

# Women's War: Media representations of female civil labour during World War I

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## Abstract

This paper looks at the coverage of women's civil labour during WWI in two magazines, *Maclean's* in Canada and *L'Illustration* in France, supplemented with material from war museums and academic works. Our concern is media representations of the indispensable participation of these women, not as victims and passive entities in the conflict, but as individuals who have significantly contributed to the war effort. We contend that the magazines' content did not reflect the magnitude of women's civil labour during WWI and the importance they had not only in sustaining the war effort, maintaining a general level of production that would allow their countries to remain significantly involved in the war, but also in their contribution to the modernisation of society.

**Keywords:** magazines; women; labour; WWI; performativity; deflation.

## Introduction

In relation to the populations and the number of countries involved in the war and the casualties due to military action, World War I (thereafter WWI) is said to have caused more damage in terms of the number of deaths and wounded than any other international war.<sup>1</sup> It was also the first time that women contributed so massively to a war effort in terms of civil labour. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the effect of the Great War on female civilian workers

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics come from the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

although their impact on the war effort was felt in such areas of action as in the production of ammunition and keeping up social productivity by taking on men's jobs in different types of occupations. Was the contribution of these working women significantly represented in magazines? Or did these media mostly concentrate on female citizens as victims or passive spectators? Our concern here is media representations of the crucial participation of women, not as victims and passive entities in the conflict, but as individuals who have, in one way or another, contributed to the war effort. We examine the war coverage of two magazines, *L'illustration* in France and *Maclean's* in Canada. We would like to stress that our analysis concentrates on the ways in which these magazine representations construct meaning and a collective memory of the war. We first briefly cover some scholarly works, which focus on women's role in WWI, then we outline our theoretical framework by drawing on Butler's and Foucault's work on the body to highlight the way in which these publications covered women's contribution to civil labour in the war. From the cultural angle, we use a discourse analysis based on the different aspects of the body in their representations and some semiotic elements to look at the relationship between different images, as well as the interrelation between the various components of each image.

Our analysis is supplemented by data from war museums and scholarly works in order to understand the contribution of women's labour during the conflict and their participation in the modernisation of society and in social change, including acquiring the right to vote and to sit in public office. We contend that these magazines' content and images did not reflect the magnitude of women's civil work during WWI and the importance they had not only in sustaining the war effort, but also in maintaining a general level of production that allowed their country to remain significantly involved in the war. Through a combination of images and articles in both magazines, we ascertain whether these contributions have been publicly recognised and represented, or marginalised and occluded.

### **World War Women: A review**

Although there is abundant literature on the various roles of women helping the war effort during WWII,<sup>2</sup> very few studies exist on Canadian and French women's roles during WWI. Geneviève Brassard notes that the contribution of women in the war has been almost completely forgotten in 'scientific works', as well as in literature, cinema and other art forms. Works interested in women during WWI have generally paid attention to women as victims, as nurses and doctors on the front lines, and as volunteers who prepared and sent "care packages" to soldiers. In *Women and War*, Jeanne Vickers elaborates on the suffering of women in wartime. Their hardships are due, she asserts, not only to the solitude and vulnerability brought on by separation from members of their families going off to war, but also because they are killed, wounded, raped and abused, and they witness their children's suffering. Moreover, they are affected by invasion, during which their houses are burned and destroyed, often leaving them little with which to defend themselves from cold and hunger, as food is reserved for soldiers or occupiers. When women are hired to fill available occupations, Vickers goes on, they are generally assigned to subordinate positions with few possibilities for advancement. As well, they often endure discrimination, oppression, harassment and various other abuses.

