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Boué Sœurs

“Compelled by the War”¹

Waleria Dorogova

“Let’s pretend there never was a war,” said Boué Sœurs.²

The Great War must be emphasized as a principal force and an incomparable catalyst on the business development and the corporate identity of Boué Sœurs, a couture house that operated for sixty years from 1897 until 1957. Having become one of haute couture’s successful pioneers of transatlantic expansion, an influential agent helping maintain Franco-American fashion trade, and a purveyor of a distinctly French stylistic narrative in support of national legitimation and the patriotic cause, the house of Boué Sœurs attests to the war’s dual mechanics of cataclysm and progress, crisis and optimism.

In 1914, Sylvie Montegut née Boué (1872–1953) and Jeanne d’Etreillis née Boué (1876–1957) ran an internationally established couture house, whose principal premises was located at 9, rue de la Paix.³ They also had branch stores in London at 39, Conduit Street (est. 1911), as well as in Cairo, Bucharest, and St. Petersburg.⁴ The house catered to a high society clientele, who revolved in the Eastern court circles and grand centers of European elite tourism which were connected by luxury train lines such as the Orient Express.

Jeanne and her husband, Baron Achille d’Etreillis, had just returned from a business trip to St. Petersburg as the July crisis evolved, bringing growing international instability. When war broke out in August, business in the Orient and Eastern Europe was instantly terminated.⁵ The Paris headquarters, along with the Conduit Street branch, were both maintained throughout the war. However, shipment of orders to Russia, Romania, and Egypt, all topographically placed on the opposite side of the Central Powers’ territories, became entirely impossible.⁶ So, too, did travel. Geographic constraint and the uncertainty of the conflict’s outcome quickly disrupted the Boué Sœurs’ trading network. Without a doubt, it was impossible for the house to survive solely under French, or even European, patronage.⁷

Figure 2.1 Left to right: *Baronne Jeanne d'Etreillis and Sylvie Montegut with their children Mounette and Philippe in the park of Château de Maison Rouge, Gagny, summer 1917. The C.M. Roussel Boué Sœurs Archive/Waleria Dorogova.*

When France found herself at war in early August of 1914, the collectivity of Paris couturiers, in the midst of their preparations for the autumn showings, was struck by the alarming unpredictability of the new season's outcome. Impending isolation from the immensely profitable US market and the gradually decreasing clientele, a consequence of Americans' cautiousness in travelling to Europe, threatened to become a financial threat to most high-profile dressmaking houses. Under severe pressure, Paris designers were forced to re-evaluate their strategies. Of utmost urgency was supplying American buyers with the current collections, and designers took advantage of the fact that American tourists were awaiting ships in England to be taken home. Fashion journalist Anne Rittenhouse reported that Boué Sœurs, who had "quite a reputation among American buyers," showed in London in October and had particular success with "American tourists who included at that time some of the richest women in the United States."⁸ Meanwhile, in New York, it was hoped the European crisis would help a national American fashion force emerge that would "somewhat dim the prestige and luster" of

Paris imports.⁹ In August of 1914, there could be no certainty about whether Parisian collections would even be presented or produced. However, trade professionals were doubtful about the prospects of America's sartorial independence from France, and dismissed the possibility of a downfall of Paris fashions: "They rest on too secure a foundation and the resourcefulness of the French is to be reckoned with," argued the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.¹⁰

Boué Sœurs' fall 1914 visit to America

Vastly experienced in international outreach, Boué Sœurs put together a delegation for a transatlantic expedition to America. They needed to sell the winter collection and it was also a good opportunity to evaluate future trade possibilities. US President Woodrow Wilson had no intention of entering the Great European War in 1914. This made investing in the ever-expanding metropolis of New York a promising prospect. The Tariff Act of 1913 had also considerably facilitated import regulations by lowering fees.¹¹

Jeanne, who had been in charge of the international trade network since the inception of Boué Sœurs, set out for New York on the RMS *Lusitania* in late October of 1914 to present the winter collection in the luxurious Plaza and Biltmore hotels. The day before their American debut, Boué Sœurs placed advertisements in the daily papers, announcing that: "As New York Cannot Go to Paris During the War Paris Comes to New York."¹² The highly anticipated Plaza showing, beginning November 2, turned out to be a great success and was covered by all the major fashion columns. For two weeks, Boué Sœurs staged daily showings with live mannequins at the Plaza before moving the collection to be displayed at the Biltmore, where it received equally laudatory press reviews. Asserting that the war had not compromised or limited in any way the Boué Sœurs' access to fabric supply, Jeanne stated in an interview with *The New York Herald*: "we have certain materials that are especially reserved for us, like the veritable *chute d'eau*, a new wool velours, and a certain taffeta that is sold nowhere else and of which we will control the output for three years".¹³ She added that the firm had ordered their fabrics earlier than usual, ensuring that Boué Sœurs would not be affected by the anticipated shortages. Only months after this statement was published, the German occupation of north-eastern France and its textile mills caused considerable loss for the couture industry. The invaded area included a cluster of "lingerie cities" between Lorraine and the Vosges, where Boué Sœurs' rural suppliers of fine cottons, whitework, and lace were located.¹⁴

