

Mary Hays's Biography of María de Estrada, a Spanish Woman in the American Conquest*

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Abstract: This article focuses on Mary Hays's entry of María de Estrada in her *Female Biography* (1803), and how this English writer dealt with issues of gender, race, religion and nation by means of the mere inclusion of Estrada in this collection of women's biographies. It studies the life of María de Estrada as inscribed in the fruitful transatlantic dialogue between the Iberian metropolis and the American continent at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the analysis of her ordeal, issues of colonization are intermingled with those of ethnic persecution. De Estrada is believed to have been a Jew suffering difficulties in the Spanish city of Toledo; she had later an additional plight as a foundling girl living with the Gypsies in order to blur her origin, and thus escape ethnic cleansing. Subsequently, her role as an expatriate woman, who would leave her country of origin on board of a ship in the Hernán Cortés Expedition, is also analyzed.

Keywords: American Conquest; María de Estrada; Mary Hays; *Female Biography*; race.

Resumen: Este artículo estudia la biografía de María de Estrada que aparece en el texto de Mary Hays *Female Biography* (1803), que se inscribe en el fructífero diálogo trasatlántico entre España y el continente americano en el siglo XVI, y el modo en que esta escritora inglesa abordó, mediante la mera inclusión de Estrada en dicho diccionario, cuestiones de género, raza, religión y nación. Las disputas de la colonización se entremezclan con cuestiones relativas a la persecución étnica, pues era María de Estrada una judía originaria de Toledo que se ocultó entre gitanos para escapar de la persecución antisemita. Asimismo, el trabajo analiza su papel en Méjico, a donde llega en una de las naves de la expedición de Hernán Cortés.

Palabras clave: Conquista de América; María de Estrada; Mary Hays; *Female Biography*; raza.

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Mary Hays's *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries: Alphabetically Arranged*, first published in 1803, has been newly published in 2013 as part of a series, edited by Pickering and Chatto, devoted to Women's Memoirs (Luria 2013: xi). Revisiting and rewriting early modern women's cultural, literary and political agency is part of the task that modern scholarship is attempting in the twenty first century in order to produce new knowledge, but also, to challenge wrongly assumed paradigms regarding women's roles in history. Hays (1759–1843) belonged to a family of Rational Dissenters, and received private and chapel education, which consisted of informal reading together with academic guidance by various friends and mentors throughout her life, such as Joseph Priestley and William Godwin, among others (Luria 2002: 6, 13; Luria 2006: 13–172; Whelan 2015: 511–512). Her intellectual development and growth within the London Radical circle, as well as her literary interests, led her to enter the public realm by publishing various essays and novels: *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793), and afterwards, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). In these texts, she vindicates women's rights (Wallace 2009), following the path trodden by Mary Wollstonecraft (McInnes 2011), who had already published essays and narrative texts: *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). This latter subject was also her main focus in other writings, such as the radical essay *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, written in 1790–91, and published in 1798. Concerning gender issues, Mary Spongberg maintains that “while she [Hays] drew on narratives created by men, she subtly shifted their focus, giving women agency, while also emphasizing the way in which the prejudices arising from the distinction of sex shaped their existence” (2010: 256). Similarly, Hays created *Female Biography* as an instrument of women's education, as she ostensibly states in its preface: “My pen has been taken up in the cause, and for the benefit of my own sex. For their improvement, and to their entertainment, my labours have been devoted” (2013: 3–4). Within *Female Biography*, a compilation of the lives of legendary women, this paper will place special attention on the female Spaniard, María de Estrada, on account of her role in the conquest of Mexico. In the analysis of her ordeal, issues of empire and colonization are intermingled with those of gender and ethnic persecution. However, due to the absence of direct and abundant data regarding Spanish Renaissance women, Johanna Drucker's concept of ‘capta,’ referring to pieces of

information taken from the tradition or from secondary sources, will be followed in this analysis, bearing in mind Drucker's idea that "the concept of data as a given has to be rethought through a humanistic lens and characterized as *capta*, taken and constructed" (2011: n. p.).

