

‘The Moustache Makes Him More of a Man’:  
Waiters’ Masculinities’ Struggles, 1890–1910

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In October 1890, French and British newspapers reported a strange case from Vienna.<sup>1</sup> A young nobleman, dining with a circle of friends in one of the city’s most fashionable hotels, complained that the waiters had moustaches resembling those of the guests and threatened to withdraw his and his friends’ custom unless they were served by clean-shaven men. Management complied, instructing the waiters to return to work next day without their moustaches. However, as the French daily, *La Justice*, observed, despite being referred to as *garçons* (boys) the waiters were mature married men and when their wives learnt of their husbands’ intention to sacrifice their moustaches they reportedly told them to choose between their jobs or the continued enjoyment of conjugal relations. The waiters chose the latter, and resigned *en masse*, only to find their place taken by unmarried, younger men, less concerned or not yet able to grow a moustache. In a heavy innuendo about the prevalence of homosexuality across the Channel, *La Justice* remarked that should the incident have occurred in England, there would have been a large pool of smooth-faced men from which to recruit replacement waiters. Meanwhile, flushed with success, the nobleman pursued his campaign in the city’s other high-class establishments, until eventually stopped in his tracks by the Hotel Imperial. The Imperial’s refusal to submit to the nobleman’s demand was possibly influenced by a statement from the Vienna Waiters’ Association that their moustaches were ‘a matter of right and honour’. It threatened to expel from its membership any waiter who cut off his moustache in compliance with ‘aristocratic caprice’.<sup>2</sup> The London *Globe* observed that until this incident it had been unaware that to be clean-shaven was a waiter’s ‘mark of Cain’ but on enquiry had found this to be the case. Informed by a London club waiter that ‘the moustache makes him more of a man’, the *Globe* commented:

It is hard that James or Robert should feel himself disadvantaged in the eyes of Mary Ann, with the enfranchised soldier, postman, or policeman, knowing all

the while that he might outdo the three of them in hirsute harvest if nature were allowed her way.<sup>3</sup>

The Vienna case is about the exercise of and the resistance to hegemonic masculinity, by which I mean men's institutionalized control over other men as an assertion of their masculinity.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, such control obliged subordinates to be bodily differentiated not only from those they served but also from most other men, a differentiation to which the Waiters' Association publicly objected. Over the next two decades, various elements of this story reappeared in French and English press reports about upper-class diners and the waiters serving them: the diner anxious not to be confused with the waiter; the moustache as signifier of a virile heterosexual male; the claim of the waiters' union to the *right* to a moustache; the reactions of waiters' wives (whose voices are never directly reported); and, lastly, the ready availability of other waiters prepared to trade a moustache for a job.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century only a small minority of European men were clean-shaven, mainly waiters in the luxury segment of the catering sector or male servants in an increasingly feminized domestic service.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the prevailing contemporary perception – the social imaginary – was of waiters as servants, equivalent to footmen and butlers, and the enforced absence of moustaches among waiters in France, Gilles Mihaely has argued, was an attempt to establish or bring back into the public sphere the patriarchal regime of the domestic-service sector.<sup>7</sup> In Britain, the focus of the present article, unionized waiters' claims to a moustache were integral to a demand that their work be recognized as a 'trade' in the public sphere of the market rather than as service in the domestic sphere. The late nineteenth-century context is the commoditization of upper-class dining as it shifted from the private home to the expanding sector of luxury hotels and restaurants, where any wealthy man regardless of his social origins could enjoy the fantasy of dining like a lord. In claiming the right to grow a moustache, waiters sought to define limits to that fantasy. Their subservient masculinity was context-specific.<sup>8</sup> Their moustaches distinguished them from the immutable, submissive and effeminate masculinity of clean-shaven domestic servants. The absence of a moustache was thus a stigma: the moustache ban enhanced the diner's sense of power over the waiter through 'ensuring control and discipline over [him] when ... off duty and off the premises'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a clean-shaven face further accentuated the difference between a waiter and the moustachioed



working men of his own class whose hard physical labour was a central feature of their gender and class identities and contrasted sharply with the ‘women’s work’ of waiters.<sup>10</sup>

This article thus explores the significance of a clean-shaven face to the construction of a waiters’ masculinity in relation both to the masculinity of the upper-class diners they served and to the trade unionists whose solidarity they sought when claiming the right to a moustache. I start by examining the moustache’s social and cultural significance at the height of its fashion, between 1890 and 1910. It was a period of conspicuous consumption when an expanding and moneyed upper class indulged in luxury dining that included service from men. By this time waitresses were commonly employed in teashops and lunchtime venues and I ask why it was considered essential for men to serve at the dinner table – and moreover why in appearance these waiters were required to exactly resemble their customers, except in the requirement that they be clean-shaven. I then examine waiters’ efforts to secure the right to a moustache. France – where commercialized luxury dining originated – was the epicentre of waiters’ claims, but wherever French-style grand hotels and luxury restaurants were to be found across Europe and in the New World waiters sporadically protested. Within that broader context, I detail the history of a British union’s attempts to muster the support of the trade-union movement and look at why the issue of moustaches was more popular with its members than was their socialist leadership’s call to abolish tipping. I connect these two demands to other trade unionists’ perception of waiters as a negative reference group, neither real men nor real workers.

