

Institution: City, University of London (City)		
Unit of Assessment: D27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Soldiers and Spies: Challenging public narratives about women's participation in military conflict through the ages.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: September 2007 – October 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Julie Wheelwright	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in English/ Creative Writing	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1/9/2007 – 1/11/2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Dr Julie Wheelwright's research has changed contemporary perceptions of women's historic involvement in warfare. Her contributions to a variety of public engagement platforms – such as literary festivals, broadcast and print media, public lectures and podcasts – have reshaped the narrative of women's military experience, challenging assumptions about their absence and passivity, and exploring the relationship of such attitudes to wider gender-based discrimination. Wheelwright's curatorial consultancy to the Dutch Fries Museum's 2017 exhibition on Mata Hari changed public perceptions of the spy in the Netherlands and internationally. As well as attracting nearly 93,000 visitors, the exhibition generated media coverage in 23 countries, which reflected a nuanced and more compassionate representation of Mata Hari's life as informed by Wheelwright's research.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Traditionally, national military narratives have trivialised, neglected or obscured women's role in armed conflict. Dr Julie Wheelwright's body of work employs deep archival research, detailing individual women's participation, focussing on European and early North American warfare. Through critical reading of historical accounts, Wheelwright's research reveals how war narratives reflect changing perceptions of gender, most notably concepts of masculinity, and how women's rights advocates equated military service with political participation. She finds that the neglect of women's historic contribution has significant implications as armed forces increasingly open combat roles to women, and she argues that contemporary female combatants represent historic continuity rather than divergence. This offers wider lessons for public narratives about war, for stakeholders concerned with diversity, and for scholars.</p> <p>Two themes of Wheelwright's research are presented in this case study. The first relates to the Dutch spy, Margaretha Zelle MacLeod <i>aka</i> Mata Hari (1876-1917) to demonstrate how women's contribution to espionage is read through a sexualised narrative. Wheelwright's key arguments are Mata Hari's naive assumptions about spying as a performance (alongside her vulnerability and manipulation of men); the French state's unsympathetic attitude to her as a 'decadent woman', and the contemporary resonance of Mata Hari's position in the context of the #MeToo movement. Wheelwright's long-standing interest in Mata Hari (she wrote a biography on this subject in 1992*) was explored in publications from 2014 [3.1] and 2016 [3.2]. Wheelwright argues that while early biographers (often former intelligence agents), claimed Mata Hari weaponised her sexuality, documentary evidence reveals a more complex reality.</p>		

Moreover, a new cache of letters published in 2017 by [Tresoar](#), a Frisian cultural archive, reveals Zelle's struggle to escape domestic abuse and to establish a stage career in Paris between 1902 and 1904. Wheelwright analysed the letters in articles for *The Guardian* [3.3] in 2016 and *Aeon* [3.4], a digital magazine, in 2017. Wheelwright promoted her arguments when invited to act as a historical consultant to the Fries Museum's major 2017 exhibition, *Mata Hari: the maiden and the girl*, which provided a nuanced, evidence-based representation of this notorious figure and interrogated the role of the femme fatale in popular culture.

The second theme focuses on the collective experiences of female combatants to demonstrate how their erasure from public discourse misrepresents the historical record. The 2020 monograph *Sisters in Arms: Female Warriors from Antiquity to the New Millennium* [3.5] builds on Wheelwright's research that identifies women's participation in military activities and warfare. Originally published as *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (1989), this volume was updated with new research, including contemporary conflicts, thereby expanding the content by a third, with fresh insights on the historical continuities of women's experiences within armed conflicts, supporting arguments for women's access to civic and political spheres. Wheelwright's contribution to the field of feminist historiography identifies historical continuities between the Scythian women whom the Greeks mythologised as Amazons, women who cross-dressed to enter military conflicts in eighteenth and nineteenth century campaigns, and the present-day intersection of women's rights and military participation.