The life of María de Estrada is inscribed in the fruitful transatlantic dialogue between the Iberian metropolis and the American continent at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In *Female Biography*, the entry for de Estrada does not provide much information concerning the said Spanish citizen. However, although many details of her extraordinary life are not present, it is of major importance that a woman of Spanish origin is included in the aforesaid compendium of women's lives. Hays's entry reads as follows: "MARIA D'ESTRADA, the wife of a soldier of Fernandez Cortez, followed her husband to Mexico, where she fought by his side, and performed extraordinary exploits of valour, to the astonishment and admiration of all who beheld her. *Dictionnaire Historique*" (Hays 2014, IV: 325). Lorenzo-Modia annotated the entry for Estrada in the Pickering & Chatto edition of Hays's text with present-day data (2014, IV: 566–567). One of the issues to be taken into account is the reason for the inclusion of this Spanish woman in Jean François de la Croix's biographical compilation. Thus, the first noteworthy source is his *Dictionnaire Historique* (1769), frequently used by Hays as a guide and whose entry reads as follows:

ESTRADA (*Marie d'*) femme d'un soldat de Fernand-Cortez, conquérant du Mexique. "Elle" montra, dit le traducteur de Feijoo [*sic*], beaucoup de valeur dans les combats qu'il fallut essayer: armée "d'une épée & une rondache, elle fit des exploits admirables. Oubliant son sexe, & se revêtissant du courage que les hommes braves & jaloux de gloire on coutume d'avoir en pareille occasion, elle se faisoit jour au travers des ennemis, avec autant d'intrépidité & de hardiesse que si elle eût été un des guerriers les plus intrépides du monde. Enfin ses actions furent si admirables qu'elles étonnerent tous ceux qui en furent témoins." (II, 186)

There is an apparent contradiction in the data regarding María d'Estrada's life. According to Hays's text, she was the wife of a soldier of Hernán Cortés, who followed him to Mexico, and who was extraordinarily courageous in the conquest of the country. The source used by de la Croix for his *Dictionnaire Historique* is indirectly acknowledged in the excerpt cited above. It refers to the French translation of a text by the Benedictine monk Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (1676–1764), "Defensa de las

mujeres” in *Teatro crítico universal* (1726, I.16), made by Nicolas-Gabriel Vaquette d’Hermilly (1705–1778) and published in Paris as *Théâtre Critique* (1746). Feijóo’s original text is the following:

Una *María de Estrada*, consorte de Pedro Sánchez Farfán, Soldado de Hernán Cortés, digna de muy singular memoria por sus muchas, y raras hazañas, que refiere el P. Fr. **Juan de Torquemada** en su primer Tomo de la **Monarquía Indiana**. Tratando de la luctuosa salida que hizo Cortés de México, después de muerto Motezuma, dice de ella lo siguiente: *Mostróse muy valerosa en este aprieto, y conflicto María de Estrada, la cual con una espada, y una rodela en las manos hizo hechos maravillosos, y se entraba por los enemigos con tanto coraje, y ánimo, como si fuera uno de los más valientes hombres del mundo, olvidada de que era mujer, y revestida del valor, que en caso semejante suelen tener los hombres de valor, y honra. Y fueron tantas las maravillas, y cosas que hizo, que puso en espanto, y asombro a cuantos la miraban.* Refiriendo en el capítulo siguiente la batalla que se dio entre Españoles, y Mexicanos en el Valle de Otumpa (ó Otumba, como la llama D. Antonio de Solís), repite la memoria de esta ilustre mujer con las palabras que se siguen: *En esta batalla, dice **Diego Muñoz Camargo** en su **Memorial de Tlaskala**, que María de Estrada peleó a caballo, y con una lanza en la mano tan varonilmente, como si fuera uno de los más valientes hombres del Ejército, y aventajándose a muchos.* No dice el Autor de dónde era natural esta Heroína; pero el apellido persuade que era Asturiana. (1726: 343–344, boldface mine)

The translation into English of Feijóo’s text published in 1778 includes most of the information provided by this Spanish writer, although it does not include any reference to one of the sources from which a quotation was extracted, nor to María de Estrada’s possible place of origin:

Behold a María de Estrade [*sic*], the wife of Pedro Sanchez Farfan, a soldier of Cortez’s, who well deserves to be honourably mentioned for her many and very extraordinary exploits, of which, **Father de Torquemada**, gives such particular relation in his first volume of the *Indian Monarchy*; speaking of the deplorable sally, which Cortez made out of Mexico, after the death of Montezuma, he says of her. *In this bloody action Maria de Estrada, eminently signalized her courage, performing wonders with her sword and target, bearing down the enemies ranks, as if she had been one of the brave and strongest men in the world; forgetful as it were, of her sex, and putting on all the valour, which only men of the greatest honour, display on such trying occasions; and the wonders she performed were*

such as struck the enemy with much terror, as they raised admiration in the Spaniards. And when in the next chapter, he gives an account of the battle, fought between the Spaniards and Mexicans in the valley of Otumba, he revives the memory of this illustrious woman, in the following words. In this battle, Maria de Estrada, *shewed herself equal to the reputation she had acquired at Mexico*, charging on horseback, with courage, not inferior to any in the whole army, and the ardour of a young warrior, eager in the pursuit of preferment or glory. (1778: 70–72, boldface mine)