The subject of moustaches intrigued and amused the contemporary press, and waiters’ protests about the issue were given more space in the newspapers than their other demands. The (digitized) press is my principal source, complemented by parliamentary papers, trade-union documents and lastly some fictitious depictions. I rely mainly on British sources, supplemented by digitized French newspapers and Italian union documents. It is relatively rare to hear directly from the waiters themselves. Writing on ‘Masculinity, Emotion and Subjectivity’, Mark Peel and his co-authors ask how we can know what men *felt* about the prevailing scripts of masculinity in the time in which they lived. Referencing Michael Roper, they note that letters, diaries and memoirs need careful reading to discern when deep feelings surfaced about the writers’ masculinity as this related to their sense of self and to their

relations with others.<sup>11</sup> Alas, in the present instance such careful reading is not required. Waiters' letters, diaries and even memoirs are next to non-existent, and the paucity of personal narratives constrains my preference for a socially grounded analysis that 'illuminates lived experience', as urged by John Tosh.<sup>12</sup>

Other than in their union journal, the *Waiters' Record* (1900–1), and in press summaries of their leaders' speeches, waiters' self-reported experiences are therefore largely mediated through their rare interviews with the press; even then, they may have been cautious in expressing their feelings. In the interview with the *Globe* cited earlier, the club waiter said that waiters had been silent about the matter of moustaches for fear of ridicule. According to Christine Williams, men who do 'women's work' have consistently been the butt of jokes.<sup>13</sup> The very word 'waiter', the fifth Earl of Rosebery remarked to his fellow peers in 1902, 'produces a general feeling of geniality and hilarity in the House'.<sup>14</sup> Waiters were a regular subject for humour and their fuss about moustaches made them even funnier. This possibly explains why contemporary scholarly accounts of waiters were silent on their lack of moustaches, as is also the case in subsequent (limited) historiography of waiters and the catering sector.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, when I first became interested in waiters' trade unions, I too disregarded the topic. It seemed trivial compared with the indignities waiters experienced while 'working for 100 or 115 hours a week for disgraceful wages'.<sup>16</sup> Like the delegates at the Trades Union Congress, discussed in the final section, I did not take seriously the impassioned plea by the waiters' union leader about his members' right to a moustache. Only later did I ask myself, why *did* it matter so much to them?

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In 1891, the *Glasgow Herald* noted that the form of the upper lip and the area above it was associated with 'feelings, pride, self-reliance, manliness, vanity and other qualities that give self-control [and thus] the moustache is more particularly connected with the expression of those qualities'.<sup>17</sup> The same year, the *Globe* observed that moustaches were the 'epitome of manly beauty', the 'irresistible weapon in the armoury of would-be conquering Romeos'.<sup>18</sup> Newspapers were replete with advertisements for products to aid their abundant growth.<sup>19</sup> That the type of moustache mirrored a man's character was frequently remarked upon. For instance,



When moustaches eventually fell out of favour with the upper classes, the consequent difficulty of distinguishing one man from another was noted.<sup>21</sup> The moustache had come to represent masculine individuality. Although Tosh does not discuss moustaches they became fashionable at a time when, according to Tosh, ‘manliness lay in the eye of the (male) beholder’.<sup>22</sup> Their popularity coincided (at least in Britain) with the emergence of a new norm of masculinity among younger men, summarized by Tosh as a change from the expressive earnestness of mid-Victorian manliness to the stiff upper lip. The moustachioed stiff upper lip represented a more derring-do type of manliness, as depicted in the fiction of Kipling and Rider Haggard and, in real life, by imperial capitalists such as Cecil Rhodes.

The fashion for facial hair had begun in the middle of the nineteenth century, taking the form of a beard usually combined with a moustache – a style that some older men kept until the turn of the century, although more common by then was a moustache with clean-shaven chin. Christopher Oldstone-Moore accounts for the abandonment of beards by younger men to their flight from the domesticity of their earnest and bearded fathers.<sup>23</sup> However, this argument ignores the similar abandonment of beards for moustaches by working-class men for whom the responsibility of heading a family was integral to a norm of manliness associated with a productive, decent employment.<sup>24</sup> The moustache’s popularity among trade unionists is evidenced by a photograph from the early 1900s of a mass rally of Parisian transport workers, and another photo of the 1911 Liverpool General Strike Committee; in both photographs every man has a full moustache.<sup>25</sup> Rather than signifying a flight from domesticity, the moustache fashion may have carried a racial connotation. Moustaches coincided with the late nineteenth-century apogee of European imperialism and arguably were part of the colonial imaginary of biologically-based difference. They distinguished white men from colonized men whose lesser facial hair signified effeminacy, infantilism and degeneracy, as it also did with homosexuals (who, it was believed, had only sparse facial hair).<sup>26</sup>

But what of the colonies, such as India, whose menfolk had a plenitude of facial hair equal to that of their colonizers? The colonizer’s beard had to be shaved to ensure absolutely no risk of confusion. The late nineteenth-century fashion for moustache-without-beard successfully distinguished him from the beard-with-moustache of Sikhs in British India or of Moslems in French North Africa.