Braybon and Summerfield's examination of working conditions within the British context echoes this assertion and argues that women's role in the war labour market must be understood as stemming from, and mirroring existing women's working conditions before the conflict. Women workers were generally young and unmarried, and occupied positions requiring little or no qualifications such as handy work, domestic labour, and occasionally as nurses or teachers. Furthermore, when they gained access to traditionally male occupations, they were paid much less than their

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<sup>2</sup> Here are a few examples : Pierson 1977, Dobie & Lang 2003, Fernandez et al 2004 ; and most particularly on Rosie the Riveter, Honey 1984, Calman 1995, Knaff 2012, and many others.

male co-workers and were not admitted to union membership. At the same time, whether they worked outside the house or not, domestic work and childcare were entirely their responsibility. The female stereotype of women better suited for the private sphere persisted throughout the war. Yet, as Braybon and Summerfield assert, public and private sector employers had to resign themselves to the employment of women, as there was a shortage of labour due to the departure of men to the front.

The first sector affected by WWI was ammunition manufacturing, where women were employed by governments to produce shells and bullets, a craft reserved primarily for men before the war. Government representatives called the hiring of women in this sector a "process of dilution"<sup>3</sup>, seemingly to make the entry of women into the labour force more acceptable to male workers. According to Thom, this process consisted of introducing less-qualified female workers to undertake the work earlier carried out by 'competent' or experienced men. It was further accompanied by a simplification of machinery and a division of labour into a number of simple operations and repetitive movements, a form of Taylorism. Despite objections by men, women were grudgingly accepted within the ammunition sector, as they were responsible for keeping the war machine running. As the war pressed on, these female workers were increasingly recognised for their proficiency in, and dedication to their various tasks, and it was this competence that made conscription possible. It is also undeniable that many of them appreciated the supplementary wages as well as the freedom and sense of accomplishment that their labour afforded them, as Braybon and Summerfield noted. Yet, according to Thom, there were serious drawbacks related to the job including cases of poisoning, or what was called 'toxic jaundice', as well as deaths related to manipulating TNT in order to fill shells. Consequently, there was a very high turnover among female labourers assigned to that task.

It is important to note that female war workers were not a

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<sup>3</sup> See Braydon and Summerfield (1987) for more on the process of dilution.

homogenous group. Working class women were given tasks that required no specialised skills such as ticket collectors in the railroad sector or street sweepers, while middle-class women worked in ammunition factories<sup>4</sup>, in the police department or in the army. As there were no institutional daycare services, women who were single or married without children were more likely to find employment throughout the war, reproducing the pattern that existed in society before the conflict. Nevertheless, even if the Great War did increase women's chances to find work, these changes were not permanent. With the return of men at the end of the conflict, the majority of women left their occupations and returned to domestic work.

### **Theoretical framework: Women and the body**

While the existing literature documents women's participation in the army labour force (as nurses, doctors, volunteers), very few address women's civil labour, and none deal with their representations in magazines' illustrations or other forms of visual expression. Our paper attempts to fill this gap in examining how major magazines such as *L'illustration* and *Maclean's* represented the complexities of women's contributions as civil labourers. To do so, we develop a conceptual approach that draws on Foucauldian and Butlerian notions of body, power and performativity to examine the various ways in which women used their bodies — at the time considered weaker and more fragile than men's — to occupy positions left vacant by male workers. Michel Foucault is concerned with the ways in which power targets, and is invested within, the body. He asserts that power is a productive rather than repressive force that incites bodies towards particular aims and objectives. From this perspective, people are not simply "docile bodies" subjected to inexorable disciplinary power, but are individuals with some degree of freedom and autonomy who use their bodies to contest or resist these forms and structures of domination. As will be explored in more detail below, some women operated as active agents by accepting to use their

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<sup>4</sup> It was a mixed blessing since munitions production involved a high level of danger. In fact, according to Thom (1998, 124), in England at least, working class women refused to work in munitions factory, they knew better!

bodies in various 'unexpected' ways in order to be part of the labour force.