It is well known that Feijóo did not like the translation into French of his essay, which was started in 1742, published first in installments, and in 1746 was compiled into book form. The Spanish writer had stated that Vaquette d'Hermilly was proficient neither in Spanish nor French: “Esta traducción está en un todo defectuosísima; de modo que parece que el Traductor sabe muy mal la lengua Española, y nada bien la Francesa.” (1774: 153). There are several versions in English of Feijóo's *An Essay on Woman*, but it seems that Mary Hays may not have followed any of them as she mentions de la Croix's *Dictionnaire Historique* as a direct source. Moreover, in some cases, the text referring to María de Estrada is omitted in some English versions, as it occurs in the translation published in 1765 or that of 1778, although it is included in the 1768 edition. However, the similarity with Hays's entry cannot be proven (qtd. above).

When offering data concerning María de Estrada in *An Essay on Woman* (Feijóo 1768: 71), the Spanish academic refers to different sources, namely that by his colleague the Franciscan friar Fray Juan de Torquemada (c. 1562–1624), whose *Monarchía Indiana* (1615) had just been reprinted in Madrid in 1723, that is, three years before Feijóo's first edition of “Defensa de las mujeres” (1726). Feijóo quotes Torquemada's text word for word (qtd. above), which provides more information about María de Estrada's marital status, places of residence and death, and about the reward received by the married couple as a payment for the defense of Hernán Cortés's troops, namely the government of the town of Tetela, in Mexico: “Casó esta señora con Pedro Sánchez Farfán, y dieronle en encomienda el pueblo de Tetela, a las faldas del volcán, y muerto este primer marido casó luego con Alonso Martín Partidor, y vivieron en la ciudad de Los Ángeles hasta que murieron” (Torquemada 1723: 504). Juan de Torquemada mentions this lady in other excerpts in his chronicle with data taken from Antonio de Solís's *Memorial de Tlaskala*, such as the following referring to the battle in which he had taken part on horseback, and her manlike courage, also quoted

in Feijóo's *Defense of Women* (qtd. above). According to Gómez-Lucena, she is the female figure on horseback in the history of the Mexican painted in 1552 on the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (2013: 37). Torquemada also quotes Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* regarding María de Estrada's fight for Cortés's troops on 30 June 1520, and an extract from his text is subsequently reproduced by Feijóo in his *Defense of Women* (qtd. above). She is even mentioned in a letter from Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Bishop of Mexico, to the King of Spain, asking for estates in the town of Tetela in order to found a school, one of which is said to belong to María d'Estrada, widow (*Memorial*, 20 December 1537). Some of these data, considered as evidence by Jean François de la Croix, were summarized in his *Dictionnaire Historique*, and directly quoted or referred to by Mary Hays.

Other Spanish sources such as *Crónica de la Nueva España II* (1560), by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar (?1514–1575), also mentioned this celebrated woman. In his chronicle, Estrada was said to be not only fierce at the battlefield, but also displaying powerful speech abilities when defending the appropriateness of women for every task that men could perform:

