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‘The Language of Espionage: Mata Hari and the creation of the spy- courtesan’

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Abstract:

‘The Language of Espionage: Mata Hari and the creation of the spy courtesan’ by Julie Wheelwright offers an analysis of post-war narratives about Margaretha Zelle Macleod, the convicted espionage agent, which revived ancient fears of women using their erotic powers to extract information from men. The focus on this theme – often present in films, plays, biographies and even graphic novels – exposes concerns about women’s changing status in a time of traumatic upheaval. The enduring interest in Mata Hari, and therefore the linguistic meaning attached to her story, formed in the crucible of the Great War, offers insight into much larger themes about the individual’s relationship to the state, to their national, racial and sexual identity.

Keywords: Mata Hari, female agents, intelligence history, spies, First World War, France

In the historiography of intelligence, Margaretha Zelle MacLeod, aka Mata Hari, occupies a unique position. Her 1917 trial by French prosecutors for passing intelligence to the enemy, fused notions of female sexuality and national betrayal to create an enduring myth against which later female agents would be measured. Mata Hari's story is also remarkable because it is among the best-documented cases of a First World War espionage trial, rich in detail about how female agents were recruited and trained and how they operated. Moreover, the body of literature and the new linguistic meanings attached to this female icon offer insight into how popular understandings of the intelligence services, before and after the war, gained currency. Narratives about Mata Hari revived ancient fears of women's erotic power, a theme that reflected concerns about women's changing social and economic status. But the enduring interest in Mata Hari, and therefore the meaning attached to her story, formed in the crucible of the Great War, reflects on wider themes about the individual's relationship to the state and identity. As Schirmann has written: 'In our current language, her name is used as a symbol – a symbol of espionage, a symbol of venal female seduction' (Schirmann 2001: 11).

The Making of an Icon: background and context

Margaretha Geertruida Zelle (1876-1917) was born into a prosperous family in Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland in the northern Netherlands where her childhood was marked by tragedy. Her parents divorced and after her mother's early death in 1891, she and her three brothers were sent to live with relatives in different cities. At nineteen she married Rudolf MacLeod, an officer in the Dutch East Indies; she lived with him in Sumatra and Indonesia from 1897-1901 and they had two children. However, Rudolph was abusive and their marriage unhappy (including the fatal poisoning of their son by a servant) so in 1903, after their return to Holland, her husband left, taking their daughter with him. Greet MacLeod, as she was then known, moved to Paris where she reinvented herself as Mata Hari¹ (Malay for 'eye of the day' or the dawn) an exotic dancer and launched a successful career in 1905. At the outbreak of war in 1914, she returned to the Netherlands, settling in The Hague. There she was approached to become an espionage agent for the Germans in 1915 and on a trip to Paris in 1916, by French intelligence. However, in 1917 the French military arrested her on charges of passing information to the enemy; a court martial found her guilty and she was sentenced to death by firing squad. Although two early biographers Allard in 1933 and Newman in 1956 challenged Mata Hari's guilt, neither had access to the French military files on her case, which remained closed to the public until the 1980s. Until Waagenaar's revisionist biography (based on partial access to the files) was published in the 1964, Mata Hari was known as 'the greatest woman

¹ Hereafter Margaretha Geertruida MacLeod will be referred to under her stage name of Mata Hari.

spy of the century' (Wheelwright 1992: 90).

This chapter is organized in the following way. It identifies three phrases that summarize the different roles into which Mata Hari was cast by the Allied intelligence services and later, in popular culture; the spy courtesan or the 'man eater', the international woman, and the savage. It will be argued that although Mata Hari uniquely embodied a constellation of fears, current during the war, about female erotic power being used as a weapon, and more generally about women's changing social role, many precursors can be found in contemporary literature. While the idea of a woman seducing a man to extract information from him may stretch back to Delilah and Sampson, it gained fresh currency in the early twentieth century. The exploration of these ideas during the Great War raises larger questions about the gendered meaning of the language used to describe women's role as intelligence operatives, and more broadly, for their involvement in the masculine sphere of armed conflict.