Whatever the explanation, even those professions in Britain that had until then resisted the adoption of facial hair were grudgingly allowing their members to grow moustaches. And although by 1910 they had lost some of their panache, moustaches retained their popularity among working men.<sup>27</sup> A photograph in the weekly *Bystander* from 1913 of a hundred or so workers at a dinner to celebrate their completion of repairs to Buckingham Palace shows ‘the working men’s penchant for the moustache. ... Only one or two brave spirits among the younger generation are clean-shaven’.<sup>28</sup>

Workers’ attachment to the moustache would have made its denial all the more painful for those who were forbidden it. By 1890, indoor male servants were relatively scarce, employed to perform ceremonial serving roles such as footmen and butlers in wealthy upper-class households.<sup>29</sup> They lived in, which made marriage difficult and denied them the public status of a household head. In that context, it was understood, according to the *St James Gazette*, that ‘the moustache or beard [is] an emblem of freedom and the smooth face the sign of servitude’.<sup>30</sup> The smooth face embodied not only subservience to what Paul Thompson has described as ‘the daily practice of class command’ but also a desexualization requisite to serving higher-class women in the intimacy of the domestic space.<sup>31</sup> And as Radhika Chopra has argued respecting domestic service in South Asia today, such desexualization would probably have been just as if not more significant in master-manservant relations.<sup>32</sup>

Most menservants appear to have accepted a clean-shaven face as part of the job. Nevertheless, in 1898 a French domestic servants’ trade-union journal raised the matter, and in 1907 an Italian union journal asserted the moustache ban was a question ‘that touches [servants’] dignity as men and citizens.’<sup>33</sup> There is scant information as to how servants felt about it in Britain other than an old English butler confiding in 1923 that throughout his years of service he had experienced ‘an intense desire to grow a moustache’, but was not allowed.<sup>34</sup> In 1891, a groom who had grown a moustache successfully sued his employer for unfair dismissal. The judge ruled there was a distinction to be made between indoor and outdoor domestic servants, the latter having the right to protection from the weather that a moustache provided.<sup>35</sup> As to waiters, the moustache ban appears not to have been strictly applied to men employed in the inns, boarding houses and cheap eating houses which provided a less skilled service to a lower class of customers. When such waiters were roped in as extras for

large banquets or private parties, they complained if obliged to shave their moustache for a single night's work.

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Although the ban on waiters' moustaches in the commercial dining venues of the wealthy mimicked the clean-shaven butlers and footmen in upper-class homes, wining and dining in the rapidly expanding number of French-style hotels and restaurants was more lavish and opulent than in the old aristocratic families' domestic dinner parties, and the waiters' subservience had become a consumption item purchased through discretionary tips.

The term 'conspicuous consumption', as coined by Thorstein Veblen, related to the extravagance of the upper classes that by the late nineteenth century had expanded to include newly rich men who, having made their money in finance and trade, were keen to display their wealth.<sup>36</sup> David Cannadine has described the newly rich plutocrats as storming 'the citadels of social exclusiveness ... [flaunting] their parvenu wealth with opulent and irresistible vulgarity'; and according to Eric Hobsbawm the 'test of aristocratic values now increasingly became a profligate and expensive life style which required above all, money'.<sup>37</sup> Percy Young, leader of a waiters' union, wrote in 1911 about the opulence of a London club:

Magnificent rooms peopled by gentlemen in every stage of comfort, reading and chatting together over cigars and wine ... Luxury, splendour, ease. Everything is designed to administer to the creature comforts of these wealthy and aristocratic members of Society.<sup>38</sup>

In France, notes Mihaely, the wealthy bourgeois sought to imitate all the elements of what they imagined to be the life of the old aristocracy, transforming these into consumables.<sup>39</sup> One way to display their wealth and power was through the conspicuous consumption of non-productive, personal services. Veblen observed that,

In order to satisfy the requirements of the leisure class scheme of life, the servant should show not only an attitude of subservience, but also the effects of special training and practice in subservience.<sup>40</sup>

Performing such subservience was thus the distinguishing mark of waiters in the high-class hotels, restaurants and gentlemen's clubs, where rich and powerful men spent much of their time. Originating in France, luxury hotels and restaurants had spread across Europe and beyond, along with an internationalization of the labour market in cooks and waiters.<sup>41</sup> Many waiters in British luxury hotels and restaurants (but not the clubs) were from Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy, in demand because they had been through apprenticeships that made them more skilled than British waiters. According to John Burnett, the new restaurants 'elevated food into glamour and placed its consumer on a public stage'.<sup>42</sup> Equally on stage was the waiter, 'skilled in the art of pandering to the luxurious diner of this luxurious age in his many whims and fancies', remarked *Reynolds News*, a radical weekly with a large working-class readership.<sup>43</sup>

A man's moustache expressed his individuality and feelings. Fundamental to the clean-shaven waiter's performance, therefore, was his depersonalization, still evident in an upper-class hotel studied in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Depersonalization, as in the wearing of liveries, had increasingly characterized domestic service in the latter part of the nineteenth century when boundaries between employer and servant had become more tightly controlled.<sup>45</sup> In restaurant and hotel settings (masculinized venues where women were only allowed when escorted by men) or in gentlemen's clubs, where women were altogether excluded, the depersonalization of the service provider was further accentuated. In 1907, 'Frank' in the *Daily Express* wrote that few credited waiters with any feelings. They were 'looked upon as part of the meal, as indispensable as the salt cellar and about as sentient'.<sup>46</sup> In Radclyffe Hall's fictitious Soho restaurant the proprietor explains to a new waiter, 'Here we have no hearts and no emotions; no passions, no bodies – except to serve'.<sup>47</sup> The narrator in a short story by J. M. Barrie gradually learns that a club waiter who had served him for many years was a man, like him, with feelings and attachments. At the start of the story, the narrator could 'no more describe [the waiter] than a milkmaid could draw cows'. Then came a day when the waiter absent-mindedly served oysters rather than the sardines that had been ordered; he apologized – he had been thinking of something else. '[The waiter] had flung off his mask and now I knew him for what he was.' It is the narrator's moment of revelation. After having known the waiter for so many years, only now does he learn his name, William, and in due course discovers that