The winter collection of 1914–15 consisted of the very first creations that were conceived before the rumblings of an impending war.¹⁵ New York's newspapers were in agreement about the novel and unexpected features of the Boué collection. Coat-, dress-, and skirt-lengths as well as the waistline had noticeably risen; the hem was now up to 10 inches from the ground. Coats and dresses were

characterized by a semi-fitted waistline that corresponded with new short, bolero-type jackets. Face-framing, high-standing lace collars were a picturesque detail of many designs, some reminiscent of sixteenth-century Medici collars. Equally delicate and historically inspired were the bell-shaped cuffs completing the long sleeves. Skirts, draped around the hips, were not only much shorter but also considerably more bouffant than in the designs for spring of 1914, when Boué Sœurs favored a lean and long silhouette, or what *Vanity Fair* believed to be a “possible forerunner of the fitted dress.”¹⁶

Bright colors were entirely absent in the chromatic prism of the collection. Black, Russian green, navy blue, *corbeau* (raven) blue (launched by Boué), and peacock blue made up the dark color spectrum, while fawn and cream lightened the palette. The collection featured predominantly solid cloth; plush velvet and corduroy weaves were a novelty of the season. Wool velour, changeant taffeta, serge, and faille were softened with flounces of net, tulle, and chiffon. Tinsel brocade, characteristic of the evening wear designs, was overlaid with metallic net, gold, and silver lace, and bore rich adornments of jet and gold braid, some trimmed with monkey fur. The silk flower garlands, explicitly associated with Boué Sœurs in their 1920s *robes de style*, were already a recognizable trademark, as were distinct references to the Rococo aesthetics favored by the art-minded Boué sisters.

A second American visit in 1915 and the establishment of a New York branch

Despite hoping for the contrary, the winter months did not bring a resolution to the pan-European conflict. Given the satisfactory order outcome for the winter collection after the first Manhattan presentations, it was clear to the Boué Sœurs that they should conduct several showings of the spring collection for 1915 in the United States. In late February 1915, Jeanne brought an exhibition of gowns to the Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida, and in March to New York’s Waldorf-Astoria on Fifth Avenue. The *Mercantile and Financial Times* pointed out the significance of this showing, appraising the presentation as: “A Fashion Exhibition of unusual Interest and Importance.”¹⁷ Visiting the daily showings required the holding of a special invitation or a card issued to members of the trade. Boué Sœurs succeeded in attracting New York’s fashion professionals for a second time. The gossip sheet *Town Topics* reported that “the fashion-mongers of all the Peacock alleys in town” were to be found at the Waldorf, “feasting their eyes on the confections that, despite the vicissitudes of war, Mme. Boué has managed to bring over . . .” The sharp-tongued journalist added in regard to the unceasing appeal of fashion despite current geopolitical concerns: “I was convinced that, through thrones totter and crowns are humbled in the dust, the sway of fashion will hold forever.”¹⁸

By the time of this second successful stay in New York, the Boué Sœurs had already made a decision to open a permanent American branch. The leasing of premises at 1 East 53rd Street was announced

Figure 2.2 “Robe Corbeau,” taffeta and velvet dress with “new draped skirt and waistcoat effect”. Photograph by Joel Feder, *Town & Country*, September 1915, p. 35. The C.M. Roussel Boué Sœurs Archive/Waleria Dorogova.

in early April of 1915.¹⁹ For unknown reasons—perhaps the topographical or structural unsuitability of the 53rd Street store—a new lease was transacted in June of 1915 for a townhouse at 13 West 56th Street, a short walk from Fifth Avenue.²⁰ In accordance with the launch of the collection for winter of 1915–16, the new venue held a celebratory opening on September 1, 1915.²¹ American *Vogue* portrayed the 56th Street venue in March 1916, observing that Boué Sœurs “have furthered [the] domestication of French shops in America by endeavoring to bring to New York the atmosphere of an historic French interior.”²² The feature highlighted the non-commercial ambiance of the reception area, which was found to be “without suggestion of ‘shop’” with its Louis XIV armchairs, precious oriental carpets, enormous brocade floor cushions, and “window draperies . . . with garlands and roses, in a manner which suggests old French prints or the interiors painted by Nattier and Moreau.” *Vogue* described the stage area as the “*petit théâtre des modes*,” where “[t]he woman in search of a frock or a blouse may seat herself at ease in any one of a number of gilded, typically French chairs, and be as near to the stage as she desires.”