The Spy Courtesan or 'la mangeuse des hommes':

Mata Hari's interrogations by her French prosecutors between February and June 1917, and her trial in July, provide one of the most detailed espionage accounts of the First World War. The French prosecuted numerous women on espionage charges during the war; Marguerite Schmitt was executed on 22 March, 1915 (Wheelwright, 1992: 104/5), Marguerite Francillard on 10 January, 1917 followed by Antoinette Tichelly on 5 March that year (Antier 2007: 9) while others fell at the *pelton* in Marseille, Grenoble and Belfort (Schneider 1917). However, while these convicted women were mentioned in French officer Émile Massard's post-war account (Massard 1922), none had the currency of Mata Hari's punishment for treasonous activities. Her international stage reputation, albeit a faded one by 1917, placed her within a recognizable narrative about an immoral, dissolute but powerful female brought low by the patriarchs of the French state. Moreover, as narratives about female agents began to appear in the British, French, German and Spanish press, they inevitably conformed to stereotypes about female seduction of unsuspecting military men. While, as Antier has argued, prostitutes did provide an important source of information, whatever their actual role Allied female agents were generally viewed narrowly as 'women of little virtue' (Antier 2007: 4).

Like many female agents, Mata Hari's engagement with wartime intelligence services was perhaps inevitable since she had access to high-ranking military officers and to locations that would prove useful to gathering information. At the outbreak of hostilities Mata Hari was in Berlin to stage a

new production at the Metropole Theatre and was conducting an affair with a German police officer. However, when war was declared, the city's theatres were shut and since Mata Hari's French residency made her an enemy alien, her bank account was frozen while her jewelry and costumes were confiscated. Without work or funds, she returned to The Hague where she became the mistress of a Dutch officer, the Baron van der Capellen. Due to her Berlin connections, in 1915 a German consul approached her to act as an espionage agent, code name H21, in exchange for 20,000 francs. She accepted but later claimed, in her interrogation with French prosecutor Captain Pierre Bouchardon, that she regarded the money as recompense for her confiscated property (Turbergue 2001: 390-391). By May 1916, the British authorities registered their suspicion of Mata Hari and refused her a transit visa, prompting French police surveillance. By August that year, she had fallen in love with Vadime de Massloff, a 21 year-old captain in the Russian Expeditionary Force and visited him at Vittel where he was recovering from a gas attack. For this she needed a *laissez-passez*, permission to travel, which brought her into contact with the French secret service.

Mata Hari would later claim that Georges Ladoux, head of counter-intelligence, offered her a million francs if she could 'perform a great service for France' by seducing Crown Prince Wilhelm of Germany (Wheelwright 1992: 51-52). However, Mata Hari accepted this assignment without informing Ladoux of her previous contact with German intelligence and now considered herself a double agent, for the French. When she traveled to Spain – the wartime route for returning to the Netherlands – she compounded the Allies' suspicions by visiting, and seducing, the German military attaché in Madrid, Major Arnold von Kalle (Wheelwright 1992: 61). Kalle provided Mata Hari with useful information, which she duly posted to Ladoux. But the German attaché, who had been informed of her work for the French, sent a series of radio telegrams containing information about these visits, to Berlin in a code the Germans knew the French had broken (Wheelwright 1992: 70). Once they were intercepted in Paris, Ladoux doctored the telegrams and when Mata Hari returned to Paris, she was arrested on espionage charges at the Élysée Palace Hotel on the 13 February 1917. She was tried on eight counts of passing information to the enemy, found guilty and executed on 15 October 1917.

Female intelligence agents, as noted by Antier and Proctor, were employed by both the Allied and Central² powers during the Great War but were considered a controversial subject and public

² To place these numbers in context, the UK government executed 11 German agents, all male, (Weber 2013) and prosecuted four women under the Defense of the Realm Act for passing information to the enemy (Wheelwright 1992: 106). MI5's official history reports that the German secret service sent 120 agents to Britain during the war, 65 of whom were caught, tried and convicted.

perception of their role stemmed largely from fictional images (Antier, op cit, Proctor 2003: 1). This was especially true for female agents and the vacuum of information about their reality – Proctor estimates, for example, that between 1909 and 1919, more than 6,000 women served in either civil or military occupations as members of British intelligence³ – was filled by glamourised accounts from the 1930s.

