

# The “Dope Ring Diplomat”: Privileged Mobility, International Intelligence, and the True Crime Press in the Interwar Period

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Among the prisoners of the Tourelles concentration camp, run by the Nazi occupiers in Paris during the Second World War, Carlos Fernandez Bacula was surely the only one who had attended one of the wealthiest boarding schools, in Sankt Gallen, had a diplomatic career in Vienna and Oslo, and engaged in militancy in a Latin American socialist party. Some inmates might have recognized his face or life story because, a few years before the outbreak of the war, Bacula had gained a certain celebrity in the international press as a notorious drug trafficker.

Dubbed the “Dope Ring Diplomat” by the tabloid *New York Mirror* in 1938, Bacula stood for what sensationalist journalists were looking for in the 1930s: mysterious and extravagant drug traffickers to give faces and names to the anxiety concerning porous state borders.<sup>1</sup> Such anxiety was propagated by the media while governments imposed stricter regulations on mobility. Traffickers and their scandalous crimes also epitomized the dangers that narcotics posed to the morality and hygiene of the national body politic. The obsession with transnational

<sup>1</sup> John Kobler, “Behind the Capture of the ‘Dope Ring Diplomat,’” *New York Mirror*, July 3, 1938. See also: David C. Petruccelli, “A Scourge of Humanity: International Crime, Law, and Policing in Interwar Europe” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2015), 239.

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**2** Among the many titles: Kathryn Meyer and Terry M. Parssinen, *Webs of Smoke: Smugglers, Warlords, Spies, and the History of the International Drug Trade* (Lanham, 1998); Douglas Valentine, *The Strength of the Wolf: The Secret History of America's War on Drugs* (London, 2004).

**3** Diana S. Kim, *Empires of Vice: The Rise of Opium Prohibition across Southeast Asia* (Princeton, 2020), 3–4; Steffen Rimner, *Opium's Long Shadow: From Asian Revolt to Global Drug Control* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 2.

**4** Cyrus Schayegh, "The Many Worlds of Abud Yasin; or, What Narcotics Trafficking in the Interwar Middle East can tell us about Territorialization," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 273–306; Ramazan Hakki Öztan, "The Great Depression and the Making of Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921–1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2020): 317–323.

**5** Ryan Gingeras, "In the Hunt for the 'Sultans of Smack': Dope, Gangsters and the Construction of the Turkish Deep State," *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 3 (2011): 426–441; Ryan Gingeras, *Heroic,*

and global networks active in narcotics smuggling was a feature that these publications shared with international organizations founded after the First World War. Interpol and the League of Nations (LoN) had special sections dedicated to tackling the illicit narcotics trade worldwide. Closely linked and cooperating with these institutions were national agencies such as the Swiss police, the *Sûreté nationale* in France, and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), founded by the United States government in 1930. This increased surveillance made narcotics trafficking, and more specifically the opium trade, a matter of discussion for diplomacy, economy, society, and popular culture on an unprecedentedly globalized scale in the 1930s.

Characters like Carlos Fernandez Bacula were not only privileged objects of the mass media back then, but they also continue to attract the attention of both academic studies and trade books that set out to retrace the origins of "organized crime" and the manifold "connections" around drug trafficking. These works often search for a prelude to the American-led "war on drugs" launched by President Richard Nixon in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, historians who study the interwar narcotics trade use increasingly sophisticated approaches. They focus on the intersection between imperialism and prohibition(ism), as well as on the origins of anti-opium policies from international conferences (Shanghai in 1909, The Hague in 1912) to permanent institutions founded after the First World War.<sup>3</sup> Historians of the Middle East have investigated how local actors interpreted these policies while facing the creation of new borders.<sup>4</sup> Whereas some scholars have shed light on the relationship between narcotics and state-making, others have discussed the narcotics trade as linked to moral discourses, social interventions, and the complex configurations of local and foreign actors that made up this business.<sup>5</sup> Most

*Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 2014); Liat Kozma, "Cannabis Prohibition in Egypt, 1880–1939: From Local Ban to League

of Nations Diplomacy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 3 (2011): 443–460; Kostas Gkotsinas, *Epi tis ousias: Historia ton narkotikon stin Ellada (1875-1950)*

(Athina, 2021). Haggai Ram, *Intoxicating Zion: A Social History of Hashish in Mandatory Palestine and Israel* (Stanford, CA, 2020), 36–37.

of the works in this vein focus on a particular state and its specific authorities, though they all refer to the role played by international institutions such as the LoN. Moreover, using the particular case of Carlos Fernandez Bacula, David Petruccelli has discussed the development of international policing in interwar Europe. Petruccelli argues that this internationalization reflected a territoriality emerging from the end of imperial rule in Central Europe, which was perceived as a moral and political necessity, and was less driven by liberal values than what contemporaries might have expected based on earlier developments of policing.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Petruccelli, "Scourge," 20.