William has a life outside the club, a wife and children.<sup>48</sup> Of course, when convenient, a waiter was allowed a personality: in response to the opposition party's contention that a waiter could not be a witness in a political corruption scandal, Lord Rosebery stated that a waiter was as much a man as a peer and with an equal right to be believed.<sup>49</sup>

Waiters' skilled performance of anonymous subservience may have alleviated anxieties of newly rich diners, unsure of their status and of their ability to manage being served. At the same time the waiter's dependency for his income on the size of the tip allowed the diner to enjoy a power over the man, as if he and the waiter were in an old-style master-servant relationship. Indeed, domestic service and working as a waiter overlapped: footmen and butlers moonlighted as extra waiters at private parties.<sup>50</sup> To be a waiter did not mean a man had escaped the deeply entrenched social institution of domestic servitude with its nexus of values, relationships and subjectivities. The consequence was that waiters, like domestic servants, were seen as members of households rather than as men with a trade that could be regulated by legislation. Thus in 1893 the Duke of Devonshire, Chair of the Royal Commission on Labour, remarked that a waiter was paid to provide a service similar to that which women and young people rendered unpaid in private homes.<sup>51</sup> The census mirrored the Duke's perception: alongside five occupational classes, established in the redesigned census of 1861, was a sixth class, 'domestic service'. Rather than a trade or profession this was a status: a life spent in the private/familial sphere, divided into two orders, the first, unpaid service of women and young people and the second, paid service in private households, hotels, restaurants and clubs. It took until the 1911 Census for employees living off the premises to be transferred from domestic service to working in the sale of food, drink and accommodation. Those living on the premises remained in the domestic class, indicating the significance for servant status of incorporation within the owner's home, even should this be a large hotel and the waiter employed by a company with its board of directors. The implications were that whereas industrial workers were securing some legislative protection and rights, domestic service remained beyond the purview of the state. At the same time the new semi-public spaces of upper class wining and dining produced contradictions and anomalies not apparent in the upper-class households that employed male servants.

Whereas the idea of waiters as in the same category as butlers or footmen seems to explain why they were forbidden moustaches, the incident in Vienna with which



this article started was explained at that time rather differently: the restaurant client did not wish to be confused with the man serving him. Such a confusion would have been unlikely in a private household with permanent, known staff and a continuity of service from one meal to the next; furthermore, although butlers wore gentlemen's evening dress, there was some slight difference in their costume, such as different trousers or tie.<sup>52</sup> This difference in apparel was not the case with waiters working in a more anonymous space, and begs the question as to why they were dressed to resemble the gentlemen they served.

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The waiter's evening dress evidently avoided any social incongruity in a privileged space but additionally the closer a waiter's resemblance to his client, the greater the sense of power over the waiter enjoyed by his client. It was the waiter's ultimate depersonalization, his identity removed. On the other hand, the resemblance to the client risked confusion and became a much-discussed problem; indeed, according to a leading trade journal this confusion was 'one of the greatest trials of the nineteenth century'.<sup>53</sup>

The requirement that waiters resemble the men they served explains why waitresses were not employed in hotels, restaurants and clubs, even though by 1890 they were working in tea-shops and lunch venues, including on the terrace of the House of Commons. After all, according to an 1892 article in *Reynolds News*, women were better fitted to wait at table than men. Whereas men worked hard with their head or their hands, the only mental or physical qualities required of waiters was to be active and polite, something well within women's capacities.<sup>54</sup> A syndicated article from the *Lady* likewise pondered why men were employed as waiters, bearing in mind that 'the labour is neither hard nor heavy', and concluded it was because men were grander.<sup>55</sup> This may explain why across most of Europe male waiters continued to be employed in the masculinized spaces of upper-class dining.

As early as 1871, the *Morning Advertiser* observed that with waiters 'in the garb of gentlemen, it was often difficult to distinguish them from the guests'.<sup>56</sup> In 1893, a Conservative Member of Parliament was astonished when a man he had just shaken hands with turned out to be the waiter serving him soup.<sup>57</sup>



Fig.2 'Inconvenience of Modern Male Attire', *Punch*, 21 February 1891  
 British Library

The consequent social anxiety was the occasion for jokes, as in the *Punch* cartoon (Fig. 2) or in this one about Ladies' Day at the club:

*Miss Pert:* Why do you allow the waiters to dress like the gentlemen members?