Judith Butler's concept of "gender performativity" complements Foucault's notion of body power as it helps to analyse the ways in which women became active participants throughout the war period. At the same time, it seemingly contrasts with Foucault's ideas as it considers the body not as a natural, *a priori* surface upon which power relations are inscribed, but rather as the product of regulatory frameworks. Consequently, gender performativity is structured and limited by the socio-economic and political conditions in which it occurs, although it is also a performance that gives the opportunity for creative agency. Media representations can be seen as one (discursive) regulatory framework that works to naturalize and reaffirm sex and gender inequalities. Butler argues that the contours of the body are established through cultural markings that serve the purpose of instating the appropriate limits of masculinity and femininity. She asserts that gender performances are constructed through a set of repeated acts, gestures and postures within a rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of a natural sex that reaffirms 'male' dominance. At the same time, her conception of gender performativity also includes the possibility of resisting these regulatory gender frames. Butler specifically turns to the examples of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylisation of butch/femme identities to reveal the imitative structure of gender as well as its contingency. She maintains that through parody, imitation and the repetition of acts on/of the body assembled in new and different ways, individuals can de-naturalise and subvert conventional gender norms and practices. The Butlerian concept of performativity therefore helps to make sense of the ways in which some wartime female labourers wore masculine costumes to perform what were previously male activities, thereby challenging stereotypical gender roles through the construction of new subjectivities that were different from – and at times opposed to – traditional female roles. The concept will be useful for examining the participation of women in the war effort and the ways in which both magazines represented or ignored them.

### Methodology: Discourse analysis

Our exploratory analysis covers the period that begins in June 1914, a few months before the start of WWI, and ends in January 1919, a few months after the armistice. Our research is composed of a multi-layered study of two general magazines – with no specific section on women’s issues – which have a different relationship with war coverage: the weekly photo-magazine *L’Illustration* in France, and the monthly news-magazine *Maclean’s* in Canada. *L’Illustration* was an influential weekly in France at the time with an average of 244 200 copies circulated.<sup>5</sup> Its content was based on notions of paternalism and traditionalism, which conceived the role of woman in the private sphere, namely as housewife and mother. As for *Maclean’s*, a monthly with an average circulation of 70 000 copies, the publication adopted a conservative, paternalistic and nationalist position; nevertheless was critical of Canada’s war effort.

We selected these two magazines first, because we wanted two culturally different publications--French and English--one in Canada where the country was only militarily involved in the war but nonetheless lost tens of thousands of young men and women during the conflict,<sup>6</sup> and one in France wholly entangled in the war. Second, we decided to analyse a monthly and a weekly as we wanted to discover whether a magazine with more time to publish would have taken that opportunity to cover more aspects of women’s role as civilian labourers in the war than a publication issued weekly. Third, we wanted to utilise magazines that have a different relationship with images: *L’Illustration* is a truly illustrated publication with half of its content devoted to images; *Maclean’s* is mostly constituted of texts interspersed with images.

Another more pragmatic reason for selecting these two

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<sup>5</sup> This number includes the circulation for 1918, which was much lower with 175 000. It is likely that *L’Illustration* was short of paper after four years of war.

<sup>6</sup> Canada had 66,000 deaths during WWI, for a population of 8,000,000 inhabitants. For more on this particular topic, see "Retrouver l’esprit de 14-18 ", *Le Devoir*, 4.05.2014, p. E10.

magazines was their archival availability. As for the French *L'illustration*, we examined all the issues, which covered the period of our study providing us with a corpus of approximately 560 pages, more than 800 images, and some short texts. All of these pages have been taken into account in our analysis, and those related to women's civil labour during WWI were carefully investigated through a critical discourse analysis, borrowing some semiotic notions. As for the Canadian *Maclean's*, which contained only a few images that accompanied some articles, we looked through all the issues covering the period of our study, selected more than 55 pages among which we paid close attention to approximately 20 pages (containing only two images), which were most related to the civil labour of women during WWI, using the same type of analysis described above. In spite of an abundant coverage of WWI by the magazine, very few pages and even less images were dedicated to women's civil labour.<sup>7</sup>

We contend that the analysis of both, images and texts, as divergent modes of communication will reveal different aspects of our topic. Our previous work<sup>8</sup> has shown that the text-image relationship is complex. Certain images do little but illustrate the text that they accompany, while others complement the information provided in a text. Finally and less frequently, some images can contradict the text and/or deflate its meaning. With this in mind, we took into consideration these types of relationships.