Press reports about Mata Hari's life and career, soon after her execution in 1917, confounded, and conformed to existing notions female agents. Moreover, phrases used by the French police and prosecutors, contemporary journalists and later biographers identified her as a woman from a respectable, middle-class background, who had chosen an artistic life in the demi-monde of Paris. According to this view, she operated outside of domestic conventions by earning her own money through her performances, (on and off stage), she appeared to spurn motherhood and to embrace a bohemian lifestyle that, during the war, appeared unseemly decadent. Moreover, Mata Hari possessed an invented name and history, openly consorted with officers of the Central Powers and was of Dutch nationality. All of these factors combined to make her valuable as a potential intelligence source – she could travel with impunity, mixed among the elites and could gain access to powerful men – but also highly dangerous with unstable loyalties.

Feminist cultural historians since the early 1990s have identified Mata Hari's iconographic quality. White has argued that the image of Mata Hari in popular culture can be read as a commentary 'on specific temporal and cultural femininities' that align with 'other indicators of cultural anxiety about femininity, such as the femme fatale and the New Woman' during the post-war period (White 2007: 1). According to Bordin, the novelist Henry James popularised the term 'New Woman' which characterized 'American expatriates living in Europe: women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own' and 'always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic' (Bordin 1993: 2) Mata Hari shared with James' fictional characters a frank regard for her sexuality, independence from marriage and maternal duty and ambitions for a career; as a female agent she neatly slotted into the alternative reality of espionage where 'every unconventional person was suspect, every conventional life a cover story and every spy a double agent' (Darrow 2000: 289).

However, when examining the evidence against Mata Hari, reality struggles to keep pace with the fantasy. During her trial Mata Hari's prosecutors provided little concrete evidence that she had,

indeed, extracted anything but cash from her many military lovers (Wheelwright, 1992: 88-89). (In fact the police surveillance that ran between 18 June 1916 and 15 January 1917 was called off due to lack of evidence (Turbergue 2001: 134-139).) Among those who denied the prosecutor's claims was Generale Adolphe-Pierre Messimy, the French deputy minister of war who, nonetheless, identified Mata Hari as a '*mangeuse des hommes*' (Allard 1934: 184-5). Messimy, whose wife Andrée wrote to the French courts gainsaying that her husband had even known Mata Hari (Turbergue 2001: 499), later claimed the former dancer had worked hard to seduce him: 'this woman, through all means of seduction of which she was capable, tried to establish herself as my mistress' (Waagenaar 1964: 259). Mata Hari admitted to enjoying the company of officers (and men without military rank as well) but vehemently denied the connection between her sexual exploits and her intelligence work. As she testified during her trial at the Palais de Justice in July 1917, she was always short of money and allowed men to pay for her 'caresses' (Wheelwright 1992: 87). She defended her right to enjoy liaisons with men from Allied nations and from the Central Powers. 'I am not French. I have the right to have friends in other countries, even those at war with France. I have remained neutral. I count on the good hearts of the French officers' (Wheelwright 1992: 90). This defiance of her sexual practices provided the British, Dutch and French press with ample fodder. Typical was a piece in *Algemeen Handelsblad* whose writer declared her 'a dangerous woman of deplorably easy ways' and whose exploits should warn powerful men 'to be careful of the advances of beautiful women' (Anon 1926) *The Sunday Express* described her as 'Queen of Spies', and 'the beautiful spy who died for love' (Deboissigne 1927; Anon 1931) while in *La Liberté* Charles-Henry Hirsch described Mata Hari as '*une fille galante*' and Emile Massard compared her to the tragic Empress Messaline (Massard 1921).