*Clubby:* So that when one of the swells is carried out the back way a bit full, we can swear it was only a waiter. <sup>58</sup>

In a story from 1911, G. K. Chesterton's fictional detective, Father Brown, was able to spot a restaurant thief disguised as a waiter by observing how the thief switched back and forth from the heavy, springy and easy careless step of a gentleman

to the quicker and noiseless step of a waiter.<sup>59</sup> What to do about the confusion problem? Some thought that gentlemen should alter their dress, for instance by wearing red waistcoats.<sup>60</sup> Other suggestions included waiters wearing blue uniforms, knee-breeches, stripes on their sleeves or badges.<sup>61</sup> But none of these ideas appear to have been adopted, and up until the First World War the matter continued to be discussed and wondered at.<sup>62</sup> To cite Mary Douglas's classic analysis of category confusion: the system appeared 'be at war with itself'.<sup>63</sup>

In 1898, a reporter from the *Morning Leader* interviewed waiters at London's principal restaurants about why they were forbidden moustaches. The common response was that it prevented them from resembling their clients.<sup>64</sup> Yet the prevalence of the moustache ban in France, where waiters often wore long aprons over their evening dress, suggests that the 'problem' of resemblance did not explain waiters' smooth faces nor why the waiters reacted so strongly to the ban. I suggest the ban was imposed not because of any possible confusion but because it contributed to constructing wealthy diners' hegemonic masculinity.

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On an autumnal Sunday afternoon in 1900 the Associated Waiters Society (AWS – their trade union) held a rally in London's Trafalgar Square. Tom Mann was principal speaker; a radical socialist and trade-union leader, he had championed the union since its infancy a decade earlier.<sup>65</sup> Waiters heard from Mann about the evils of the tipping system, of how they had to 'fawn and cringe for every sixpence of their inadequate remuneration'.<sup>66</sup> It was a system, he said, that 'turned the waiters into sycophants and undermined their manhood'.<sup>67</sup> Then came the turn of the union's secretary, Paul Vogel. His 'small and pathetic' appearance contrasted with 'the prosperous figure of Mr. Tom Mann', but nevertheless Vogel had 'much spirit and determination and notwithstanding the German accent and the broken English, his speech was a great success':

With pathetic humour [Vogel] bowed and scraped to an imaginary customer by way of showing how the waiter had to gain the wherewithal to support his wife and little ones and then he asked grimly, 'Are we men or are we only dogs'?<sup>68</sup>

Both Mann and Vogel were articulating the working-class norm that to be a man meant to be able to work in a manner and condition which did not degrade him in his own eyes.<sup>69</sup> Waiters, on the other hand, would have frequently read that they were not ‘real men’. At the British Association meeting in Southport in 1891, for instance, members laughed when their President mentioned his earlier worries that the only audience for the Association’s popular lecture would be hotel waiters and bathing machine women, whereas in fact there was a ‘splendid audience of two thousand working men’.<sup>70</sup> And in referring to the problems in assembling a fighting force for the Boer War, Sir Charles Dilke noted that recruiting difficulties were such that even club waiters were being accepted.<sup>71</sup> As the visible sign that waiters were not considered real men, the lack of moustache was a grievance felt by all unionized waiters. On the other hand, only a socialist minority concurred with Tom Mann’s view that tipping too undermined their manhood. In most high-class restaurants tips were the main, if not entire, source of their income and like other waiters’ leaders across western Europe, Vogel was more enthusiastic than were most of his members about the replacing of tips by regular wages. Instead, the membership wanted a fairer tipping system with a reduction in payments made to proprietors for the right to work in their establishments.<sup>72</sup>

In 1900 the first issue of the union’s monthly paper, the *Waiters’ Record*, argued that tipping created ‘fawning subservience’ and took the backbone out of the waiter.<sup>73</sup> But as Paolo Raspadori and Patricia Van Eeckhout have recently argued, tipping reinforced waiters’ bourgeois dreams, giving the illusion that they were business partners, profit-sharers rather than wage-earners.<sup>74</sup> Professionally-trained waiters could aspire to become head waiters (who were permitted moustaches), or even to own their own establishment. In Britain, a proprietors’ trade journal sought to discourage waiters from striking in 1913 by suggesting that each waiter carried a manager’s baton in his pocket, and George Orwell observed how the waiters he worked alongside in 1920s Paris came to identify with the class they served:

He has the pleasure of spending money by proxy. Moreover there is always the chance that he may become rich himself, for, though most waiters die poor, they have long runs of luck occasionally... The result is that between constantly seeing money and hoping to get it, the waiter comes to identify himself to some extent with his employers.<sup>75</sup>

Orwell contrasts the waiter with the cook, who saw himself not as a servant but as a skilled workman and sported a bushy moustache. Waiters, on the other hand, found the servile nature of their work congenial. But Orwell also observed how waiters' subservient performance front stage contrasted with their backstage pilfering. 'Who will blame the men?', enquired Percy Young, a waiters' union leader in 1911 writing with reference to waiters' habit of stealing of food.<sup>76</sup> The press reported even more subversive behaviour, alleging that young German waiters had apparently taken advantage of being clean-shaven to enter and steal from boarding houses disguised as women.<sup>77</sup> These weapons of the weak might have helped compensate for any indignity waiters felt from their subservience, while they looked forward to the day when as chief waiters or proprietors they could sport a moustache and become their own masters. Yet others became militant in demanding the right to a moustache.

