

Keeping his sights consistently on the constituency of the PKK insurgency, on how strategies of the PKK and state policies contributed to shaping this constituency, and on the way PKK discourse and practice were, in turn, influenced by its constituency, O'Connor has made a valuable and insightful contribution to our understanding of the Kurdish movement. The role of extreme violence in the early stages of the insurgency, the transformation of Öcalan from *primus inter pares* to charismatic sole leader and ideologue of the movement, and the reorganization of the movement along the lines of “democratic autonomy” and “democratic confederalism” are duly noted but not given central importance. The author’s central argument, that “the PKK’s caution to avoid alienating its constituency has been a contributing factor in its longevity and relative success” has obvious implications for other insurgencies.

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BRUCKER, JÉRÉMIE. *Avoir l'étoffe. Une histoire du vêtement professionnel en France des années 1880 à nos jours*. Préf. d'Isabelle Lespinet-Moret. [Histoire des mondes du travail.] Arbre bleu, Nancy 2021. 406 pp. Ill. € 32.00.

To the question, when did work clothes receive their official baptism in France, Jérémie Brucker provides a precise answer: 1904, when the French National Assembly adopted legal provisions requiring the owners of hazardous workplaces to provide their personnel with a locker room where they could change out of their everyday apparel and into garments for wearing only in the mine, the factory, or the shop. Until then, the labouring classes donned clothing on the job and into which, at best, they changed in improvised locales near their work or which, at worst, they wore indifferently and without functional distinction in domestic and open spaces as well. The legislator expanded the law in 1913, highlighting the contribution of specialized work clothes to personal safety and collective protection, i.e. to prevent the diffusion of toxic dusts and micro-particles in public areas. To be sure, the regulation crystallized societal preoccupations with health and the externalities of economic growth. But most of Brucker’s book, whose title plays on the literal and figurative meanings of the noun “stuff” [*étoffe*] (fabric and inward quality or character), takes aim at the material and symbolic uses of workwear.

The narrative comprises three sections. Part One locates the emergence of work clothes in the 1880s, when apparel manufacturers began advertising them in catalogues. These entrepreneurs tended to have honed their technical skills in observing the large orders for uniforms placed by the military, with whom they sometimes struck business deals. Brucker, whose sources remain mute on the size of and competition in this garment market, here delineates the shift from trade-related, bespoke garb that identified and ranked members of guilds and specific crafts – such as the cooks whose sartorial ensemble was codified by chef Carême in the early nineteenth

century and has not changed very much since then – to mass-produced outfits destined for the increasing number of wage earners. Promotional arguments highlighted the robustness and longevity of the new textiles. In a commercial sector that ignored the potential profits to be made from women's work clothes up to the 1940s, nurses' aprons nevertheless figured among early sales promotions. Indeed, if targets were myriad, they were almost exclusively male: from carpenters to cooks, masons to mechanics, and painters to pork butchers. Brucker discerns three sartorial types in the world of work: relatively qualified jobs where the smock, the blouse, the jacket, or the apron became the norm; service occupations that relied on uniforms (railways, postal services, urban transport, domestic service); and those at the bottom of the occupational ladder who continued to make do with whatever garments were at hand and whose patched-up Sunday attire usually ended in their everyday, that is workday, wardrobe. The introduction of dedicated, standardized work clothes did not proceed without friction. Legal requirements contained no guidelines concerning financial responsibility for their acquisition, and wage earners ordinarily shouldered the full cost without compensation. This was to turn into an issue for workers' unions.

Parts Two and Three rely on sources and oral histories from railway networks and the post office to explore the role of uniforms in large and long-lasting companies. Professional clothing helped create a brand as well as a collective identity (Part Two). Buttons expressed belonging. While there were at least fifteen different uniforms for postal workers in the 1880s, the northern railroad defined forty-six outfits. Uses determined the quality of the cloth, the palette of colours, and the type of cuts according to whether operatives interacted with customers or tended to the machinery. Neat appearances were intended to convey values such as regularity, order, and trustworthiness. Mail carriers, for one, represented the newly minted Third French Republic and its public service, most notably in the countryside, and their cloaks – and the printed news and letters they reliably delivered – participated in the transformation of peasants into Frenchmen. In 1938, the creation of a unique, public railroad (SNCF) from regional groups, each with its own uniform, led to the design of an apparel repertoire that contributed through its chromatic code to the same visual and practical integration of national space.

Company semiotics, however, did not just project communication outwardly. The third part of this book retrieves the ways in which uniforms mediated internal operations. To wear a uniform was both an honour and a constraint. The dignified person disappeared, so to speak, with their incorporation into a collective working body. The company-building *esprit de corps* normalized individuals. It also came with a disciplinary charge. The uniform betrayed its military origins. Physically, there was only one correct mode to don it, and formal sanctions threatened careless transgressors. Mentally, it imposed a responsibility to perform one's tasks in the best possible way, because one member's mistake tarnished the reputation of the whole enterprise. Regalia signified occupational hierarchy and embodied the chain of command. Such paraphernalia did not become available to women until the 1960s, and acted as a constant source of disagreement between management and staff. In a telling example, Brucker notes that the heads of major railway stations wore civil suits in the 1930s, suggesting that the company's highest ranks had no need to rely on markers of

prestige because that level of authority no longer demanded ornamental anchoring. It also denoted the freedom to live by the canons of bourgeois respectability. However, the majority of the staff was subjected to the company's dress code. Activists occasionally weaponized working clothes during social discontent, though uniforms themselves were at the centre of recurrent fallings-out. In 1936, employees at the Creil railroad station refused to wear the mandatory outfits as long as the company excluded them from the benefits package. Hard times exacerbated this long-standing union grievance. Shoes and raincoats, for example, weighed heavily on salaries and elicited personal preferences, and while contractual arrangements benefited wage earners along the way, recent employment conventions that prized individual competition among company agents over public service were less likely to see provisions being made for clothing allowances. Note, too, that while the trend in the second half of the twentieth century runs toward simplicity, less uniform and, within limits, more personal taste in professional clothing, wage earners hailing from all kinds of occupations still wear their blue overalls, white blouses, hard hats, or postal kepis during protest rallies so as to make a public statement about their collective identity and cohesion.

*Avoir l'étoffe* is a highly original contribution to our knowledge of the past. Who would have imagined the number of committees – whose paper trails live on in archives – dedicated to writing rules concerning company apparel and, recently, launching surveys among stakeholders to determine its most acceptable make-up and look? Who would not be surprised to learn that, until very recently, professional clothing for men was more chromatically diverse than that for women, that the clip-on tie prevents personnel from being strangled by irate customers, that in 1945 the United States offered 97,000 pairs of new, and 6,000 pairs of used, shoes to railroad workers, that it took women time to convince union leadership to fight for dedicated changing rooms where they could change out of view of gawking male colleagues, or that polyester received an unfavourable welcome among postal and railroad workers in the 1950s because it caused more perspiration than traditional textiles (cotton, linen, wool) and contributed to body odours that might have bothered customers? The imaginative angle taken by the author undeniably yields a profusion of information. It amply proves that issues connected with working apparel remain a good reflection of their struggle for a better life – on and off the job. But at times the rich details make for a dense and somewhat repetitive book. The same subjects reappear in various chapters, sending the reader clamouring for a thematic framing of the narrative. The numerous and welcome illustrations deserve more in-depth commentary to guide the uninitiated, fashion-challenged student in unpacking their meaning. All the same, encountering the many gems in *Avoir l'étoffe* fuels a sense of historical discovery and intellectual stimulation that make for exciting and rewarding reading.

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