### **Exploratory analysis**

#### *Representation of women in the magazines:*

Our analysis identifies two types of representation of women's bodies in the magazines studied: the 'performative bodies', whose participation in the war effort took the form of activities that de-naturalised, and in some ways subverted, gender norms and practices of the time; and the 'victimised bodies', which suffered the experience

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<sup>7</sup> The numbers of pages of these two magazines varied during the war in accordance to the availability of paper.

<sup>8</sup> See Martin 2003 for a discussion on the method, and 2006 for its application.



of the war and whose activities clearly marked the limits of femininity. Each category offers different degrees of agency and a variety of expressions that correspond to multiple characters and activities. The first type of representation reveals voluntary, independent and courageous women who wanted to help their country – some participated directly in the war effort through the production of various goods and services, others as soldiers and members of special female military divisions in which they could be promoted.<sup>9</sup> The second type reveals women who were passive, tearful, or suffering in silence. At the same time, these women were somewhat active in the sense that they performed the tasks necessary to help minimize the possible suffering that the war inflicted on their homes and families. It should be understood that these categories are not discrete; rather they often intersect in different ways. Still, images representing female victimised bodies by far outnumbered those of women's performative bodies participating in the war in both magazines. As we will discuss later, this imbalance does not mean that each magazine covered these issues equally.

Our research concentrates on the coverage of performative bodies: those of civil women acquiring some power in actively contributing to the war effort, in order to determine whether, at the time, our two magazines were ready to value this kind of participation. Did these magazines insist on depicting stereotypical feminine markers and activities? Or did they provide a coverage that illustrated women's indispensable contribution to the war effort? In the latter case, did the coverage use an unbiased tone? Or did it adopt a technique of 'deflation' whose effect was to reduce the importance of women's contribution either in using a simplistic, or even patronizing tone, or by keeping silent about some aspects of their labour?<sup>10</sup> These are the questions we attempt to answer in our analysis. We contend that women's performative experiences during WWI were an important contribution not only within the context of

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<sup>9</sup> Jensen 2008. Jensen asserts that, except for the nurses, women had the possibility to climb the military hierarchy if they were part of male regular troops. However, our analysis is not concerned with this aspect of women's work.

<sup>10</sup> We adopt and adapt the notion of 'deflation' developed by Allardyce (1979) in his 'What fascism is not : Thoughts on the deflating of a concept.'

the war, but also to the modernisation of society at the time, whose effects can still be seen today. As such, we expect the magazines to provide a complex representation of all women's experiences, whatever their degrees of agency.

In both Canadian and French contexts, once male workers had left for the front, women became gradually involved in occupations traditionally reserved for men before the war. These women found themselves working in the fields, in public transit, and in factories. For example, in Canada, at the end of the war, approximately 35,000 women worked, at one time or another, in arms factories manufacturing more than 100,000 shells, making a crucial contribution to Canada's participation in the Great War.<sup>11</sup> To produce these shells, women practiced trades such as welding, mechanical engineering, shipping and handling, and more. As the engraving below [Figure 1], from the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1916 issue of *L'Illustration*, shows, two women wearing men's work clothes are learning the ropes of wielding (guided by a man). Female labourers often dressed and worked like men during a large part of the war period. As such, they de-naturalised female stereotypes existing at the time.<sup>12</sup> The occlusion of female labourers, in a long article entitled "Rocket shells" published in the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1915 issue of *L'Illustration*, suggests that the magazine preferred to ignore these 'de-naturalised' women, rather than acknowledge their indispensable activities to the war effort. Illustrated by two engravings [figure 2] – the first one showed a part of a factory with a few male workers standing around a shell, and the other depicted the French under-secretary of state speaking to a group of mainly female labourers – the article detailed the manufacturing of shells without even mentioning that women carried out the work. As for *Maclean's*, not a single picture of these female labourers graced its pages. While the magazine's articles did very briefly mention the presence of women in arms factories, the

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<sup>11</sup> These numbers were found at the Canadian War Museum. This is an enormous quantity considering that the entire Canadian population at the time was barely 8 million.