In 1891 a Parisian waiters' union petitioned the association of hotel and restaurant proprietors for permission to grow moustaches. The British press followed the matter with interest. The *Globe* sympathized: a clean-shaven upper lip condemned waiters to be always in uniform, even in their free time.<sup>78</sup> When the waiters' petition was rejected, their protests made reference to 1789 and they swore the moustache was a constitutional right.<sup>79</sup> Eventually the waiters struck; *Figaro* observed that an apparently trivial issue had become a matter of injustice.<sup>80</sup> The restaurant proprietors capitulated and the waiters started to grow moustaches. The *Daily Telegraph* blamed the waiters' action on the prevailing Republican mood in France. Waiters, it observed, had become 'ill-kempt boors with faces suggestive of one of those Cossacks of the Don or brigands of the Abruzzi'.<sup>81</sup> The Paris correspondent of the *Caterer and Hotel Proprietors' Gazette* also objected to the moustaches:

I consider a clean-shaven face to be an integral part of the livery of service. If the waiters don't want to look like servants, let them retire in favour of those prepared to take, with the advantages of the profession, the drawbacks.<sup>82</sup>

In the next number, he observed that if the right to a moustache was a matter of dignity, presumably waiters were now too dignified to accept tips, a sarcasm to be reiterated by others during that decade.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, within a few months, the moustache ban was re-imposed until the next wave of strikes.

To discover that waiters had trade unions was a surprise. In 1896, when French waiters were once again claiming the right to a moustache, the *Globe* observed:

No trade or craft is complete nowadays without its union and its potentiality for striking and even the gentle waiter, the most long-suffering of mortals, is resolved to be in the fashion – in Paris, at least.

Then the inevitable joke (that had some truth to it):

The question might easily be settled by putting the moustache in inverse ratio to the tip. In first-class restaurants where tips are high no moustache should be the rule; in second-class restaurants, where tips fall below a certain fixed sum, the waiter should be allowed to grow a moustache; and in the cheap eating-houses a beard if he chooses.<sup>84</sup>

In August 1897 the Parisian waiters' union resolved to stop accepting tips, and in London the AWS immediately followed suit, exposing itself to mockery from the press:

Mine is not the avocation  
 Suited to the cringing slave –  
 'Tip me not; 'tis degradation',  
 Shall be chiselled o'er my grave.<sup>85</sup>

It is likely that rank-and-file members objected to the AWS decision; within weeks the leadership back-pedalled, clarifying that it was not against tipping but rather against management appropriating most of the income from tips.<sup>86</sup> Yet the debate continued. At a union meeting in 1899 addressed by Tom Mann, the audience was enthusiastic about fixed wages and regular working hours, but as much as they admired 'the abstract virtue of independence', they were less taken with Mann's suggestion there should be no more tipping.<sup>87</sup> And, some years later, *the Daily Telegraph* observed that despite the 'unjustifiable indignity' of being forced to shave, 'When all is said and done, the average waiter, be he British, French, German or

Italian, would find it easier to dispense with a moustache than with even the smallest of tips'.<sup>88</sup>

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The wider trade-union movement, at least in Britain, was wary of the waiters' preference for discretionary tips rather than regular wages; it confirmed waiters were not real workers and strengthened trade-union opinion about the triviality of the claim to a moustache, one that risked bringing the trade-union movement into disrepute. Waiters' frequently foreign origin did not help. The press represented waiters both as performing jobs that no self-respecting man would want while also taking away jobs from British men. Furthermore, waiters were figures of fun, speaking English with a funny accent. Hence for Paul Vogel, the AWS leader, it was a challenge to be taken seriously. How to persuade other trade unionists that waiters were their fellow workers needing protection under the law?

Vogel had started organizing his fellow waiters in about 1890, joining forces with a fledgling domestic-servants' union. Together they sought and failed to have hotels and restaurants included within the purview of the parliamentary legislation relating to workers' conditions. In 1897 both unions registered with the Trades Union Congress and in August Thomas Barnes of the servants' union had a letter published in *Reynolds News*, pointing out that domestic servants had 'grievances more acute than the majority of workers', and adding:

I am not aware that the Trades Union Congress has made any attempt to get our hours shortened, nor to include domestic servants, waiters etc in the Workmen's Compensation for Accidents Bill, the Factory Act, or any other measure which could have been extended to us with great advantage. Hence, we intend to attend the conference and look after our neglected selves.<sup>89</sup>