*Wheelwright, J. (1992). *The Fatal Lover: Mata Hari and the Myth of Women in Espionage*. London: Collins and Brown.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Wheelwright, Julie D. (2014). 'Beyond the spooks: The problem of the narrator in literary history', *Journalism: Theory, practice and criticism*. (15.5) pp.561-72. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884914523237> **Peer review.**
- 3.2 Wheelwright, Julie D. (2016). 'The Language of Espionage: Mata Hari and the Creation of the Spy-Courtesan' in Declercq C. & Walker, J. (eds), *Languages and the First World War*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp.164-77. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137550361_11 **Peer review.**
- 3.3 Wheelwright, Julie. D. (2016). 'Mother, dancer, wife, spy: the Real Mata Hari'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/05/the-real-mata-hari-executed-abused-woman> 5 December. **Commissioned article.**
- 3.4 Wheelwright, Julie. D. (2017). 'Mata Hari Uncovered'. *Aeon Magazine*. <https://aeon.co/essays/revamping-the-vamp-the-woman-behind-the-legend-of-mata-hari> **Peer review.**
- 3.5 Wheelwright, Julie D. (2020). *Sisters in Arms: Female Warriors from Antiquity to the New Millennium*. (London: Osprey/Bloomsbury). <https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/sisters-in-arms-9781472838001/> **Peer review.**

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Wheelwright is an established broadcaster and journalist, who uses an extensive variety of public engagement platforms and novel approaches to share her research. Since 2014, this includes public talks (e.g. National Army Museum; Royal Greenwich Museum, London), conferences (e.g. British Library, London), appearances in the media, film consultancy (ZDF/Arte documentary, *Mata Hari – Die Schoene Spionin*), podcasts (e.g. International Spy Museum, Washington DC; 32,000 downloads as of 20.9.2020), and other public events (e.g. Inside Out Festival, London). Sometimes working with a cabaret performer, a dance historian, and a gamelan orchestra, Wheelwright's commitment to influencing public perceptions of women in the military has led to significant impact in the UK, the Netherlands, and wider.

4.1 Mata Hari Centenary 2017: Influencing exhibition curation and public debate

Wheelwright's research on Mata Hari led to a consultancy in 2016 with the Fries Museum's exhibition *Mata Hari: The Maid and the Girl*. The museum is sited in Zelle's hometown of Leeuwarden in the Netherlands, where she remains a controversial figure. The exhibition marked the centenary of Mata Hari's execution in Paris for spying on behalf of Germany in the First World War. The museum's aim was to provide a compassionate representation of Zelle's public and private life, while ensuring the exhibition's historical accuracy [5.1]. Wheelwright made a major contribution to curatorial decision-making by providing historical context, sharing and evaluating documentary sources, discussing exhibit choices, and contributing to media and public engagement, including directly addressing Dutch journalists on a Paris press tour.

The exhibition curator describes Wheelwright's research as central to the exhibition's vision, helping them to '*... grasp the role of females in general and [Zelle] in particular during the last years of the 19th century and the start of 20th century*' and goes on to acknowledge her contribution to the public debate by taking part in the press tour and giving '*... the necessary depth the journalists were looking for*' [5.2].

The Director of the Fries Museum echoed that Wheelwright facilitated the production of a more 'nuanced' portrait of Mata Hari for the public:

"... with your help as researcher, we were able to present a much more accurate story in all of her facets. For example, there had always been this doubt about whether she had spied or not and we took away that doubt. It is clear that she did that, but it's also clear that the French were eager to convict her ... we managed to transfer those two facets – the clear guilt and the eagerness of the French authorities, to the public." [5.3].

The museum's website [5.4] shows the exhibition (October 2017 - April 2018) attracted nearly 93,000 visitors and ranked among the most successful in the museum's 126-year history. Dutch nationals formed the majority of visitors (62%) and public feedback was very positive, giving an average satisfaction rating of 8.1, with 89% indicating they would recommend the exhibition to another person. It was nominated in the Netherlands for 'Exhibition of the Year 2017'.

The exhibition led to a discernible shift to more nuanced attitudes towards Zelle in the Netherlands, where a statue erected to her in Leeuwarden had been twice thrown into the nearby canal [5.5]. An analysis of reports in the Dutch national media relating to the exhibition (1,270 reports, 2017-18) found the changes could be traced directly to Wheelwright's research which supported the museum's aims of creating understanding and sympathy for Zelle while retaining biographical integrity [5.5]. Furthermore, twelve reviews of the exhibition in Dutch media outlets specifically addressed Mata Hari as a vulnerable young woman, mother, and ambitious actor, in addition to her spying and exotic lifestyle [5.5].