This article builds on these contributions while also proposing different angles from which we can write about a trafficker. "Dope affairs" are a lens through which we can analyze the interaction between authorities and mobile individuals. But they also allow us to critically assess how different archives have organized information around them; and to assess the institutions that produced sources on trafficking as well as references to earlier events and to other activities of the persons involved. State and interstate institutions operated in a context in which the press made trafficking a popular subject, contributing to creating a new social profile of smugglers and the world around them. Investigating drug trafficking thus intersects with questions of mobility, politics, and media. Bacula's case, this article argues, shows how the narcotics trade relied on privileged forms of mobility at a time when immigration restrictions were becoming more rigid. Secondly, it shows that the networks of the illicit drug economy were emphasized by surveillance institutions, although the suspects could counter accusations by emphasizing other connections related to their political activism. Thirdly, this article argues that the press contributed to creating the character of Bacula in order to stigmatize international syndicates that were transgressing the "normal" national and moral boundaries.

In tackling these issues, this article proposes three interventions in the historiography of narcotics trafficking. Concerning

**7** Alan A. Block, "European Drug Traffic and Traffickers between the Wars: The Policy of Suppression and its Consequences," *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 2 (1989): 315–337.

**8** Salvatore Lupo, *The Two Mafias: A Transatlantic History, 1888–2008* (New York, 2015).

**9** Devi Mays, "Becoming Illegal: Sephardi Jews in the Opiates Trade," *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 3 (2020): 1–34.

**10** Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Peter B. Evans, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, 1985), 169–191; Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (Oxford, 2013).

**11** Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago, 1991).

**12** Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, "Introduction: Violence, Crime, and Political Power," in *Organized Crime and States: The Hidden Face of Politics*, ed. Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues (New York, 2010), 3.

mobility, it offers a perspective centered around an individual rather than cohesive groups. Since Alan Block's article on drug trafficking in interwar Europe, there has been a tendency to write the history of the narcotics trade by paying attention to ethnic or regional categories.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation sees Greeks and Jews as playing a central role in the heroin trade of the interwar period, later replaced by other Mediterranean actors like the Corsicans of Marseilles (the so called French Connection) and the Sicilians (Cosa Nostra) in the 1960s. Most of these studies focus on a national or a rather "classic" transnational perspective on emigrant communities keeping illicit bonds with the homeland, such as "the two mafias" active in Sicily and North America.<sup>8</sup> In a recent article, Devi Mays has retraced the trajectory of Sephardic Jews active in the illegal opium trade of the interwar years beyond a simple explanation based on kinship or cultural values. Mays's study provides an excellent reading of how family and migrant networks adapted to the illegalization of opiates.<sup>9</sup> Carlos Bacula's trajectory, by contrast, does not quite fit a transnational reading of trafficking which mobilizes the notions of diaspora, community, or minority. The most interesting aspect of his trajectory is how he used and abused his diplomatic status to move narcotics through Europe and to North America.

This leads to the second intervention, the nexus between trafficking and politics. Charles Tilly and Peter Andreas have offered groundbreaking insight into the nexus between state making, "organized crime," and the smuggling economy.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, state actors could be involved in criminal organizations: Alfred Mc Coy's work documented the tangle of the CIA, guerrilla officials in the heroin's "golden triangle" of Southeast Asia, and mafiosi in the expanding drug trade during the cold war.<sup>11</sup> Gilles Favarel-Garrigues and Jean-Louis Briquet have collected different case studies from around the world to historicize the links between transnational crime and the state beyond a frontal relationship.<sup>12</sup> Here as well, Bacula's case is intriguing: not only did he face arrests,

trials, and interrogations by different state authorities, but he was also directly affected by political turbulence. His fate depended on politics in Peru as well as in his countries of residence, including Austria or France. He does not fit the model of traffickers entering politics or corrupt politicians becoming traffickers. In his case, these two domains were complementary: the more Bacula was described as the main pivot orchestrating transatlantic smuggling, the more he described his movements and interactions as part of his militancy in the politics of Peru.