In 1917, a visitor's account evoked the enticing atmosphere of the fanciful interior:

I must admit that I felt very much as did Alice in Wonderland, when I stepped from the bright sunlight of Fifth avenue into the House of Boué Sœurs. . . . I must tell you about the beautiful Louis XIV setting, of gold and exquisite flowered tapestry, brought from the chateau of Baronne D. [*sic*] D'Etreillis, near Paris [Gagny, Château de Maison Rouge], which together with luxurious delicately shaded rugs gave the main salon more the appearance of a beautiful home than a place of business. Every detail has been thought out with infinite care, evidenced by the unique manner in which even the lace curtains were draped, and caught with bands of delicate blue silk and festoons of roses. Perfectly huge pillows made of gold brocade, gold filet lace and pompadour flowers studded with turquoise were thrown at the foot of a divan or near a table on the floor. As a proper setting . . . the Boué Sœurs have fitted up a stage with a background of blue grey and so lighted that each gown stands out like a cameo. In this room, as in the other, the touch of an artist appears. The windows are covered with delicate blue silk curtains gathered through the center with garlands of flowers. Little gold chairs are arranged in comfortable groups, . . .²³

The trials of transatlantic business

American orders were not exclusively executed in Rue de la Paix. A secondary workshop was installed in 56th Street: "A gown can be ordered at the New York house and it will be made up in Paris or New York, just as the customer pleases. If the dress made in Paris requires any alteration, it will be made here."²⁴ From an economic perspective, the import of finished garments was disadvantageous, as opposed to the shipment of uncut embroideries, fragments and raw material on which tariffs were lower. The number of orders was so high in winter 1915, that the house deemed it necessary to interrupt order-taking for ten days "due to present overwhelming demands."²⁵

Import taxes caused considerably high expenses and—purposely or not—the legal requirements for declaration of imported goods were neglected in at least one case in the winter of 1915. What the *New York Times* described as "an unusual kind of smuggling plot" was the violation of American customs law by undeclared import of garments for trade valued at \$8,000.²⁶ These gowns were carried by Jeanne, Sylvie, and three of their employees as personal effects. In addition, a violation of labor law was detected when American employees of Boué Sœurs complained that they worked under different contracts than those workers who were employed at the Paris house and brought to New York. After an eight-day trial and pleading guilty on December 21, Sylvie and Jeanne were ultimately charged with a fine of \$5,000 and sentenced to four hours in custody, spent in the police commissioner's room. The gowns were handed over to the customs inspectors to be processed as

smuggled property. Both customs and labor law violations, imply the potential legal minefields that the transatlantic import of garments brought forth. The early period of business in the United States also confronted the sisters with the burning issue of design piracy and fraudulent practices of retailers copying Paris originals. In October 1916, an agent of the department store Hickson, misrepresenting herself as a private customer, had purchased gowns and a cape at Boué Sœurs. Shortly after, the garments—all labels removed—and counterfeits thereof were offered for sale at Hickson as their own models. In consequence, Boué Sœurs successfully sued Hickson, Inc. for \$25,000 in damages.²⁷

Apart from legal issues with import logistics and copyright protection, trading on both sides of the Atlantic grew to be a dangerous undertaking. The running of the Manhattan branch demanded regular travel by steamship, according to Sylvie six to eight trips annually.²⁸ When a German submarine sank the RMS *Lusitania* in May 1915, Jeanne and Sylvie continued traveling on the SS *Rochambeau*, where Sylvie organized a concert for the Secours de Guerre war relief in 1917.²⁹ The US declaring war on Germany on April 6, 1917 intensified the danger of transatlantic travel. Under the headline, "Parisian Dressmakers Risk Submarine Perils," a *New York Herald* report referred to the acute threat for dressmaking establishments, who seemed unreasonably "[u]ndismayed by German frightfulness."³⁰ Sylvie remembered that the ship captains marveled at her and Jeanne's seeming indifference to danger.³¹ The sisters insisted on travelling together—Jeanne's granddaughter Christine Roussel remembers—for "as long as the war continued because if the ship was sunk, they wanted to die together. If one died, the other didn't want to have to go on without her sister."³²