The extensive files on Mata Hari's case in the military archives at Vincennes, and post-war memoirs of those involved in her story reveal that the idea of paying a female agent to sleep with the enemy, came originally from its head of counter-intelligence, Georges Ladoux. Three months before he recruited Mata Hari, Marthe Richard, an aviator and widow of a French officer, joined Ladoux's forces. As she recalls in her memoir: 'An acute psychologist he tacitly demanded that I should use all my womanly wiles to succeed as a spy', a request that escalated into 'a sinister sequel of veiled threats' (Richer 1935: 47). Ladoux implied, she believed, that refusal to follow his orders would amount to a criminal offence. Richard was assigned to Madrid in 1916 where she became the mistress of the German naval attaché Major Arnold Kalle, operating as a double-agent. However, while Ladoux regarded it a Frenchwoman's duty to perform sexual acts in the service of her country, Richard did not. After the war she admitted, 'I was full of resentment against the French secret service's methods of business. I complained bitterly' (Richer 1935: 253). As a municipal councilor

for Paris in the 1940s she would later channel her anger at this double standard into a campaign to close the city's brothels on the grounds of public health.

The defining characteristics of the '*mangeuse des hommes*', who occupied this role for the purposes of intelligence during the war as a spy and courtesan, arose from the controllers (including Royal Navy intelligence expert Captain Ferdinand Tuohy who believed officers were susceptible to being 'blackmailed for their sins' by female agents) rather than the women they employed (Wheelwright 1992:109). But what was the genesis of this idea that appears so firmly entrenched by 1914 and is expressed through the phrases identified in this chapter, and what were its consequences for Mata Hari and other female agents? The next phrase 'the international woman' which was used by her prosecutors as she travelled between the Central Powers, neutral and Allied countries during the war, suggests a strong connection with the New Woman. Both could be characterized as exercising control over her life, valuing her economic and social independence, therefore rejecting domesticity, and plotting her own fate.

Une femme internationale/ an international woman

In December 1915 Mata Hari was on a journey from The Hague to Paris via Spain and England. When her ship docked at Folkestone the Police Alien and Military Authorities interviewed her, noting that she gave conflicting versions of the reasons for her travels. (Folkestone itself was an intelligence centre from which agents were recruited for operations in Northern France and aboard passenger ships (Antier op cit: 3)). There her luggage was searched and when nothing incriminating was found, she was released. However, this prompted British authorities to circulate a notice to their allies that Madame Zelle 'appeared most unsatisfactory and should be refused permission to return to the UK' (Wheelwright 1992: 48). To put the officials' suspicion into perspective, during the war MI5 supervised an, 'alien population', of more than 200,000 and detained, arrested and temporarily interned 30,000 'alien enemies and dangerous persons' (ibid). There were several reasons why Mata Hari might have been come to their attention: she was a citizen of a neutral country, she had been in a German police officer's company at the outbreak of war, and was a known courtesan.

Her apparent lack of allegiance to her adopted country and her insistence on traveling during the conflict troubled her French prosecutors. As Lieutenant Andre Mornet described her in 1917: 'The Zelle woman appeared to us as one of those international women – the phrase is her own – who have become so dangerous since the hostilities. The ease with which she expresses herself in

several languages, especially French, her numerous relations, her subtle ways, her aplomb, her remarkable intelligence, her immorality, congenial or acquired, all contributed to make her a suspect' (Wheelwright 1992: 90). Lady Kell, the wife of MI5's head Sir Vernon Kell, noted in a history of her husband's wartime work, this new and threatening breed of woman. '[W]omen were occasionally used by the Germans as agents if they were possessed of a ready wit and adept at using it when in a tight corner' (Kell, nd). If a woman was linguistically gifted, intelligent and articulate, as Mata Hari was these characteristics alone made her suspicious. If she was clever enough to defend herself against accusations of spying, ergo, she must be a spy.