<sup>12</sup> By contrast, many women were reproducing feminine stereotypical and normative roles with practices such as knitting and making 'comfort packages' to send to the front lines.

accompanying images concentrated on the shells, as if the editors considered the women to be out of place or disgraceful, or the products to be more important than those who produced them. Yet, *Maclean's* had dedicated a large portion of its content to the war coverage and, as we observed in the special exhibition entitled *World War Women*, there existed at the time many photographs, engravings and paintings [figure 3] of women engaged in civil labour during WWI.

**Figure 1**  
Female welders



(Source: *L'illustration*, 22 May 1916)

**Figure 2**  
Female munitions labourers



(Source: *L'illustration*, 25 September 1915)

**Figure 3**

'Women operators', George A. Reid, 1919



(Source: Painting, World War Women exhibition, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, 2016)

In 1914 and 1915 in Canada, *Maclean's* continued to depict women almost uniquely in stereotypical advertising or in traditional roles. Progressively, starting in 1916, and as an effect of more men leaving for the front, the magazine included articles by female journalists. Among them was Nellie McLung, pioneering feminist, activist and Canadian female politician who, with others, campaigned for the recognition of women as "qualified persons" by the Supreme Court, which would allow them to sit in the Senate.<sup>13</sup> In France, women were gradually represented as labourers in *L'Illustration* as they, like their Canadian counterparts, progressively replaced men in several occupations. The French publication, being a weekly photo-magazine, had more opportunities to picture women's labour than the Canadian monthly news-magazine. Yet, few illustrations of its numerous visual representations, and even fewer texts,

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<sup>13</sup> At the same time, McLung was a supporter of the then popular notion of eugenics and campaigned for the sterilisation of those considered "simple minded".

acknowledged this new reality. One article, entitled "Firehouse Women", published in the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916 issue of the French magazine, showed that even this early in the war, French women were already working as tailors in clothing decontamination workshops, and in the fields for the cause of national defence, performing jobs that had been previously done by men. The author explained that 'firehouse women' were the widows, sisters and daughters "of our brave men," and their tasks, "under male guidance," were "carried out behind the scenes" [as if they were to be hidden away] in supply rooms, headquarters, and as secretaries "to the great satisfaction of their [male] superiors". These male superiors, then, believed that the women who replaced men at a moment's notice performed equally well, under men's supervision, in occupations previously unknown to them. Here we see the emergence of new subjectivities. Still, in the firehouses, there were women's entrances and exits! This segregation was also reflected at the very end of the article with a brief phrase deflating the essential work of these women by qualifying it as "a bit of feminine touch," disqualifying their efforts and limiting the effect of their work to their gender.

Other male occupations practiced by women were mentioned in both magazines, and particularly visually depicted in *L'Illustration*, yet they were never significantly discussed in either. These are: rural policewoman, tramway operator [figure 4], metro operator, wine grower, peat bog harvester, military doctor, and minister. As is generally known, the better part of these occupations were given back to men when soldiers returned to their countries after the war.

**Figure 4**

### Female tramway operators



(Source: *L'illustration*, 18 December 1915)

### *Women's war and the modernisation of society:*

Several articles, published in both magazines studied, examined the way in which the Great War contributed to the advancement of women's rights (e.g. *Maclean's*) and the modernisation of society (e.g. *L'illustration*). Some of *Maclean's* articles claimed that the extension of voting rights to Canadian women was largely due to WWI as the vote was initially granted to nurses and women employed by the army and to the wives, mothers and daughters of war veterans.

In regard to women's rights, Nellie McLung's article "Speaking of Women", published in *Maclean's* in May 1916, utilised the concept of the body as power to advance the argument that women should have the right to vote and to participate in public life. While men attempted to discredit women's right to vote on the basis of certain bodily attributes – arguing that they were "too frail, weak and sweet" for such activities, another technique of deflation used to ignore women's intellect – McLung used 'body' and 'brain' alike as sites for reclaiming women's rights: "... no man has the right of citizenship on his weight, height or lifting power; he exercises this right because he

is a human being with hands to work, a brain to think and a life to live". She also asserted: "that women are physically inferior to men is a strange reason for placing them under a further handicap [sic]... the exercising of the ballot does not require physical strength or endurance." Ballot voting, she believed, was a simple, easy, distinguished and feminine means of expressing a preference. In another article published in July of the same year entitled "What will they do with it? The vote in the West", McLung again invoked the body, suggesting: "...women who had stood behind counters and stooped over washtubs for so long would be very glad to sit anywhere...", including in Parliament. Nellie McLung's argument is a good example of Butler's concept of performativity as she invoked women's bodies, in addition to their brain, as a counter-hegemonic technique for advancing women's rights.