In wartime, the poetic idiom of the Boué sisters as "swallows in lace" was created. Sylvie credited this phrase to the soprano Emma Calvé, a close family friend and fellow traveler, while the writer Louis Roubaud wrote in 1928 that it originated because sailors dubbed the sisters the "les hirondelles en dentelles" (swallows in lace).³³ Calvé later wrote in her autobiography: "Two fairies of the couture parisienne, Mmes Boué, elegant, beautiful, wandered on deck, in light and floating costumes, two swallows in lace. Intrepid, they made the journey between New York and Paris all those years, with no worry of danger."³⁴

Boué Sœurs' patriotic nationalism

Early in the war, the Paris atelier participated in the Œuvre de la Cocarde (Cocarde Charity Workshop) for the war effort, until human loss started to overshadow the cheerful testimony of patriotism that the cocarde symbolized. In a letter to Gustave Charpentier, founder of the Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson (Popular Conservatory of Mimi Pinson), dated October 21, 1915, an "unknown midinette" at Boué Sœurs regrettfully expressed her feeling of moral ambiguity in the production of

Figure 2.3 “Ma Patrie,” Summer Collection, 1916, pencil, ink, and watercolor sketch for presentation purposes, stamped “Boué Sœurs Ltd., 9, Rue de la Paix, Paris,” Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, 1956.23.1.4.51. Photo: Waleria Dorogova.

cockades.³⁵ The tokens of patriotism were put on display in Paris to be regarded by “indifferent people,” while the men they were meant to be made for gave their lives in battle.

Discontented with the notion of competition between dressmakers that had started to dominate the cause, Boué Sœurs ended their charity work making cockades. In November of 1915, when the Concours des Cockades de Mimi Pinson (Contest of the Mimi Pinson Cockades) was held in the Palais des Beaux-Arts (informally known as the Petit Palais), Boué Sœurs did not participate.³⁶ The creation of the design “Mimi Pinson” for the spring collection of 1916, a crinoline dress in lace with an eighteenth-century-style bodice, was a nod to the ongoing fascination with this patriotic heroine of the garment industries.³⁷

By 1915, the collections had begun to show the impact of the omnipresent military conflict. This was a change from the collection of winter of 1914, which was mainly informed by a somewhat heterogeneous historicism and slight orientalist effects. Wartime designs began to display a striking

duality between sumptuous romanticism in eveningwear and austere, military-inspired suits and coats. The effects of uniform appeared in the novel use of Hercules braid and metal embroidery. The so-called "Vivandière" apron, used to finish a dark blue taffeta afternoon gown baptized "Militaire" in the spring 1915 collection, was an echo to the eponymous female military canteen workers.³⁸ Other models designed between 1915 and 1917 were titled "Grenadier," "Mon Lieutenant," or "Mon Général." The winter collection of 1915–16 featured the "trouserette" suit with bloomers and a short flaring coat, adorned with metal braid that evoked the military.³⁹ Extant garments, notably a delicate embroidered blouse of white net in a private collection, exemplify the widespread vogue for sailor collars in wartime fashion.⁴⁰

The design of the lingerie dress "Ma Patrie"—a historically inspired festive ensemble in the color scheme of the French flag—can be seen as a symbol of the pronounced patriotic sentiment characteristic of the war period, when the explicit demand for national dress design was regarded as being of strategic and psychological importance for the survival of the endangered fashion industry (Figure 2.3).⁴¹ The rise of national self-consciousness could not but have been instrumentalized by the leading minds of haute couture, who were seen as forming a national art.

French art and Boué Sœurs' wartime marketing in America

Although the militaristic elements in the 1915 designs were a reflection and assimilation of social reality, and possibly even emblematic of solidarity, Boué Sœurs found their central wartime aesthetic in the artistic articulations of the eighteenth century. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a golden age of French culture, were given particular importance in the wartime collections of many dressmaking establishments but Boué Sœurs began to build an all-encompassing corporate identity around the visual heritage of the Ancien Régime from 1916 on. The spring collection of 1916 formed a stylistic entity, serving as a sartorial manifestation of the strength of an entire nation as expressed by a national industry. These designs helped determine the very particular Boué Sœurs image, which persisted for several decades following the war.

The genre of the lingerie dress was first presented in spring 1916. Widely advertised as "The Boué Lingerie Dress," it combined delicately embroidered whitework, French lace, and strategically placed silk roses, as seen in the design "Ma Patrie." American *Vogue* proclaimed: "There are two kinds of lingerie frocks: just lingerie frocks and Boué lingerie frocks."⁴² Those delicate full-skirted calf-length creations of whitework-embroidered batiste, organdy and tulle, baptized "Lutèce" (Lutecia, the Roman city that Paris was founded on) or "Versailles," complemented with buckled Louis XV shoes, picture hats and ruffled parasols were a suitable expression of a modern-day Rococo vogue and an unmistakable claim to French tradition. Among individual elements from eighteenth-century dress

that were rendered to suit the current style was a fashion for aprons, which Boué Sœurs introduced during the war and revisited time and time again in subsequent seasons (Figure 2.4).

Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's 1786 portrait of Madame Molé-Raymond became an integral element of Boué Sœurs' signature imagery and appeared in many advertisements. It helped support the nationalistic stylization that had been introduced in spring 1916. For a fashion house that was intrinsically tied to theatre, this dynamic portrait of a beautiful and stylish actress of the Comédie Française was in many respects a suitable emblem.⁴³ Other graphic advertising in the period after 1915 consisted of elaborate Louis XVI-style framework, ribbons, and rose festoons. Of particular artistry was an advertisement in the 1917 program of the Newport Casino club with an engraving by then young Witold Gordon (1885–1986), who was later to become well known for his cover designs

Figure 2.4 Mannequin wearing the "Manette" model, winter 1919. Photograph by Ira L. Hill Studio. The C.M. Roussel Boué Sœurs Archive/Waleria Dorogova.

Figure 2.5 Witold Gordon, Boué Sœurs advertisement, Newport Casino program, 1917. The C.M. Roussel Boué Sœurs Archive/Waleria Dorogova.

for American *Vogue* and *The New Yorker* in the 1940s (Figure 2.5). The engraving showed a French beauty in 1750s court dress beneath a rose arbor, where she had plucked a rose to take delight in its perfume. She was a nod to François Boucher's 1759 painting of the Marquise de Pompadour in a garden.⁴⁴ This Rococo vision alluded to the crucial period of Louis XV's reign, when, for the first time in French history, "patriotic sentiment . . . infiltrated all aspects of French culture" leading to the emergence of a veritable "goût patriotique."⁴⁵ An updated French patriotic taste reemerged in Boué Sœurs' wartime collections and marketing.

This statement of historically legitimized national tradition, conceived to define the Boué Sœurs brand under the given political and social circumstances, was in part a well-strategized maneuver to gain recognition within New York's Francophile elite. The vivid enthusiasm towards French art in general that American patrons had initially expressed during New York's gilded age had a resurgence in wartime. The American upper class acted as a considerable financial support structure to help prevent the loss of French heritage; this played in haute couture's favor. The fascination with French court culture went so far as to cause a vogue for replicas of French interiors and even entire architectural structures in the United States.⁴⁶ The preservation of France's cultural heritage and the fashionable assimilation of a French style by America's financial elite were indicators of an unofficial cultural entente in wartime.

At the same time, collaborations between American department stores and Parisian couturiers became a mutual interest for commerce. At the opening of the spring season of 1916, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* (Trade Association of Parisian Couture) met with American buyers to forge an alliance between the fashion houses of New York and Paris and discuss strategies for economic growth in the transatlantic fashion trade.⁴⁸ At the house of Boué Sœurs, this alliance materialized in the spring season of 1918, when Boué Sœurs officially announced their first collaboration with the 5th Avenue department store Franklin Simon & Co, a regular importer of Paris models, in early May.⁴⁸

The range of this diversified line of simplified models first comprised nightwear and undergarments (for the bridal trousseau) and was extended to gowns and blouses later in 1918. The line was permanently represented at the department store until well into the 1930s. All models were exclusively designed for Franklin Simon & Co and advertised as entirely handmade in the Paris atelier; they were priced lower than the Boué Sœurs lingerie offered in their branch shop. Aesthetically, there was little difference between the department store designs and the main line, except for a simplified execution in construction and decor of the collaboration pieces, which are distinguished by an addendum to the usual woven orange-on-white label "expressly for Franklin Simon & Co." In tune with the Franco-American trade alliance initiated by the *Chambre Syndicale* and the American Chamber of Commerce in 1916, this collaboration helped bolster the French fashion industry while strengthening the Boué Sœurs' presence and dissemination on the American market at a variety of price points.⁴⁹

Conclusion: The Americanization of Boué Sœurs

In 1919, while the terms of peace were being set at Versailles, Boué Sœurs produced a collection inspired by the spirit of triumphant France. The "Trianon Collection" for spring 1920 was a nod to an

ongoing conference at the Grand Trianon. The collection was meant to stand as a symbol for peace and showcase France's proud victory—which could transpire in something as seemingly trivial as the name of a couture collection. The designs were a testimony to French Rococo fashions and expressed the quintessential Boué Sœurs style as it had taken shape during wartime.

