women’s roles too often focus on a “public” domain that is presumed both to exist and to be more important than a presumed “private” domain’. Burkhart, ‘Mexica Women on the Home Front’, p.25.

^{xxxvii} Edward E. Calnek, ‘The Internal Structure of Tenochtitlan’, in Eric R. Wolf (ed.), *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), p. 298. Archaeological evidence of domestic life in Tenochtitlan itself, especially for non-elite households, is sparse due to the nature of the construction, the devastating conquest and the subsequent rebuilding.

^{xxxviii} McCaa characterizes Nahua households as a ‘joint-compound bilateral system of co-residence’. Robert McCaa, ‘The Nahua calli of Ancient Mexico: household, family and gender’, *Continuity and Change*, 18.1 (2003), p. 24.

^{xxxix} Kellogg, ‘The Social Organization of Households’, pp. 212-13; Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals*, pp. 163-6.

^{xl} Alonso de Molina, *Vocabularia en Lengua Castellana y Mexicana* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 2001), p. 62.

^{xli} Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, p. 59.

^{xlii} Camilla Townsend, “‘What in the world have you done to me, my lover?’ Sex, servitude and politics among the pre-conquest Nahuas as seen in the *Cantares Mexicanos*’, *The Americas*, 62.3 (2006), p. 373.

^{xliii} There is considerable debate about the precise nature and functions of the *calpolli* and *tlaxicalli* and the degree to which they were interchangeable. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, pp. 16-17. I do not here assert the geographical or ancestral nature of the *capolli*, but only its significance as an organisational unit.

^{xliv} Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, pp. 16, 479, n.10; Alonso de Molina, *Vocabularia en Lengua Mexicana y Castellana* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 2001), p. 146.

^{xlv} Louise M. Burkhart, ‘Mexica Women on the Home Front: Housework and Religion in Aztec Mexico’, in Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett (eds), *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), pp. 30-1.

^{xlvi} There are cases of women serving as regents for young sons and even, very occasionally, as *cihuatlatoque* (woman-rulers) in their own right.

^{xlvii} Susan Schroeder, ‘Introduction, in *Codex Chimalpahin, Society and Politics in Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, Culhuacan, and Other Nahua Altepetl in Central Mexico: The Nahuatl and Spanish Annals and Accounts Collected and Recorded by Don Domingo de San Antón Muñon Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin*, ed. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Susan Schroeder (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 1997, i, 43.

^{xlviii} For one reading of the complex symbolic significance of the *cihuacoatl* see Pete Sigal, 'Imagining Cihuacoatl: Masculine Rituals, Nahua Goddesses and the Texts of the *Tlacuilos*', *Gender & History*, 22.3 (November 2010), pp. 538-63.

^{xlix} Kay A. Read, 'More Than Earth: Cihuacoatl as Female Warrior, Male Matron, and Inside Ruler', in Beverly Moon and Elisabeth Benard (eds), *Goddesses who rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 58-62.

^l *Codex Chimalpahin*, i, 43.

^{li} This balanced division of labour was never categorical, and had some apparent flexibility in response to circumstances and individuals, but it may have been particularly eroded in the final years of Aztec rule under Moctezuma II, when the *tlatoni*'s personal promotion of both his own status and social etiquette and hierarchy more widely was coupled with increasing focus on military matters with the empire's expanding hostile borders.

^{lii} Richard F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 76-7.

^{liii} *Florentine Codex*, 6: 10: 48-9.

^{liv} Gender complementarity is also regularly visible in cosmology and theology, and the importance of binary patterns and pairing has been discussed by many scholars.

^{lv} Even the *tlalmaitl* (landless peasants who did not hold citizen status and were exempted from other service obligations, literally 'hand of the earth') were required to undertake military service.

^{lvi} Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 18.

^{lvii} One prominent version of the creation myth is translated in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. and ed. J. Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), pp. 145-6.

^{lviii} On the many different aspects of *Cihuacoatl* see Kay A. Read, 'More Than Earth', pp. 58-62.

^{lix} *Florentine Codex*, 6: 29: 162.

^{lx} Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 295.

^{lxi} As mentioned above, my model differs from that of scholars such as Cecelia Klein and Louise Burkhart, who posit a fluid notion of gender based on the idea that sex was understood by the Aztecs as an inherently unstable and flexible category and that social practices were designed to prevent the transgression of ideal gender roles. See Louise M. Burkhart, 'Gender in Nahuatl Texts of the Early Colonial Period'; and Cecelia F. Klein, 'None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology', in Cecelia F. Klein (ed.), *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), pp. 183-253. These theories are by no means entirely incompatible, as they share an understanding of Aztec society as structured according to gender binaries and concerned with reproducing this binary structure.