This article's third and final intervention concerns the role of the media and the perception of traffickers. Historians of the drug trade have often considered newspapers and magazines as sources of information rather than as objects of study. An underexplored aspect is how media used tropes, a particular vocabulary, and images to create the profile of these traffickers. However, the media played a key role in promoting political, diplomatic, or military intervention against certain activities, like nineteenth-century sex trafficking linked to illicit mobility.<sup>13</sup> The media can also normalize this intervention's devastating effects on local societies, as a study on Mexico has demonstrated.<sup>14</sup> Although press scandals and special genres such as "true crime" magazines boomed in the interwar period, their interrelation with the expanding drug trafficking still demands historical inquiry. The press emphasized Bacula's character as a "dope ring diplomat" for different purposes: to create a persona that merged vice and decadent lifestyle but also to praise or criticize the efficiency of law enforcement and, more generally, the functioning of state institutions.

Along these three lines of interpretation, this article contributes to the critical assessment of notions of connections and connectivity recently pursued by global historians and proposed by this special issue.<sup>15</sup> Stating that connections were diverse and far-reaching is not satisfying for the agenda of global history. Accordingly, this article investigates the

**13** Gretchen Soderlund, *Sex Trafficking, Scandal, and the Transformation of Journalism, 1885-1917* (Chicago, 2013).

**14** Julien Mercille, "The Media-Entertainment Industry and the 'War on Drugs' in Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 41, no. 2 (2014): 110–129.

**15** Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), 42; Roland Wenzlhuemer, "The Ship, the Media, and the World: Conceptualizing Connections in Global History," *Journal of Global History* 11, no. 02 (January 1, 2016): 165.

**16** National Archives Records Administration (NARA) – Record Group (RG) 59, A1 1487, Bacula. Statement by Bacula to the Swiss authorities, June 7, 1938. See also several notes written by the French police that stress his suspicious activities in Switzerland during and after the First World War (false passports, false names, illicit gambling), all while admitting that many accusations were likely false. Archives Nationales (France, ANF) – 19940434/9 Carlos Bacula. Notes dated November 20, 1923; June 10, 1930. On his father's emigration: Cecilia Bákula Budge, *Visión Cartográfica del Perú y América: Colección de Mapas de Juan Miguel Bákula Patiño* (Lima, 2014), 180.

transformation and the representation of these connections. In other words, the fact that Bacula and other traffickers, just like the authorities trying to tackle them, were connected across borders is not the conclusion, but an assumption that invites us to expand the analysis. Bacula's connectivity can be questioned with regard to its materiality (his mobility was not only privileged but also fragile as it depended on a diplomatic passport), its efficacy (it was limited by police and juridical decisions taken in different places), and its representation (shaped by the press, the authorities' assessments, and his own accounts). By broadening the range of sources and voices, attention is given to the flipside of connectivity: the reasons and the dynamics that made it coexist with volatility, fragmentation, incongruency, and hyperbole. Eventually, we cannot know for certain what Bacula did or did not do, but we can ask why he became so pivotal for discussing interwar trafficking. Rather than "reopening" the Bacula case to solve it, then, we can use this case to "reopen" the archives where his story has been preserved and the media which made it sensational.

## I. Tracing Bacula in the Archives

The protagonist of our story, Carlos Fernandez Bacula, was born in Lima, Peru, on 11 March 1888 as the son of a wealthy cotton trader. On his father's side, he was the descendant of a Croatian emigrant from Trpanj, Miho Bacula Jugović, who had arrived in Peru in 1874. When he turned 13, Carlos moved to Europe and attended Dr. Schimdt's private school in Sankt Gallen, one of the most prestigious and expensive boarding schools for boys worldwide. He studied in Darmstadt and Zürich and remained in Switzerland during the First World War. Supported solely by the money sent by his father, he later entered the Peruvian diplomatic service in Geneva before being deployed to Vienna in 1924 (or 1926, according to other sources).<sup>16</sup> Documents on his life in those years are scarce until, in 1928, Bacula was involved in a major heroin