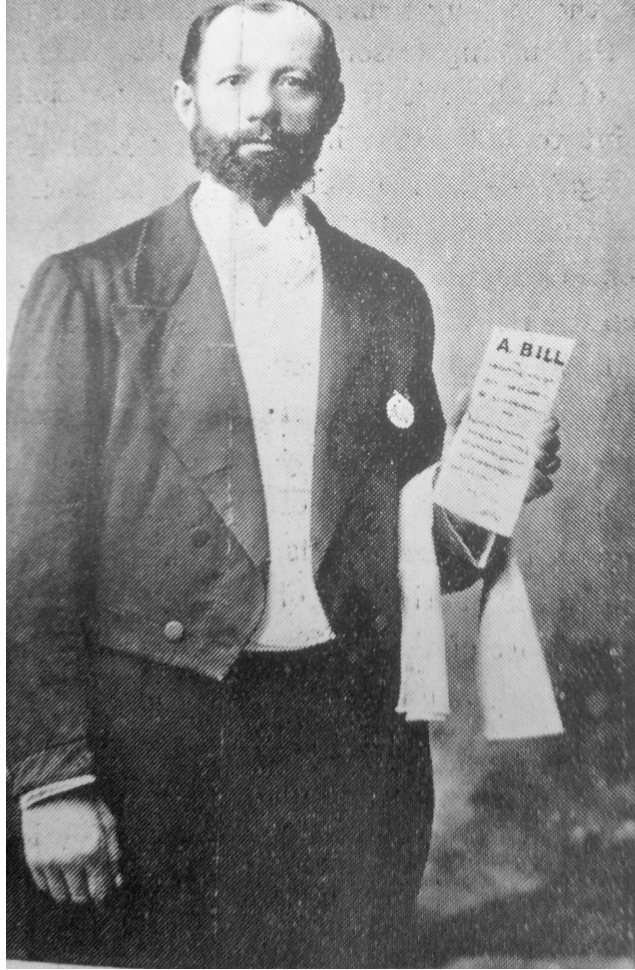


Fig. 3 Paul Vogel in the *Waiters' Record*, March 1900.  
British Library

According to the official report of his speeches, Vogel spoke with a pronounced foreign accent, and 'caused some merriment with his reference to the waiters' grievance with regard to the wearing of moustaches'.<sup>90</sup> His speech was also widely reported in the press:

[Vogel] did not object to waiters wearing a number at banquets to distinguish themselves from the guests but why should they be compelled to disfigure themselves? Many wives objected strongly to their husbands shaving off their moustaches [loud laughter].

At Congress Vogel moved two resolutions, one on fair wages, the other calling for a waiter's job to be recognized as 'a trade'.<sup>91</sup> He returned to Congress the following year, and this time included the right to a moustache in the resolution on fair wages.<sup>92</sup>



By now blacklisted from working as a waiter, he sported both moustache and beard (figure 3). The *Daily Telegraph* thought the waiters' complaint about moustaches justified, and linked the grievance to the union's hope of an Act of Parliament that would no longer class them as domestic servants but place them on an equal footing with other workers. Other papers made a joke of it. 'What of the evolution side of the question?' enquired the *Aberdeen Press*. 'Is there not a danger of the waiters of posterity becoming female-faced?' Meanwhile the *Glasgow Evening Herald* was annoyed:

'To trot out such trivialities in a Congress supposed to be devoted to the serious consideration of matters relating to practical industry is to burlesque the whole affair'.<sup>93</sup>

Vogel returned to the TUC with the same resolution in 1899. This time, according to the official report, on three out of the six occasions during Congress when there was general laughter it related to waiters. Already, in his opening remarks, the Chairman had set the scene by joking about fair wages for waiters, 'with, he presumed, the abolition of tips (laughter)'.<sup>94</sup> In moving his resolution, Vogel spoke directly to members of the press, asking would they care if told they could not enter the hall until they had shaved off their moustaches? Yet this was the injustice inflicted on waiters, their wives and their families. 'We are no slaves', he said, 'and I hope this Congress will protect us.'<sup>95</sup> But Congress declined to do so. According to the *Manchester Courier*, 'Congress had never treated Vogel seriously'.<sup>96</sup> And by now its leaders had wearied of the joke. In 1900 Vogel stayed away from Congress, and in his absence the Chairman declared that the previous years' resolutions on waiters wearing moustaches 'had cast ridicule upon their deliberations'. The TUC cheered its approval of the proposal to disallow any resolution considered to go beyond 'what were generally accepted as the objects and aims of trade unionism'.<sup>97</sup>

The TUC's mockery and eventual dismissal of Vogel positioned him uncomfortably. A socialist, he had secured from the start not only Mann's friendship and support but also that of Keir Hardie and other Independent Labour Party (ILP) members who had taken up the waiters' cause in Parliament. But for many trades unionists, waiters' workplace subservience at work and their reluctance to abandon the tipping system were probably viewed as not only unmanly but a betrayal of the working class. In writing about socialist masculinities, Karen Hunt has noted that the typical socialist image was of a man with spade or shovel, 'hardened rather than

broken by demanding manual toil'. Her article reproduces an ILP poster from 1895, of a 'strong, virile' man dominating the 'plutocrats' who are vainly trying to pull him down. Each week, Vogel may have read socialist literature wherein these kinds of images and articles implied 'that those whose masculinity is compromised or who are effeminate ... are not required'.<sup>98</sup> To convince his fellow socialists that the waiters' cause should be supported he had to argue that waiters did *not* want to fawn on the plutocrats, did *not* want to be effeminate, and that despite the appearance of light employment in luxurious surroundings, they worked extraordinarily long hours, were badly fed and paid and often in poor health.

Following his treatment by the TUC, Vogel no longer emphasized the moustache grievance. Nevertheless, it remained a union demand and the publicity gained from his TUC speeches may have had some effect. In 1901 Vogel wrote that Bernini's and Monico's – restaurants in London's West End – were henceforth permitting moustaches; on the other hand, Odenino had reinforced the ban, 'although we have known some of his waiters with moustaches looking very smart and handsome'.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, the AWS continued to pursue their claim that waiters should be treated as workers, not servants. Vogel even wrote to the new King asking him to support legislation to this effect.<sup>100</sup> But his union was very small. In 1899 the AWS had only two hundred registered members and even allowing for the likelihood of a wider group of supporters, the majority of waiters employed in upper-class establishments probably did not perceive themselves as trades unionists. In his analysis of waiters' strikes in Italy during this period, Raspadori convincingly argues that it was the actual process of striking that made the waiters feel like 'real workers'.<sup>101</sup> That waiters did not strike in Britain until 1913 may indicate that most did not aspire to cast off that servility which so passionately concerned Mann and Vogel.