In retrospect, the First World War redefined the Boué Sœurs clientele: before 1914, the house dressed European aristocracy and the Parisian beau monde of the Belle Époque, but by the end of the war the house supplied an American bourgeoisie to a much greater extent. The multifold effect the war had on the development of Boué Sœurs was integral to the state of the fashion house from 1914 to 1957, the year it ceased to exist. Evolving from a branch store that was established to keep the Paris workshops afloat for the duration of the war, the Manhattan establishment soon became an equal counterpart of 9, rue de la Paix. Furthermore, the "trading links forged through the demands of wartime" proved to have a vital influence on the proceedings of the following decades.⁵⁰

Only a few years after maison Boué set foot in the megapolis of New York in wartime, the house had become deeply rooted in New York's fashion landscape. Boué Sœurs gained a strong foothold on the American market by diversifying its range. After the success of simplified, yet elaborate lingerie at Franklin Simon & Co, Boué Sœurs opened an American wholesale division in 1921.⁵¹ The house became one of the first Parisian couture businesses to venture into wholesale manufacturing for the American market. In the early 1920s, Boué Sœurs, Inc. was registered as an American corporation and in 1923 the firm Parfums Boué Sœurs was created at 565, 5th Avenue.⁵² Later, Boué Sœurs opened branches in Palm Beach, Miami Beach and St. Francisco and enjoyed the patronage of illustrious clients in every corner of the United States. By 1936, the families of both Boué sisters had made New York their permanent residence. When in 1957, Boué Sœurs closed its doors at their last address at 16 West 58th Street, not very far from where their US expedition had begun in 1914 in the Plaza hotel, the house was legally and geographically an American fashion house.⁵³ As with many fashion houses, the Great War changed the history of the company Boué Sœurs and the life of its proprietors in a permanent way.

Notes

1 "Compelled by the war, Boué Sœurs show here. Remarkable Winter Models in Private View," cited in, "The Boué Collection," *Women's Wear Daily* (WWD), October 29, 1914, 1.

2 *Vogue*, July 15, 1918, 24.

3 In 1897, Sylvie and Jeanne Boué established their couture house at 13, Rue du Helder, and incorporated the Société Boué Sœurs in 1899 at 9, Rue de la Paix (Archives de Paris, D31U3 849). In 1906, Boué Sœurs became an English company limited by shares (The National Archives, Kew, BT 31/17764/88838). Technically, between 1906 and 1928, Boué Sœurs, Ltd. was a British business with a branch in Paris, but factually, the Rue de la Paix house remained the principal office and workshop of the firm.

- 4 The eastern subsidiaries of Boué Sœurs were established around 1908–13. The branch in Cairo was located at 36, Kasr El-Nil, a Europeanized boulevard, where French luxury trade flourished around 1900. The prewar address for the Bucharest branch remains unknown. There were plans for it to reopen in 1922 at 98, Calea Victoriei, under the patronage of longtime client Queen Marie of Romania. Boué Sœurs was one of numerous Parisian couture houses which acted as supplier to Russian nobility. Business in Russia was likely initiated with the aid of Jeanne's husband, Achille d'Etreillis, who ran a shipping insurance company in St. Petersburg since 1891 and created the *Revue Slave* in Russia, the first francolingual periodical dedicated to Eastern European literature. Achille-Clément Interling, Baron d'Etreillis (1854/55–1918), known under his *nom de plume* Servanine, married Jeanne Boué in 1904. He was a Dreyfusard and *homme de lettres*, owner and chief editor of the newspapers *La France* and *Paris*.
- 5 I am greatly indebted to Christine M. Roussel, granddaughter of the Baronne Jeanne D'Etreillis, whom she remembers very well, for sharing many fascinating stories of her family's history with me over the past years and providing tremendous help with my work on Boué Sœurs. Jeanne told Christine about this journey to Russia in the early summer of 1914. The closure of the Eastern branches is confirmed in: "Parisian gowns come to New York," *The New York Herald*, November 1, 1914.
- 6 In his article, Paul Kempf, then President of the Association des Tissus et Matières Textiles et de la Délégation des Industries Créatrices de la Mode, addresses the issue of transport in wartime. While inter alia shipments to Russia had been conducted by German companies before the war, this was now regarded as potential commercial espionage. Paul Kempf called for a reform of commercial transportation of goods, export tax, and international money transfer. Paul Kempf, "L'avenir de nos Industries de Luxe à l'Étranger," *Les Élégances parisiennes. Publication officielle des Industries Françaises de la Mode*, April, 1916, 50.
- 7 Jeanne addressed this issue in an interview: "We are a house that is patronized above all, by private customers abroad," *The New York Herald*, November 1, 1914.
- 8 Anne Rittenhouse, "Fashion world looks for invasion of America by Paris designers during European War," *The Sunday Star*, Washington DC, October 18, 1914, 6.
- 9 "Native fashions for Americans," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 9, 1914, 11.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 H. Parker Willis, "The Tariff of 1913 I–III," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, January–March, 1914.
- 12 Advertisement in *The Evening Sun*, November 2, 1914.
- 13 "Parisian gowns come to New York," *The New York Herald*, November 1, 1914.
- 14 A report on the conditions in the textile and lace centers during the occupation: Blanche McManus, "Fashions affected by German hold on Northern France," *WWD*, September 3, 1915, 22–3.
- 15 Detailed descriptions of the collection can be found in the following articles: "Paris gowns come to New York," *The New York Herald*, November 1, 1914; "The Boué Collection," *WWD*, October 29, 1914, 1–2; "The new silhouette," *The New York Herald*, November 15, 1914.
- 16 "What they wear in *Vanity Fair*: The mode displays a dual personality," *Vanity Fair*, May 1914, 68.
- 17 "A fashion exhibition of unusual interest and importance," *The Mercantile and Financial Times*, March 25, 1915.
- 18 *Town Topics*, March 25, 1915.
- 19 "Paris dressmaker opens branch here: One of Boué Sisters will make permanent headquarters in New York," *The New York Herald*, April 7, 1915; 1 East 53rd Street is announced as the "Permanent American establishment" of Boué Sœurs in *Town Topics*, April 8, 1915.