**Figure 1.** Bacula portrayed in a 1934 mugshot. Archives Nationales (France), 199404349.

smuggling affair initiated by the Russian émigré Joseph Raskin.<sup>17</sup> Although Bacula remained on the radar of different authorities for almost thirty years, two moments linked to smuggling affairs stand out in his trajectory. The first relates to the investigation of the Raskin ring between 1929 and 1931. The second concerns an explosion in a clandestine heroin factory in Paris in 1935 which led, three years later, to Bacula's arrest for his role in the trafficking scandal involving the notorious smuggler Louis Lyon. Rather than the hero of a one-man story, however, Carlos Bacula emerges from the sources as a name within a network of traffickers, mostly as a broker offering services to more prominent characters.

Details about his activities are scattered in several archives, among which two sets of records stand out because of their international dimension: the records of the LoN section on opium and those of the United States FBN. The LoN archives have recently been digitized in their entirety and are now accessible through word search.<sup>18</sup> Their repositories are a valuable resource to reflect on how an international organization scrutinized and archived information. Although intergovernmentalism is key to understanding drug diplomacy and control in the twentieth century, scholars point to continuities between the League's framework and earlier conventions. The League's Permanent Central Opium Board, officially founded in 1925, saw American diplomacy take over the prominent role played by the British Empire in imposing restrictions on the opium trade during the early twentieth

**17** For a detailed account of the investigations concerning Bacula: Petruccelli, "Scourge," 238–290.

**18** <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lontad>

**19** John Collins, *Legalising the Drug Wars: A Regulatory History of UN Drug Control* (Cambridge, 2021), 18–24; William B. McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century: An International History* (London, 2000), 43–102.

**20** Richard Büchner, "Die neuste Entwicklung der Opiumfrage," *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* 20 (1924): 394–396.

**21** League of Nations Digital Archive (LNDA) – Seizures of Drugs – Smuggling of Heroin, April 1929, by Mr. Joseph Raskin – R3125/12/18750/157; Narcotics Traffickers' Files "B" – S212-2-B; Annual Reports – 1935 – Austria; Opium Committee - Procès-verbaux [minutes] 14th Session, January 1931. Various correspondence - File R3186/12/26230/3522.

**22** LNDA - Narcotics Traffickers' Files "R" – S212-13/R, Card 102.

century.<sup>19</sup> As a study on the opium question of 1924 has argued, the collection of information in the form of yearly reports with abundant statistics was one of the goals, although the coordination among the signatories was far from easy due to conflicting agendas and unequal infrastructural features.<sup>20</sup>

Bacula's name appears in different series of the LoN archives: in reports of arrests and smuggling cases; on the register of the thousands of international traffickers organized alphabetically (card no.B.364), which contains information on drug seizures as well as on other traffickers related to him; in annual reports organized by country, such as Austria; and in the minutes of meetings of institutions such as the Advisory Commission on the Traffic in Opium, which discussed the Raskin incident in 1931.<sup>21</sup> These documents span from 1930 to 1940 and provide rather general information on their protagonists. They mostly consist of succinct reports in English and French and, more rarely, newspaper clippings as well as correspondence from the countries involved (for instance Austria and Germany). The issue of opium trafficking was tackled internationally, which does not imply that all cases or smugglers displayed global connections. Many, like Bacula's partner-in-crime Joseph Raskin, were more effective in planning the movement of illicit goods than in moving across long distances themselves. Raskin's personal file contains two domiciles: Lodz and Vienna.<sup>22</sup> The list of places where drug seizures related to him were carried out mention Vienna, Cairo, Istanbul, and Belgrade, but the "governments involved" in tracking his activities point to a more complex geography including Austria, Egypt, France, Japan, Afghanistan, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Germany, the United States, and Bulgaria. In other words, the LoN files reflect a centralized production of summarizing sources rather than a composite repertoire in which documents from all these countries are collected.

Compared to the LoN, the United States governmental sources offer more detailed insight. One vital resource for the history

of drug trafficking is the FBN collection. In 1930, the United States Treasury Department created this bureau and placed Harry Anslinger, who had cut his teeth in the department's branch in charge of implementing the prohibition of alcohol.<sup>23</sup> The FBN's files belong to record group 170 (now named Drug Enforcement Administration, the agency that replaced the FBN in 1967). The hundreds of folders in this collection are mostly archived by subject and countries. Especially the country files allow for access to documents that hardly exist (or are not accessible) outside the United States, including in important opium-producing countries like Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

**23** Alexandra Chasin, *Assassin of Youth: A Kaleidoscopic History of Harry J. Anslinger's War on Drugs* (Chicago, 2016), 165–176.