Meanwhile in German restaurants, according to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1899, a ban on moustaches had been introduced. Unlike in Britain, many manservants in Germany customarily wore moustaches and thus this new imposition was seen as a foreign import from Britain. 'We are robbed of our rights as German men', the waiters reportedly declared.<sup>102</sup> The moustache ban was also contested in Italy: at an aristocratic café in Milan waiters successfully struck when required to sacrifice their moustaches on the altar of the rich, 'an offence to human dignity'.<sup>103</sup> In 1908 their union resolved the ban on moustaches should be abolished.<sup>104</sup> In 1910 a waiters'

union in Brussels included among its demands the right to grow beards and moustaches.<sup>105</sup> And as French-style restaurants spread to the New World they took with them the fashion for clean-shaven waiters – including in New York where the waiters protested in 1893, and in Argentina where the trades-union congress resolved in 1903 that ‘all impositions by the employers on the working class, including the compulsory shaving of moustaches, is humiliating’.<sup>106</sup> In France the moustache remained a burning issue, as detailed by Mihaely who cites a comment from *l’Humanité* in 1907: ‘Only once he has won the right to wear a moustache will [the waiter] no longer be a kind of pariah who can only earn his bread by displaying on his face the stigma of servitude’.<sup>107</sup>

By the 1920s many other men were also clean-shaven; the lack of moustache was no longer a stigma. When Orwell found work at a luxury hotel in Paris, he was told to shave off his moustache:

On the way home, I asked Boris what this meant. He shrugged his shoulders. ‘You must do what he says, *mon ami*. No one in a hotel wears a moustache, except the cooks... Reason? There is no reason. It is the custom’.<sup>108</sup>

\* \* \*

The common contemporary explanation for a waiter’s clean-shaven face was that it denoted him a servant of the upper class, like a butler or footman, thus distinguishing him from the gentleman he served and whom he was dressed to resemble. Not explained was why such a resemblance was necessary, other than in querying why waitresses could not be employed instead, and this despite the general view that waiting was a woman’s job. Yet, as the *Lady* put it, men are grander than women, and I have argued that the conspicuous consumer had greater enjoyment in exerting authority and demanding submission from a man than from a woman. Moreover, the more the man looked like the customer, the greater the enjoyment from that exercise of power, further enhanced by requiring the waiter to shave off his moustache that in the age of empire was a signifier of white man’s power. Post-colonial historiography and the ‘new imperial’ history have taken most notice of embodiment in contexts of domination and privilege.<sup>109</sup> Otherwise, relatively little attention has been paid to masculinities and embodiment in such contexts, despite R. W. Connell and James

Messerschmitt arguing for the need for more research and citing, as a rare example, a study of today's plutocrats – including how their eating practices are an exercise in domination over other men's bodies.<sup>110</sup> The enjoyment gained from exercising domination, I believe, explains why both waiters and domestic servants were obliged to be clean-shaven during a period when nearly all other men wore moustaches.

Unlike men in domestic service who were largely silent about this imposition, waiters made the moustache ban a public grievance. Their clean-shaven faces reinforced the public perception they were feudal retainers rather than the skilled men; that they were men who earned their living in the market place and possibly aspired either to join the bourgeoisie or to be accepted as a 'tradesman' in the working class. They objected to a clean-shaven face because it embodied the innate subservience of the domestic servant and took away their manly individuality. The lack of moustache was a stigma that kept them permanently in their place, even when not at work. It undermined their manliness not only in their relations with their wives and children, but also with other men.

In commenting on the Viennese waiters' protests in 1890 with which this article began, the *Globe* argued that waiters should not be unduly concerned with their loss of their moustaches. Rather, they should see themselves as professional actors and as such treat their work as a performance.<sup>111</sup> This was an astute observation. Probably many waiters did see it thus: a performance wherein the customer had an equal part to play – he, lordly and demanding, the waiter, fawning and subservient, angling for a generous tip. The essence of the drama was the mutual construction and reaffirmation of two masculinities – one hegemonic, the other subservient – a drama that could not have been enacted had the customer been waited upon by a woman, considered to be 'naturally' subservient. Men had to learn how to play this role. Yet, as a performance, some waiters wanted their professionally acquired subservient masculinity confined to the work-place, hence the importance of keeping the moustaches that allowed them to be proper men at home or with friends.

On the other hand, waiters' work was typically perceived by the industrial working classes as not a proper job for a man; waiters 'fawning and cringing upon the upper classes' – as Tom Mann put it – may have been seen as bringing into disrepute both their class and their sex. Furthermore, although most waiters remained poor and overworked, the glamorous surroundings of their workplaces created a public perception of a comfortable life and generated little sympathy for their grievances.

That they be treated by the TUC as workers, with workers' rights, was just about admissible, provided the waiters rejected the servitude of tips and stayed silent about their stigma. When the waiters' leader introduced moustaches into his speeches, his presence became an embarrassment to which delegates first responded with mockery and finally no longer tolerated – and perhaps not only because of the unwelcome publicity. The waiters' grievance possibly touched too closely delegates' anxieties about their own complicity in capitalism and the consequent weakening of their virile, independent masculinity. The waiter who fawned on the plutocrats may have been trade unionists' worst nightmare.

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