- 20 "Boué Sœurs have taken a lease from Rosalie G. F. Barr, of the remodeled building at 13 West 56th st. . . ." In *New-York Tribune*, June 17, 1915, 13. In early August, they already occupied this new building. See *WWD*, August 10, 1915, 10.
- 21 Boué Sœurs was located at 13 West 56th Street until c. 1937.
- 22 "Shops which import the atmosphere of Paris," *Vogue*, March 15, 1916, 54–5.
- 23 Jean, "Bringing Rue de la Paix to America," *The American Jewish Chronicle*, 1917, 734.
- 24 "Paris dressmaker opens branch here: One of Boué Sisters will make permanent headquarters in New York," *The New York Herald*, April 7, 1915.
- 25 *WWD*, November 22, 1915, 16.
- 26 "Indict dressmakers in smuggling plot," *New York Times*, December 11, 1915, 13. The incident was widely covered in *WWD* between November 1915 and January 1916, and other American and French papers, for instance in, "Lenient with sisters who smuggled gowns," *The Evening World*, December 21, 1915, 7; "5,000 Dollair! Pouf! Reedicule!," *New-York Tribune*, December 21, 1915, 5; "Les Couturières parisiennes poursuivies à New-York," *Le Petit journal*, December 25, 1915, 2.
- 27 Case *Montegut v. Hickson, Inc.*, Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, 164 N.Y.S. 858. Covered by *WWD*, November 1916–October 1917.
- 28 Sylvie Montégut quoted in Jacques Makowsky, *Histoire de l'industrie et du commerce en France: L'Effort économique Français contemporain*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1926), 115.
- 29 "\$600 is raised for Secours de Guerre. Mme Sylvie de Montagut and Mr. Jules Ratzkowski [Director of the Society of French Artists] organize concert on board ship," unattributed newspaper clipping, 1917, from a wartime press scrapbook in Christine Roussel's collection.
- 30 "Dressmakers risk submarine perils," *The New York Herald*, May 1, 1917.
- 31 Sylvie quoted by Makowsky, *Histoire de l'industrie et du commerce en France*, 115.
- 32 Christine Roussel, correspondence with the author.
- 33 "Une grande artiste française, Emma Calvé, connaissant le genre Boué et la fréquence de nos voyages, nous appela à bord 'les hirondelles en dentelles,'" Sylvie quoted in Makowsky, *Histoire de l'industrie et du commerce en France*, 115; "Mme Montegut et la baronne d'Etreillis (les sœurs Boué) ont bravé les torpillages pendant la guerre et se sont fait surnommer par les marins du bord 'les hirondelles en dentelles,'" Louis Roubaud, "Promenades dans le monde de la couture," *Le Petit parisien*, March 4, 1928, 1.
- 34 "Deux fées de la couture parisienne, Mmes Boué, élégantes, belles, se promènent sur le pont, en costumes légers et flottants, 'des hirondelles en dentelles.' Intrépides, elles font tous les ans le va-et-vient entre New-York et Paris, sans souci du danger," Emma Calvé, *Sous tous les ciels j'ai chanté: Souvenirs* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1940), 264.
- 35 I am very grateful to Patricia Tilburg (Davidson College) for sharing this letter, that she has found and transcribed in the Fonds Gustave Charpentier/Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris [No. 471] and presented during the conference accompanied by this publication as part of an ongoing book project. In her article, Tilburg gives an excellent account of the midinette's social transformation, her symbolic role in the Cocarde campaign and her allegorical significance in wartime. Patricia Tilburg, "Mimi Pinson goes to war: Taste, class and gender in France, 1900–18," *Gender and History* 23, 1 (April 2011): 99f.
- 36 Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, *Concours des Cocardes de Mimi Pinson: Catalogue* (Paris, 1915). Nearly 300 establishments and individuals of the Parisian luxury trade are listed as participants.