(...) Partieron de ahí a poco, despidiéndose de Sandoval, e llegaron aquella noche a Oculma, e partiendo otro día de madrugada durmieron en Gualipán, e otro día entraron en la ciudad Tlaxcala, donde fueron muy bien recibidos. Recogieron los bastimentos que pudieron, que fueron quince mil cargas de maíz y mil cargas de gallinas e más de trecientas de tasajos de venados, juntamente con los bienes de Xicotencatl, que estaban aplicados al Rey, en que había buena cantidad de oro, plumajes ricos, chalchuitles e mucha ropa rica, treinta mujeres entre hijas, sobrinas y criadas suyas. Partieron de Tlaxcala y llegaron con todo esto a Tezcuco, bien acompañados de gente de guerra, sin subcederles desmán alguno. Entregaron lo más del bastimento a Pero Sánchez Farfán y a María de Estrada, que allí estaban por mandado de Cortés, y lo demás llevaron a Cuyoacán, e de allí fueron a ver a Cortés, el cual por extremo se alegró con el buen recaudo que traían. (...) Ayudó grandemente, así cuando Cortés estuvo la primera vez en México, como cuando después le cercó, una mujer mulata que se decía Beatriz Palacios, la cual era casada con un español llamado Pedro de Escobar. Dióse tan buena maña en servir a su marido y a los de su camarada, que muchas veces, estando él cansado de pelear el día y cabiéndole a la noche la vela, la hacía ella por él, no con menos ánimo y cuidado que su marido, y cuando dexaba las armas salía al campo a coger bledos y los tenía cocidos y aderezados para su marido y para los demás compañeros. Curaba los heridos, ensillaba los caballos e hacía otras cosas

como cualquier soldado, y ésta y otras, algunas de las cuales diré adelante, fueron las que curaron e hicieron vestir de lienzo de la tierra a Cortés y a sus compañeros cuando llegaron destrozados de Tlaxcala, y las que, como Macedonas, diciéndoles Cortés que se quedasen a descansar en Tlaxcala, le respondieron: “No es bien, señor Capitán, que mujeres españolas dexen a sus maridos yendo a la guerra; donde ellos murieren moriremos nosotras, y es razón que los indios entiendan que son tan valientes los españoles que hasta sus mujeres saben pelear, y queremos, pues para la cura de nuestros maridos y de los demás somos necesarias, tener parte en tan buenos trabajos, para ganar algún renombre como los demás soldados”; palabras, cierto, de más que mujeres, de donde se entenderá que en todo tiempo ha habido mujeres de varonil ánimo y consejo. Fueron éstas Beatriz de Palacios, María de Estrada, Joana Martín, Isabel Rodríguez y otra que después se llamó doña Joana, mujer de Alonso Valiente, y otras, de las cuales en particular, como lo merecen, hará mención. (1971: 207–209)

As to the data concerning her personal life, there is no complete or conclusive evidence regarding her origin in Spain or details of her trip to the Indies. There are spelling variations in her second name, i.e. in some texts it appears as ‘María de Estrada,’ in others ‘María Estrada.’ The new family name is even spelled ‘D’Estrada,’ with or without capitalization in the preposition; other alternatives present a clipping of preposition and noun, ‘María Destrada,’ and finally it has also been with a different final vowel in the family name ‘María de Estrade.’ In most books, she is said to have flourished in Spain and Mexico *c.* 1500–1547. There are some sources that indicate that she was a Jew from Toledo, who had been educated in a well-to-do medical family (Anon., “María de Estrada...”: n. p.; Benito Ruano 1961: 137–138). In 1492 Jews were forced to abandon their faith or leave the country by the Spanish monarchy. As an ophthalmologist, her grandfather used to help all kinds of people, including Gypsies, who —unable to pay him for lenses or treatments— promised to help the family when in need. Such payment took place when the doctor was imprisoned for refusing conversion and the young María was helped by the travellers (Anon., “La mujer judía...”: n. p.). Consequently, as an orphan, she was given to a Gypsy family in order to hide her religious affiliation (Anon., “Maria Myriam...”: n. p.). As an outsider, when having problems within the new family, she left the country for good, which was a common way for runaways to escape the Inquisition prosecutions. In this process, her original Jew name —Miriam Pérez— would have been changed to María de Estrada, the new family name referring to the common noun for ‘road,’ on which she

is said to have been found. Béatrice Leroy explains that in 1491 the Inquisition accused the Jews in the Spanish city of Toledo of the ritual killing of a boy. However, the monarchy did not accept to sign the expulsion of Jews, no matter the pressure put on them by the clergy. In fact, it was not until the beginning of 1492, with the conquest of Granada and the Santa Fé capitulations, that the Catholic monarchs signed the decree of expulsion. The decree offered Jews the possibility of conversion or else abandon the territory before July 31st of that year, not being allowed to take either books nor profits from their belongings or property during departure (1996: 143). Due to the political reunification of the Spanish peninsula by King Ferdinand of Aragón, and Isabella of Castile, there was a recentralization followed by an exodus of various ethnic minorities to the recently discovered American continent. It should be noted that when the Royal decree for the expulsion of Jews was passed, the prominent leader of the Spanish Inquisition in Toledo was the Dominican friar Tomás de Torquemada (Valladolid, 1420–1498), and although one of the chroniclers of the Indies who wrote about de Estrada's deeds on the American continent was the Franciscan friar Juan de Torquemada (Torquemada, Palencia, c. 1562–1624), to the best of our knowledge, no family relationship existed between them.