The international woman, however, could also take recognizable, even domestic forms. Central to the spy novels that had generated a fascination for intelligence work before the war, were strong male heroes who often parried with amoral female characters. To take the British example, widely read thrillers such as Erskine Childer's *The Riddle of the Sands* that portrayed the spy as hero who could translate the complexities of its growing empire into a classic struggle of good and evil. The line between fact and fiction was so successfully blurred by writers such as William Le Queux in his serial *The Invasion of 1910*, that British police stations around the country were flooded with reports of German agents (Wheelwright 1993: 295). As Le Queux reminded his readers, spies also in female guises, raising fears about the loyalty of German nannies, waitresses, cabaret dancers, and language teachers. Even Robert Baden-Powell warned in his *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men* that 'certain foreign governesses could tell you a great deal about the army' (Wheelwright 1993: 296).

Allied propagandists also targeted foreign 'New Women' claiming they were attempting to disrupt the 'moral balance' through attempts to blackmail political and military leaders into spying. In England, rumours that aristocrats with German relations were poisoning the war effort provoked Prime Minister Lloyd George in early 1917 to 'expose the odious influence of . . . the "Petticoat Scandal"', hinting at treasonable correspondence with Germans in high places. An earlier myth about German efficiency in using seductive spies was also revived. Hamil Grant, writing in 1915, described how several thousand pretty barmaids were recruited as agents during Bismarck's unification campaign. Women with a 'high type of morality' were rejected because all agents were ordered to 'extract information from drinking soldiers' (Wheelwright 1993: 297). Grant claimed that recently the Germans had limited the number of female spies to those with well-honed powers of seduction:

In matters of love or revenge, where her deepest feelings are concerned, she is capable of

a sustained effort calling for the application of whatever analytical skills she may possess . . . an appeal to, say, her patriotism leaves her almost invariably cold and unenthusiastic, since love of country is a quality which depends too largely on a platonic and impersonal principle to attract and hold for long her undivided interest and attention. (Wheelwright 1993: 297)

Grant suggests that disenfranchised women, without the power to participate in government or in public life beyond the superficial, had no interest or capacity to understand patriotism. The vacuum created by their poor capacity for abstract thinking, made them more susceptible to their romantic and erotic desires. Captain Tuohy expressed similar concerns: in Germany ‘beauty specialists’ were employed in special training, ‘to emulate the dark and bestial days . . . in Berlin where the highest in the land consorted and were duly blackmailed for their sins’ (ibid). Kell, in a 1934 lecture on ‘Security and Intelligence in War’, claimed that although women spies lacked technical knowledge of naval and military matters ‘as a scout, a judge of character or as a recruiter or trainer of agents in non-technical matters, she met with some success’ (ibid).

Internal discussion within intelligence agencies about the role of the female agent was bolstered by her popularity as an iconic figure in adventure stories, stage plays and early films. A plot involving dastardly German agents disguised as ‘bogus architects, contractors and sham waiters’ was so popular that ‘Candida’, writing in the London *Graphic* in 1914, could confidently claim that these romantic villains were familiar to the ‘average person’ (Wheelwright 1993: 298). The spy’s female accomplice was ‘the more extravagantly humorous type’ with a foreign accent, ‘daring Parisian wardrobe’ and evil intentions. The dangerously alluring foreign agent was also a staple of early cinema. Female spies featured in films such as *The Submarine Plans* (1912), *An Adventuress Outwitted* (1912), *OHMS* (1913) and *Huns of the North* (1913). *Two Little Britons* portrayed two children of the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Brussels unmasking an ideal spy – their governess (Wheelwright 1993: 298).

These popular representations of the female spy were not confined to Britain. In France, the story of Italian courtesan La Castiglione – sent by Cavour to seduce Emperor Napoleon III and known as ‘a fine political agent’ – was well known. And while the actress and courtesan Leonide Leblanc was mistress of French Prime Minister George Clemenceau, she longed to become an agent who could be entrusted with state intelligence and inspire revolutions (Richardson 1967: 4, 125). Such popular narratives about women in espionage explain the context in which the French public would believe the claim by Captain Jean Chatin, a jurist at Mata Hari’s trial, that she was responsible for the

‘collective assassination’ of ‘more than 50,000 men’ (Morain 1930: 210). There were other deaths counted here too; of reputations and ruined families as Mornet returned often to Mata Hari’s impressive number of important lovers. Rumoured to have bathed in milk and demanded her jewelry while in prison, she represented a new breed of war profiteers, exploiting for her own material greed the male yearning for female comfort.