**24** NARA – RG 170 A1 9 660 Turkey.

**25** NARA - RG 59 A1 1487 – Name Files of Suspected Narcotics Traffickers 1927-1942.

Even more important for this article's actor-centered approach are the traffickers' personal files. They belong to another record group (59) since they were produced by the United States Department of State. The series contains 740 folders that vary significantly in size. Many consist of a few pages with basic personal information, while others on prominent traffickers such as Bacula, Augusto Del Gracio, Elie Eliopoulos, or Lucky Luciano have several hundred. These files contain reports, letters, statements, personal documents, and newspaper clippings, which make them more diverse.<sup>25</sup> The bias of these sources related to the ambition to control and survey illicit flows worldwide with a focus on foreigners is evident. Their state-centered and criminalizing standpoint, though, coexists with variety in terms of document types and of the voices they reveal, including many statements delivered by the suspected traffickers, which makes this collection invaluable for historians of narcotics trafficking.

In addition to this material, this article uses files produced by the Swiss and the French authorities. A common trait of these repertoires is the presence of newspaper clippings. The press was therefore not simply a receiver of narratives created by the police. It also drew the police's attention since it contributed to shaping the perception of trafficking and traffickers. It is along this interwoven dimension of surveillance practices and representations directed at a broad audience that the

**26** Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2014), 21–37.

**27** Mathieu Deflem, *Policing World Society: Historical Foundations of International Police Cooperation* (Oxford, 2004), 138–139.

article sets out to understand how Bacula came to be identified as an important player in a hyperconnected, large-scale illicit business.

## **II. Trunks and Diplomatic Passports: Privileged Mobility in an Age of Restriction**

In the early twentieth century, the United States was the main destination for European migrants while it also represented an expanding market for narcotics coming from the Middle East. As authorities and conservative forces increasingly considered such movements as unwanted, however, Washington enforced two major restrictions. Firstly, the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, which became effective in 1915, implied higher taxes and stricter criteria for the production, import, and sale of narcotics. A few years later, the Immigration Act of 1924 established quotas on aliens entering the territory, targeting Asians and Southern Europeans, who counted among the main suspects of drug trafficking.<sup>26</sup> Racist and eugenic considerations particularly addressed permanent immigration, but reinforced control also applied to short stays, since the application process for visas issued by American consulates also relied on stricter rules.

Yet the United States was not an exception. In the 1920s, the new postwar world order generally enhanced interstate cooperation to regulate and sanction mobility flows. The creation of Interpol in Vienna in 1923 made it easier for police authorities to track suspected criminals and politically “dangerous” elements (especially anarchists), while the Geneva International Opium Convention of 1925 restricted the trade of opium and its derivatives to pharmaceutical consumption. Interestingly, although the fight against narcotics smuggling was a common interest for the LoN and Interpol, any “formal connection” between the two “remained more fiction than fact,” as Mathieu Deflem has argued.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, mobility and trade related to narcotics underwent an accelerated shift

from regulation to restriction and criminalization. Transporting opium across borders became more difficult and riskier, but not necessarily less profitable. Since the worldwide demand was far from declining, the supply chain elaborated new methods, and the traffic expanded to different hubs.

Vienna, the city where Bacula resided in the late 1920s, was an important center for narcotics trafficking.<sup>28</sup> Viennese rings operated transactions with Egypt, back then one of the main transit countries for drugs directed to the Far East. Among the methods described by the reports collected in a LoN case file, one mentions clothes trunks filled with heroin.<sup>29</sup> The seizure contributed to convincing Ludwig Auer, a key actor within the already mentioned Raskin trafficking ring, to adopt a safer method. “Bacula owns this invaluable document, a diplomatic passport”:<sup>30</sup> With these words, later paraphrased by several newspapers, the Egyptian Central Bureau for Information on Opium described Bacula’s involvement in these traffickers’ activities in Asia (Tsientsin), Europe (France, Germany, Austria, etc.), Africa (Egypt), and North America (United States). The diplomatic status was Bacula’s specificity in a network that included persons of diverse background, active in different continents, and responsible for different tasks in the trade: Bacula’s passport made him vital for his partners and dangerous for the authorities because he could move the drugs into the American market without being searched by customs officers. Since traffickers depended on identity documents when they traveled, having a diplomat friend could also be an easy way to forge one’s identity. Bacula admitted that the Polish citizen Raskin pressured him to obtain a Peruvian passport, most likely so that he could transport narcotics under a false identity. But Bacula claimed that he only used his privileged status to mediate with his colleague at the Polish consulate in Vienna to help Raskin obtain a new Polish passport which, however, would not have been as useful.<sup>31</sup>