All in all, neither de Estrada's religious affiliation nor her birthplace has been thoroughly established so far. The Asturian origin of the family name suggested by Feijóo (1726: 344) can be considered simply tentative, as it was—and is—a common family name in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, including Galicia and Portugal, and a synonym for 'road,' referring to a foundling who was said to appear on the highway. However, her Gypsy attachment has been underlined in a novel on her life published by the Yale Professor Gloria Durán in 1999, entitled *María de Estrada. Gypsy Conquistadora* (1999), and a contemporary biography revising the same issue has been published in Mexico by Juan Duvenard Chauveau (1989), thus suggesting that her exploits seem to be alive in the collective mind of the people of the Americas.

Regarding her marital status, different possibilities coexist. One is that she was married to one of Cortés's soldiers, as stated by Hays in her *Female Biography* (1803). However, the assumption that she travelled as a married woman may have been an inference made by Hays, since it seems she left Spain as a single woman, and later married her husband Pedro Sánchez Farfán in Cuba, according to Bernal Díaz del Castillo (2012: 578). In the first years of the Spanish voyages to America by the *conquistadores*, single

women were allowed to travel, and were encouraged to marry in the colonies. Thirty of the 330 settlers allowed to embark in the third voyage with Christopher Columbus were women (Catholic King and Queen Decree, 23 April 1497, qtd. Pumar 1988: 12). However, Mary Elizabeth Perry states that, out of the six hundred women who had travelled from Seville to Nueva España, only fifty had done so with the appropriate license from the Spanish *Casa de Contratación* (emigration agency) (1980: 216). Despite the emigration stipulations, there was a great desire to place new settlers for colonization, therefore, Columbus was allowed to take single women with him, and even law offenders, regardless of their gender: “cualesquier personas, hombres y mujeres, delincuentes” (Medina del Campo Decree, 22 June 1497, qtd. Pumar 1988: 12). Later, this open policy regarding the marital status of women was changed, and single women were not allowed to travel to the new world, except if going to live with an existing husband already living in that part of the world: “[no autorizar] a mujeres solteras para pasar a Indias, porque esto queda a nos reservado, y las casadas pasen precisamente en compañía de sus maridos o constando que ellos están en aquellas Provincias y van a hacer vida maridable” (Carlos I, 23 May 1539, qtd. Pumar: 12). An assumption is that María de Estrada may have travelled to the Indies while single, in order to find a better life in the new world. In fact, Himmerich, following Boyd-Bowman (1985: 117), states that “she had arrived in Cuba in 1519, and accompanied her brother [Francisco de Estrada] to New Spain as a member of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition” (1996: 77, 239). Others think that she may have travelled accompanied by a former husband who would have died in America (Campuzano 2004: 197).

Concerning her activities in the new world, it seems clear that she travelled to Mexico from Cuba in the expedition with Hernán Cortés in 1519 (Maura 2005: 188), together with the man whom she had married in this American island, Pedro Sánchez Farfán, although the couple most likely travelled on board different vessels. When she married, or while living with the *conquistadores*, it seems that she was not considered young according to the standards of the times: “Primeramente, la vieja María de Estrada, que después casó con Pedro Sánchez Farfán,” (Díaz del Castillo 2012: 578) (‘Firstly, the old lady María de Estrada, who later married Pedro Sánchez Farfán’; my translation unless otherwise stated). The reputation of the couple was very positive as attested by Díaz del Castillo: “un buen soldado que se decía Pedro Sánchez Farfán, marido que fue de la buena y honrada mujer María de Estrada” (446) (‘a good soldier named Pedro Sánchez Farfán, the husband of a good and honest woman, María de Estrada’).

Sánchez would not be her only husband: “They had no children. Sánchez died c. 1536, and his widow succeeded him as an ‘encomendera’ of Tetela” (Himmerich 1996: 227). When travelling with her husband, Sánchez Farfán, she helped the expedition playing an outstanding role in the battlefield, to such an extent that most of the Spanish chroniclers from the West Indies reported her deeds there (Muñoz Camargo 2007: 227).