In France, an article entitled "Teaching agriculture: a farming school for young French women", published on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 in *L'Illustration* and written by Gabrielle Fournery-Estrangin, informed the readers about women's labour on the farm and their participation in the modernisation of society. The school was geared especially towards female war orphans whose mission was to undertake the "peaceful crusade" by defending and assuring the prosperity of the country "by working to recuperate agricultural life... a career compatible with their motherly and spousal obligations, since rural occupations, more than anything, keep women at home." French agriculture had been in decline before the war, we are told, when the men deserted the countryside for the city. Thus these orphans were given the "national mission" not only of participating in the war effort, but also of saving and modernising French agriculture. To do so, they were taught zoology and horticulture in order to instil 'scientific' notions in agricultural practices, as well as electrical skills, welding, carpentry, basketwork, automobile mechanics, and even yoking oxen. They were also encouraged to use their brain to read and to engage in public speaking and intellectual life, and of course in cooking and embroidery. They were taught all of these techniques, not to become independent and responsible, but to accompany their husbands "without losing grace or charm". Here again, women's intellectual work was deflated, and their activities related to

stereotypical aspects of their bodies and temperament as well as with masculine pleasure were accentuated. To reinforce this idea, women farmers were shown in illustrations where they were dressed in long outfits (skirts or dresses) rather than in the comfortable clothes that men usually wore for farm work. [Figure 5] Thus, while the women were de-naturalising male occupations, the magazines refused to represent them as subverting the code of feminine dressing! Canadian women were also replacing men on the farm, although their clothes seem to be more appropriate for that type of labour [figure 6]; a practice, which was never reproduced in *Maclean's*.

**Figure 5**  
French female farmers



(Source: *L'illustration*, 13 October 1917)

**Figure 6**



## Canadian female farmers



(With gratitude from City of Toronto Archives, fund 1244, item 640.)

*Return to gender stereotypes:*

For women, the post-war period was heavily concentrated on the return to the household. Some of them did not want to continue to work outside the home and were happy to give their jobs back to men. However, according to Edgar Wallace, who already discussed the female post-war experience in the October 1916 issue of *Maclean's*, men might not want to return to the jobs that had been 'polluted' by female workers and could thereafter be regarded as "boy's work". This is another example of deflation where Wallace's words discredit women's work and their contribution to the war effort.

From the end of 1917 onward, *Maclean's* returned to depictions of women in traditional occupations, finally introducing a section entitled "Women and their work", which repositioned women into their more stereotypical roles, thereby downplaying the

importance of their civil contribution to the war. This section included articles such as "Summertime infant care" (August 1917) and "How can I keep my household expenses down". *Maclean's* presented the following table to its audience in an attempt to re-establish women in their traditional work, through the distribution of domestic practices according to gender:

**Figure 7**

Domestic practices according to gender

What women can do:	What men can do:
– Assure there is no food wasted	– Eat less
– Use their ingenuity to make use of leftovers	– Happily accept the economical meals their spouses have prepared
– Never serve elaborate meals to guests	– Refuse to eat beef and bacon on the days on which they are banned
– Never serve an overly elaborate five o'clock tea	– Eat light breakfasts and ask restaurant owners to respect the rules
– Never serve spring lamb	– Refuse to offer or attend elaborate breakfasts
– Do the food shopping in person and not by telephone	– Abandon the idea of going out for supper after theatre
– Observe the rules for alternating days without beef, bacon or other types of meat	– Happily accept, and never balk at, the rules
– Invent economical meals	

(Source: *Maclean's*, August 1917)