- 37 A gouache sketch of “Mimi Pinson” can be found at Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, 1956.23.1.4.62.
- 38 “Militaire,” and other military-inspired Boué Sœurs designs are illustrated in *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1915, 6.
- 39 Ibid., September 19, 1915, MS6.
- 40 This blouse is in the Joan Hart Collection and dates 1915–17. Another known example with a sailor collar from the period in question is a peacock blue velveteen dress with cut steel buttons in the Costume Collection of Mount Mary University, WI.
- 41 “Ma Patrie” is illustrated and described as “La Patrie” in *Vogue*, April 15, 1916, 43.
- 42 *Vogue*, April 15, 1916, 43.
- 43 Boué Sœurs dressed opera singers and theatre actresses in France from the onset and later in England and America. The firm was well connected to the stage with Philippe Montégut (1864–1933), Sylvie’s husband since 1898, being a celebrated voice of the Opéra Comique, while Emma Calvé was a close family friend. Boué Sœurs was internationally promoted in theatre periodicals and, in 1919, they staged their own Broadway show, the *Parisian Fashion Frolic*.
- 44 François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1759, oil on canvas, 91 x 68 cm. London, The Wallace Collection.
- 45 Colin Bailey, *Patriotic Taste: Collecting Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 16.
- 46 Pascale Richard, *Versailles: The American Story* (Paris: Alain de Gourcuff, 1999), 116ff. This publication offers an extensive account of the various contributions of wealthy American individuals in support of the French cultural heritage, for instance the restoration of Versailles and its neighboring buildings.
- 47 “À l’occasion de l’ouverture de la saison printanière de 1916, les membres du bureau de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne avaient décidé de se réunir aux principaux acheteurs américains, afin d’échanger leurs vues sur leurs intérêts réciproques. . . en remerciant la nation américaine des marques de sympathie qu’elle n’a cessé de témoigner à notre population si éprouvée par la guerre. . . En résumé, cette réunion est une première étape: elle laisse prévoir une entente, une alliance, entre les maisons de couture de New-York et de Paris, dans l’intérêt commun et pour le développement économique de nos relations avec les Etats-Unis,” *Les Éléances parisiennes: Publication officielle des industries françaises de la mode*, April 1916, 54.
- 48 In addition to Boué Sœurs lingerie, Franklin Simon & Co also imported Premet, Agnès, Paquin, and Jeanne Lancret in 1919 (Advertisement in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 21, 1919, 11). By 1924, the store claimed to be the “largest importers of Paris fashions in America,” offering “Original Signed Models from every important member of the Haute Couture and Petite [*sic!*] Maisons, including the first and largest collection of original Vionnet models and the new Callot collection,” *ibid.*; *WWD* pointed to the particular importance of lingerie in wartime: “experience in France and England has shown that, as the war burden increased, expensive outer clothes have been frowned upon as an extravagance and the expression of a lack of patriotism, but as the outer garments have lost in attractiveness there has been a greater demand for dainty things worn underneath or in the privacy of the boudoir,” April 24, 1918, 27.
- 49 “Les Maisons de couture de Paris et les acheteurs de New-York,” *Les Éléances parisiennes*, April 1916, 54. M. Flurshheim of Franklin Simon & Co attended a meeting of the trade alliance’s supporters as one of many representatives for American department stores in early 1916.
- 50 Ross J. Wilson, *New York and the First World War: Shaping an American City* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2.
- 51 “Boué Sœurs to create simpler trade models,” *WWD*, November 3, 1921, 1, 5.

- 52 The perfume company of Boué Sœurs was specifically established for the supply of the American market.
- 53 When Sylvie Montégut died in 1953, all business in Paris was liquidated.

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