^{lxii} Of course, as I hope is clear from this article, I argue that gender roles were highly culturally constructed in Tenochtitlan, but were also believed to be biologically predetermined; gender was both performed and innate. For an explicitly performative analysis see Rosemary A. Joyce, 'Girling the Girl and Boying the Boy: The Production of Adulthood in Ancient Mesoamerica', *World Archaeology*, 31.3 (2000), pp. 472-83.

^{lxiii} The exact age at which children began attending school is a point of disagreement between the sources, but the typical age of entry seems to be around fourteen. For more on this and other aspects of Aztec education see Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, pp. 66-83.

^{lxiv} Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 290-2.

^{lxv} Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 14.

^{lxvi} Alonso de Zorita, *The Lords of New Spain: The Brief and Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Benjamin Keen (Phoenix House: London, 1965), p. 140.

^{lxvii} Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs*, pp. 139-41.

^{lxviii} Lack of gendered language sometimes makes it difficult to identify male and female roles in trade, but images in the Florentine Codex show 'many women vendors in the market, especially everything related to food and clothing'. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, p. 195. On the archaeological evidence for women's domestic activities, especially weaving, see Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, 'Asking about Aztec Gender: The Historical and Archaeological Evidence', in Klein, *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America*, pp. 57-85.

^{lxix} Florentine Codex, 6: 23: 132.

^{lxx} For more detail on the complementary roles within marriage see Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, pp. 103-23.

^{lxxi} Florentine Codex, 4: 14: 53-4.

^{lxxii} *Ibid.*, 6: 37: 204.

^{lxxiii} This is an argument which I would also apply to the *cihuacoatl* official, and also to some men in religious contexts, particularly priests who dressed as female deities or wore the skins of female victims. The gender transgression was permitted because the role required both male and female functions to be fulfilled. Sigal also argues that a 'strict gender division' may not have been imposed 'in ritual life'. Sigal, 'Imagining *Cihuacoatl*', p.539.

^{lxxiv} I lack the space to discuss fully the relevance of the nature/culture debate in this context, but it is important to note that these were not oppositional concepts in Aztec culture; ideas of 'nature' carried far more positive

attributes in Tenochtitlan than in either contemporaneous Judaeo-Christian societies or recent feminist debate. For more on gender roles in human sacrifice, especially amongst victims, see Caroline Dodds, 'Earth Women and Eagle Warriors: Revealing Aztec Gender Roles through Ritual Violence', in Katherine D. Watson, *Assaulting the Past: Violence and Civilization in Historical Context* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 162-78; and Caroline Dodds, 'Female Dismemberment and Decapitation: Gendered Understandings of Power in Aztec Ritual', in Stuart Carroll (ed.), *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 47-63.

^{lxxv} I will use the terms 'priest' and 'priestess' as the most suitable terms available for the men and women in the service of the temple.

^{lxxvi} Toribio de Benavente o Motolinía, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1990), p. 43 [my translation and bracketed inserts].

^{lxxvii} My principle source for this passage, Motolinía, refers to the institution as 'templo', because he is writing in Spanish, but *teocalli* ('house of the god') is a well-established Nahuatl term for 'temple'.

^{lxxviii} Motolinía, *Historia*, p. 43 [my translation].

^{lxxix} Joan Wallach Scott famously called for 'a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference'. Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.165. Whilst Aztec gender systems were inherently binary, they were not posited in terms of 'opposition'.

^{lxxx} Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 3-30.

^{lxxxi} Kay A. Read, 'More Than Earth', p. 61. For more on Read's analysis of the *cihuacoatl* / *tlatoani* relationship see her 'Death and the *tlatoani*: The Land of Death, Rulership, and Ritual', in Eloise Quiñones Keber (ed.), *Representing Aztec Ritual* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), p. 171.

^{lxxxii} I deliberately avoid the use of the term 'separate spheres', not only due to its pre-existing burdens of meaning, but also because it implies a strict separation which is perhaps inappropriate in this complementary scheme.

^{lxxxiii} Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview', p.23.

^{lxxxiv} Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Doris Heyden (Norman, 1994), p. 192.

^{lxxxv} Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 119-20.

^{lxxxvi} My analysis here builds on the idea of the 'home front' posited by Burkhart in 'Mexica Women on the Home Front', pp. 25-54.

^{lxxxvii} For a more detailed analysis of this parallel between mothers and warriors see Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, pp. 36-40,

^{lxxxviii} *Florentine Codex*, 5: Appendix: 7, 8, 13, 34: 185-94.