Darrow develops this idea in her study, *French Women in the First World War* (Darrow, 2000) arguing that Mata Hari remains the only recognisable, although dishonourable, female icon of the Great War in France (Darrow 2000: 272). Mata Hari conveniently conformed to the female version of the subversive enemy, known in France as ‘The Lady in the Hat’. According to Darrow:

Elegant, seductive, apparently rich, possibly foreign, she was mysterious and elusive; distance and frontiers meant nothing to her. She could get inside, coaxing out the secrets of the French heart and mind, sapping simultaneously French morals and morale; yet she moved freely outside, untrammelled by trenches or battle plans, passports or censorship. This phantasm of the emancipated woman, already branded in pre-war literature as the destroyer of the French family, was now out to destroy France itself. Three years before Mata Hari embodied her before the military court, public opinion had convicted her as France's most deadly enemy next to the Kaiser (Darrow 2000: 270).

As Doane has argued, Mata Hari fed into projections, fears and anxieties regarding women and modernity that emerged in the late nineteenth century. This archetypal spy, like other femme fatales, was thus 'not the subject of feminism, but a symptom of male fears about feminism' (Doane 1991: 2-3).

The Savage

The third recurring theme in the lexicon of Mata Hari coalesces around her racial origins. Although Margaretha Zelle was born in Leeuwarden, when she took the stage name Mata Hari she began to reinvent her past. In press reviews of her 1905 debut at the Musée Guimet where she performed as Lady MacLeod, she was described as ‘a native of Java’ whose discarded veils ‘introduce[d] some of the richness of the Oriental colour and life’ (Wheelwright 1991: 14). *Le Gaulois*, which devoted an entire front page to the performance, praised its unique articulation of ‘primitive theosophies’, and ‘arcane rites of the Hindu’. Leaving the Musée Guimet that evening the reviewer mused over a

poem that unconsciously compared the ‘virginal’ Mata Hari to ‘the amber bodies of the Bayaderes [temple dancers]’ (Wheelwright 1991: 15). The European audiences that flocked to watch Mata Hari (the stage name she soon adopted) projected their own erotic and racial fantasies onto the stage. Her performances, based on dances she had observed in Java, Sumatra and Egypt, drew upon the French obsession with the Orient’s ‘Fatal Woman’, described by nineteenth century writers such as Swinburne, Baudelaire and Huysmans. Like the veils Gérard de Nerval saw everywhere in Cairo, Mata Hari’s dance promised a deep, rich fund of sexuality. Cloaked in her imitative ‘Otherness’, she offered an escape from all conventional expectations of femininity. The Lady in the Hat, in this early, innocent, incarnation, wore a veil.

Although Mata Hari’s origins were constantly changing – in press interviews she was everything from an Indian princess to an Indonesian temple dancer – her French prosecutors knew that she was neither (Wheelwright 1992: 23, 27). Yet Bouchardon’s descriptions of her are couched in racist language: ‘[she was] a tall woman with thick lips, dark skin and imitation pearls in her ears, who somewhat resembled a savage’ (Bouchardon 1953: 315). In a later interrogation session he conjures up a woman with ‘the swollen lips of a negress, teeth as big as plates’ (Wheelwright 1992: 71).

André Morain’s post-war account of Mata Hari’s trial and execution (he was present at both) also revealed racist projections. He quotes Dr. Bizard, the physician at the St. Lazare prison where Mata Hari was held in 1917, who describes his patient as ‘of Asiatic type . . . something of a savage’ (Morain 1930: 201). Morain himself imagined Mata Hari as a woman possessing ‘a strange Oriental beauty, so different from the European, the exoticism of which could not be explained from her origins’ (Morain, 1930: 213). Ladoux also referred to her in the right-wing newspaper, *L’Intransigeant* as speaking French with a guttural reflection, ‘typical of her Oriental type’ (Ladoux 1932). Mata Hari’s pseudo-Asian dances gestured towards liberation and modernism but after her execution, served only to reinforce a colonial politics that aligned women and non-Europeans as regressive and aberrant (White 2007: 37).