The unique role played by Bacula is also confirmed by Elie Eliopoulos, arguably the most wanted trafficker of the 1930s.

**28** Petruccelli, “Scourge,” 245.

**29** LNDA – Illicit Traffic in Egypt by an Austrian Organization, R3120-12-157-11391. Photos attached to a letter by Jean Schober, President of the Vienna Police, to the Secretary General of the LoN, April 22, 1929.

**30** Bureau Central d’Informations des Narcotiques, Rapport Annuel 1932, Cairo, Imprimerie Nationale, 13.

**31** NARA – RG 59 A1 1487 – Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, Statement before the United States Attorney, November 4, 1931.

**32** NARA - RG 59 A1 1487 – Eliopoulos case. Statement by Elie Eliopoulos regarding the Narcotic Traffic made at Athens, September 1932.

**33** NARA – RG 59 A1 1487 – Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, Statement before the United States Attorney, November 4, 1931.

**34** *Ibid.*, Dearing to Grey, 16 October 1931; November 1, 1931.

**35** LNDA – Découverte d'une fabrique clandestine de drogues nuisibles à Gorna Djoumaya, R4792-12-12424-387. Extract from Minutes of the Seizure sub-Committee 7<sup>th</sup> Session, May 1935.

**36** History of Heroin, Bulletin on Narcotics, United Nations, 1953, [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin\\_1953-01-01\\_2\\_page004.html#bf034](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1953-01-01_2_page004.html#bf034).

In a widely cited statement, Eliopoulos explained how orders were processed through a Frenchman, Louis Lyon, and the Newman brothers, American citizens in New York. Eliopoulos profiled Bacula as the main drug courier, who allegedly transported the drugs in his diplomatic trunks at least six times through Miami, New York, and Montreal.<sup>32</sup> The trunks and the passports were also mentioned by a United States attorney in November 1931, when he interrogated Bacula upon his arrival in New York. While denying all accusations of narcotics smuggling, Bacula explained that he always mentioned his diplomatic status to prevent his belongings from being searched at customs (“I am a consul, you don’t make any difference?”).<sup>33</sup> Both intelligence services and traffickers were sure that he had been smuggling drugs, but they realized this too late, after he had already suspended this activity because he had lost what made it possible: a valid diplomatic passport.

Indeed, Bacula’s diplomatic status did not rest on solid ground. The interrogation of November 1931 in New York occurred while Bacula was travelling with a regular passport. Coming from Peru, he had been denied a diplomatic visa to the United States by the American consul in Lima because the latter discovered that Bacula’s service for Peruvian legations in Europe had been put on hold. The same consul talked to the Peruvian foreign minister, who admitted knowing nothing about Bacula’s functions in Europe.<sup>34</sup> That Bacula capitalized on his status for activities other than consular service is suggested by his frequent stays in France, where he could hardly have had obligations related to his offices in Vienna or Oslo. His tenure ended in 1931 as a result of a seismic shift in Peruvian politics described in the next section. Bacula remained based in Vienna and was rumored to have kept his connections to heroin traffickers.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the 1930s, he limited his activities to Europe. This corresponded to the general trend which saw an impressive drop in drug seizures at United States ports after 1930.<sup>36</sup> Although he was not able to travel

with a valid diplomatic passport anymore, Bacula kept the consulate's stamps at home, as the French police discovered during a search in 1938; other traffickers referred to him as a provider of false passports.<sup>37</sup> Bacula also allegedly convinced a colleague to become a long-distance drug courier. Germán Eduardo Argerich, the secretary of the Argentine legation at Belgrade and Bucharest, was involved in the transport of opium via train to Paris. However, Argerich's illicit career did not last long either. In June 1937, he was suspected by Yugoslav authorities of illegal activities. Argerich was immediately suspended by the Argentine foreign office and, a few weeks later, he was found dead, allegedly a suicide.<sup>38</sup> As late as 1948, the Swiss police referred to Bacula's links to other diplomats active in trafficking rings, like Francisco Madrid (Chilean representative in Bucharest) and Eliseo Ricardo Gomez (Uruguayan ambassador in Prague).<sup>39</sup>