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (c. 1568–75), summarized the situation after Cortés’s defeat in Tenochtitlan (30 June 1520), the episode called by the Spaniards ‘la noche triste’ (‘the sad night’), in which she was said to be the only woman fighting arm in arm with the soldiers, and the only woman survivor from Castile: “que no teníamos otra mujer de Castilla, sino aquella” (2012: 400). The historian on the New World Juan de Torquemada also refers to her valor fighting for Hernán Cortés in that battle, when he seemed to glimpse more than two hundred thousand Indians (1723: 504). Soon after this episode, she reappears on 10 July 1520 in the battle of Otumba, where “she shewed herself equal to the reputation she had acquired at Mexico” (Muñoz Camargo, qtd. Feijóo 1774: 71). Later, together with other women, she is reported to have argued openly against the decision made by Cortés of leaving women behind in Tlaxcala when going to the battlefield. Cervantes de Salazar (1971: 209) states that they claimed to be as valiant as their husbands, and that it should be understood by the Indians, as the women were willing to die where their husbands were to die, and that they were necessary for the general welfare of their husbands in battle as they would tend to their wounds, and to have a chance at fame as the male soldiers had. The chronicler adds that it should be understood that they were *more than women*, and that in all times there have existed women with a *male* attitude and behaviour. Concerning her life in the Mexican city of Tetela del Volcán, she is said to have had a prominent role in the government of that place, and even to have organized a Jew or crypto-Jew circle there (Zerón Zapata 1945: 20–21). She later married the colonist, *poblador*, called Alonso Martín (Partidor) (Himmerich 1996: 239; Icaza 1969: 204). As to her place of death, Torquemada states that she and her husband, Alonso Martín, died in Los Angeles (1723: 504). It should be noted that he is not referring to the Californian city but rather a Mexican city called Puebla de los Ángeles. Other nineteenth-century authors write about de Estrada, such as Sarah Josepha Hale, who presented the same information as Hays, except for the inclusion of the date of de Estrada’s voyage to America (1519), or Ellen Cleathorne Clayton, who mentioned Maria d’Estrada as a courageous

woman who wanted to fight with Hernán Cortés “by the side of her husband through every campaign displaying the same courage as her companions in arms” (1879: 166). According to Clayton, Cortés had requested the women to remain behind, at Tlascala, but they proudly answered him that “[i]t was the duty of Castilian wives not to abandon their husbands in danger, but to share it with them — and die with them if necessary” (166). Alison Booth also mentions de Estrada in her online *Collective Biographies of Women: An Annotated Bibliography*.

In conclusion, María de Estrada's origin is open to debate, however, she is believed to have been both a Jew suffering difficulties in the Spanish city of Toledo, and an additional plight as a foundling girl later living with the Gypsies in order to blur her origin, and thus escape ethnic cleansing. Subsequently, her role as an expatriate woman, who would leave her country or origin on board of a ship in the Hernán Cortés expedition to the West Indies, has been an area of great interest to many chroniclers and scholars. Regardless of the certainty of her origins, she proves to be an influential figure of her time. Her exploits appear in the chronicles of most contemporary writers on the Spanish conquest of America, in some vindications of the honor and courage of outstanding women in different countries, and they also seem to survive in the collective mind of the people of the Americas as her legend continues in contemporary recreations of her life in Mexico and the United States. Thence, her courage as a wife in the conquest of Tlascala became an emblem of valor leading a group of female Castilian warriors. This outstanding attitude in the battlefield, together with her discourse before fighting male *conquistadores*, gave her a place in history which would encourage coeval chroniclers of the Indies, and subsequently many female biographers such as Mary Hays, to include her in their biographical texts. Hence, de Estrada became an emblem of the fight for citizenship across borders, due both to ethnic and gender issues at a time when Spain underwent a crisis on account of the recentralization of the country, and of the expulsion or displacements of ethnic minorities, such as Moors, Jews, and even Gypsies. In the period in which de Estrada was going to exile, the reunification of Spain after a long partition is connected both with a new nationalism and with the exploration and colonization of new lands in the Americas. Thus, de Estrada's life is studied in terms of voluntary or forced migration, since —due to her ethnic origin— she felt forced to leave the country for good, and confront migration by adopting the role of the colonizer on the American continent. However, by subverting the secondary roles that women were supposed to perform within the corps of

the *conquistadores*, she was able to vindicate agency for all Castilian women, represented by those in her group, and be instrumental in the salvation of both men and women in the theatre of operations.

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