These fantastical interpretations of Mata Hari’s story arose from her own dissembling in the press and from a vacuum of evidence about her in-camera trial. Hard, cold facts were difficult to come by when she was shot at dawn on 15 October 1917. Early biographies and memoirs relating to Mata Hari therefore included limited references to official records but were largely based on rumours,

anecdotes, unattributed interviews, and a conflation of events. These writers claimed to offer ‘the truth’ about her life, constructed into a narrative that invariably justified Mata Hari's execution and exaggerated her alleged crimes, including the unstated ones. Their writing, which was often serialised in newspapers or magazines, implied that the narrator's authority stemmed from his previous experience (all were male and most were ex-intelligence or ex-military officers) and from his access to ‘secret’ papers. French officer Emile Massard illustrates this point with his *Les espionnes a Paris* in 1922. Massard was among the few witnesses to Mata Hari's trial claimed to have consulted ‘Mata's dossier’. In the introduction to *Les espionnes*, Massard states: ‘This book is not a novel, it is a document’ (Massard, 1922: 3) However, he reports that, among other things, she disguised herself as a volunteer nurse to gain access to soldiers for the sole purpose of gaining military information (Massard, op. cit.:219). While the actual ‘Dossier Mata Hari’ contains no such evidence, the story of Mata Hari as a nurse appeared in subsequent biographies (Newman, 1956: 63, Coulson, 1930:110). Undoubtedly Massard used this potent image of a corrupted care-giver to touch a raw nerve among his French readers who believed that Mata Hari really was responsible, as Chatin claimed, for a mass assassination of French troops.

CONCLUSION:

Mata Hari's story is full of contradictions: to her enemies she appears as simultaneously dominant and vulnerable; attractive and disgusting; foreign and familiar; passive and active; highly intelligent and yet woefully naïve. And yet these dichotomies form a unified description of the ‘enemy within’ which included those New Women of the early twentieth century whose wartime participation would lead to demands for a place within the body politic. In reality, while women were employed by Allied and Axis forces in a wide range of intelligence operations, the idea of hiring female agents to gain access to classified information through sexual seduction appears to have come from the intelligence chiefs themselves. This method, rooted firmly in popular literature and drama, took a deeper hold during the First World War and, in public discourse, entwined fears about independent women with anxieties about internal threats. Mata Hari, therefore, became the perfect scapegoat. Ironically, a legacy of this powerful concoction of female sexual and national betrayal resulted in ‘Mata Hari’ becoming a phrase in itself while also inspiring future generations of women to enter the field of intelligence. Many biographies and memoirs of female agents from the Second World War, including those in the Special Operations Executive, reveal the extent to which the spy-courtesan informed their concept of intelligence services. Violette Szabo, an Englishwoman who joined the SOE French section in 1942 grew up reading about Mata Hari. ‘She read two or three

books on Mata Hari and used to go round to the public library to ask for more,' according to her biographer R. J. Minney (quoted in Wheelwright 1992: 147). Suzanne Warengem, a Frenchwoman who helped Allied soldiers to escape occupied France and the African-American dancer Josephine Baker, recruited by French counter-intelligence, compared themselves to Mata Hari (ibid).

This brief exploration of the language associated with Mata Hari's case draws attention to a potent moment of change that had reverberations beyond the Great War. The 'Lady in the Hat' or the 'spy courtesan', was a creature invented to encapsulate those fears so that she could be identified and, in narratives, be safely vanquished. For Margaretha Zelle, the vanquishing was real and on the 15th October 1917, in a field at Vincennes, on the outskirts of Paris, she refused a blindfold, blew kisses to the nuns of St. Lazare who witnessed the scene and, fell into what one witness described as 'a pile of petticoats' (Wheelwright op ci: 99). The demon had been exorcised and with it, her enemies had hoped, France would be saved.

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