The exhibition attracted substantial global attention with Wheelwright quoted in more than 3,000 articles including *The Financial Times*, *Time Magazine*, *El Pais*, broadcasts on the *BBC World Service*, *Radio 4*, *NPR*, and *ABC*. Such wide-scale references reflected the research's influence; 575 on-line media sources (newspaper references, television and radio, exclusive of blogs) specifically mentioned Wheelwright on their internet sites. Of these sources, 535 were on English language platforms (including 475 from the US), 29 in Spanish, 4 in Vietnamese, 3 in Dutch, and 4 other ones in single languages, representing immediate reach in 23 countries. The hits / viewers per source ranged from 10 to 48,472,669. The distribution indicates that this was not a figure skewed by a few outliers with very high values. The mean average reach was 678,190 people per site. The total sum of reach figures for all sites combined was 362,831,508. In 40 cases information about the numbers of hits a site received was not provided, so total reach is higher [5.6].

An analysis of English language sources with hits of more than 1,000,000 readers and a comparative sample found that most used a syndicated Associated Press article on the

exhibition [5.7]. In the article Wheelwright argues for the contemporary resonance of Mata Hari's story in the context of the #MeToo movement, her unworldly assumptions about spying as a performance, and the French people's continuing hostile attitude towards her. Its very extensive use enabled Wheelwright and the exhibition curator to define the tone and content of news features globally, thereby achieving the exhibition's aim of presenting Mata Hari as a sympathetic gendered subject. The contribution of Wheelwright's research to and her active involvement in the exhibition's design and media engagement resulted in changed perceptions of Zelle in the Netherlands and influenced public debate internationally.

4.2 Bringing female combatants into public discourse through public engagement

Some of the planned events and outreach activities for Wheelwright's book *Sisters in Arms* (2020) were halted due to Covid-19. Despite this, Wheelwright engaged audiences via remote presentations at the Literary Lockdown Festival at Chawton House (702 views 25.9.20), the Lambeth Literary Festival; five radio interviews, and writing three feature magazine articles. She appeared on six podcasts including BBC History's *History Extra* (106,998 downloads to 28.9.2020), *HistoryHit* (159,944 downloads of two podcasts to 25.9.2020), *History Today* (3,988 downloads to 23.9.2020), *Cauldron*, and *Prospect Magazine*. *Sisters in Arms* was short listed for the prestigious 2021 British Army Military Book of the Year Award.

This activity has already brought better understanding of women's historic involvement in warfare, with the historian Dan Snow's review of the book calling the research 'a long overdue assertion on the role of women in the battlefield. This book is going straight to my daughter's bookshelf' [5.8]. The producer of the Cauldron podcast said of his interview with Wheelwright (25.9.20):

'[N]ow my understanding of warfare and its history has been changed forever... As a podcaster with a largely male audience that skews young (16-36) I feel that it's imperative in the age of disinformation that ... content like this book gets as much attention as possible.' [5.9]

Wheelwright continues to use her research to change attitudes and correct the historic absence of women in the military. Her online interview for the National Army Museum (3.10.20) led to discussions with service organisations about future work with active and veteran British servicewomen using Wheelwright's creative writing approach to gather their reflections on their military experience for publication.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Fries Museum (2016) Mata Hari exhibition concept and design brief.
- 5.2 Testimonial from Curator, Fries Museum, The Netherlands (11.11.18).
- 5.3 Director of the Fries Museum (personal interview, 4.10.20). Discussion about the Mata Hari exhibition and museum policy generally.
- 5.4 Fries Museum exhibition report (2018). Available at: <https://www.friesmuseum.nl/over-het-museum/nieuws/2018/mata-hari-tentoonstelling-succesvol> Accessed 25.02.21
- 5.5 Ummels A. & Wheelwright, J. 'Mata Hari: de mythe en het meisje'. A Media Analysis of Changing Attitudes towards Margaretha Zelle MacLeod in the Dutch Press, 1996-2018.
- 5.6 Finn, T. (2017). Mata Hari engagement analysis: events and media.
- 5.7 Casert, R. (2017). 'Spy, Temptress, Victim? Mata Hari still eludes definition'. Associated Press syndicated article. 14 October. Available at: <https://www.apnews.com/6d3e520b74b84955a02268986b8657e5> Accessed 25.02.21
- 5.8 Snow, Dan (2020). Review of *Sisters in Arms*. Available at: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/sisters-in-arms-9781472838001/> Accessed 25.02.21
- 5.9 Testimonial from Cauldron podcast producer (personal email, 28.9.20).