## Concluding remarks

*L'illustration* and *Maclean's*, two magazines published in France and Canada, which adopted different formats that corresponded to divergent modes of communication, offered insights into the influence of media on content. Some divergences and similarities emerged from our examination and are due to a variety of reasons. For example, the illustrated content representing women in non-traditional occupations was more consistent in *L'illustration* than in *Maclean's*, where we found none. This difference might have been due to their distinct formats: the French publication was a weekly photo-magazine with half of its content concerned with images, which gave many opportunities to illustrate women's civil labour; the Canadian one was a monthly news-magazine that used photographs sparingly. We believe, though, the reasons for such discrepancies to be more complex, and related to the political, cultural and ideological conditions of the societies in which they were published and read.

Since France was immersed in the war, it seemed more important to provide an expanded representation of women's war effort than in a country such as Canada, which was limited to military involvement. Yet, as we have mentioned before, the high percentage of casualties and deaths of Canadian soldiers, as well as the large coverage of war activities by the magazine, could have been an incentive for *Maclean's* to give more contextual information on what Canadian women were doing for the war effort. The more so that the Canadian publication was a monthly, as opposed to the weekly French one, which could have afforded its editors enough time to provide more extensive coverage of women's essential contribution. Further, we note that such representational evidence existed, as we have discovered in the 'World War Women' exhibit at the Canadian War Museum.

Nonetheless, the textual and illustrated content in both magazines shows common characteristics. Both, *L'illustration* and *Maclean's*, published articles that examined the important work of women during the war, yet devalued this contribution by using, often at the end of articles, a deflating technique that, at least partially, discredited what had just been said. Given the patriarchal ideology of

the time, this journalistic practice was not simply fortuitous. Consequently, it became clear, in the course of our analysis, that the regulatory framework of the magazines studied, guided by hegemonic values, limited their coverage to illustrations and texts that mainly represented the gender stereotypes of the time. However, the author was not always responsible to take up the technique of deflation of critical content; sometimes it emerged from the text/image relationship. Nellie McLung's article "Speaking of Women", mentioned earlier, constitutes a good example of such a technique of deflation. While the text adopts an almost revolutionary feminist tone, reflecting Foucault's idea of productive resistance of body power, the illustrations accompanying the text not only minimise its emphasis, but even contradict McLung's message. In fact, while the article advances an argument favouring women's suffrage, the caricatures accompanying it lend a light tone to the text and have no link with the subject being discussed.

Figure 8



(Source: Maclean's, May 1916)

In short, the war coverage in these two publications does not represent the magnitude of women's war efforts, especially their contribution to the modernisation of society. In fact, illustrations on women's civil labour in both publications are rare if not altogether missing, and the use of stereotypes to lighten the tone of some articles, or to wholly discredit the content of texts, is frequent. The coverage of female activities in the two magazines could have been more extensive given the indispensable role of women in civil labour in the war effort.

Our study of women's civil labour as part of the war effort helped us discover shortcomings expressed in the following questions: Did the editors feel so uncomfortable depicting women who had practically adopted men's bodies that they refused to represent them as such? Or were they misogynist to the point that they were incapable of recognising the participation of working women to the war effort? Why so much reservation in describing the forceful role of women during World War I?

French and Canadian societies at the time were based on gender stereotypes, and changes in mentalities would take time. Women, very early in the conflict, had to take over many masculine occupations and adapt their bodies to the requirements of the job. Suddenly, a large number of women repeated acts, gestures and postures, to use Butler's words, that de-naturalised their feminine bodies, transforming them into what was seen as male bodies, with men's work clothes and a sturdy look for a woman but, at the same time, bodies that gave them some productive power in the labour market and society. This was not dissimilar to the act of cross-dressing that we mentioned earlier. Perhaps, the magazines had to acknowledge the very important contribution of women in these occupations but, simultaneously, had to remind the readers that these workers were 'only' women.

A women's war? Most certainly! First, women created – on short notice – new subjectivities in order to participate in the war effort; and second, some attempted to obtain suitable recognition in the press for these women's participation, but without much success.

We hope that our research will lead to more extensive work that will investigate the strategies we have uncovered.

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