Bacula was thus neither the first diplomat accused of smuggling large quantities of narcotics into the United States, nor the last.<sup>40</sup> One only has to think of Mauricio Rosal's case, the Guatemalan envoy to the Netherlands arrested at JFK airport in October 1960, smuggling 110 pounds of pure heroin.<sup>41</sup> The Peruvian diplomat's story reminds us that, for drug trafficking rings, transporting and smuggling the illicit goods is the most delicate phase of the trade. Therefore turning to the most privileged form of mobility, that of a diplomat like Bacula who did not have to undergo any luggage inspection, emerged as a new possibility; in the end, Bacula was suspected of smuggling drugs in person for about two years at most, a rather short time span. In this sense, Bacula's story tells us something more about connectivity. When national and intergovernmental authorities sought to move against large-scale transnational trafficking circuits, they did not only worry about the narcotics themselves or the volume of traffic. A more significant danger in their view was that such uncontrolled circulation could happen in the first place even as personal identification and the control of mobility were taking

**37** ANF – F7 14839. Police report, June 23, 1938; Statement by Georges Chabat, July 6, 1939.

**38** NARA – RG 59 A1 1487, Argerich, Dr. German Eduardo, Fuller to the Secretary of State, June 1, 1937; Note by the Secretary of State, July 9, 1937.

**39** Swiss Federal Archives (SFA) - E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez. internationaler Schmuggler, The Police of the Zürich Canton to the Direction of the Swiss intelligence, July 28, 1948.

**40** For an occurrence of smuggling by use of a diplomatic passport in eighteenth-century America, see Andrew Wender Cohen, "Smuggling, Globalization, and America's Outward State, 1870-1909," *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (2010): 377.

**41** Philipp McMan-dlish, "Envoy loses Post in Narcotics Case," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1960.



**Figure 2.** Some of the diplomatic stamps found by the French police during the 1938 search of Bacula's home. Archives Nationales (France), F7 14839.

more sophisticated forms based on the principle of national sovereignty.

### III. Politics and Trafficking: Missing Crossroads?

Although the bureaucratic documents that describe Bacula's affairs generally paid little attention to his political activism, Bacula often described it as his main (pre)occupation as well as the cause of what he perceived as persecution. In fact, neither drugs nor politics played a role in Bacula's run-ins with the law in the early 1920s. When he was accused of using false names, he retrospectively claimed that this was the revenge of a "subaltern police agent" from Geneva with whom he had had an altercation. According to Bacula, these names had nothing to do with fraudulent activities: one (Feller) was the name of his future wife's first husband, which, since they cohabited unmarried at that time, Bacula occasionally used

to avoid scandal; the other one (Norden), he claimed, was a deformation of the nickname that his fellow students had attached to him (Nordini, allegedly due to his capacity to imitate a homonymous magician).<sup>42</sup>

Bacula's activities seemed to have nothing to do with politics at that time. But things changed in the late 1920s. Facing the previously mentioned interrogation by the U.S. Attorney in 1931, Bacula explained his trips to New York by claiming that he traveled to obtain loans for Peru from companies on Wall Street. The diplomat stated that he was the "closest friend" of a candidate to the Presidency of Peru, Victor Haya de la Torre, whom he likely met in 1926 in Paris during the latter's exile. Although he did not overtly mention this name, Bacula added that he arranged meetings between the American ambassador in Lima and Haya de la Torre. He also claimed that during one of the trips to Cherbourg and New York in May 1931, instead of smuggling heroin, he was merely accompanying the Peruvian candidate on his electoral campaign. Since Haya de la Torre lost the election, Bacula claimed to have been placed on a Peruvian "blacklist." He added that the new Peruvian government would arrest him if he contacted the authorities of his country to obtain a new diplomatic passport. He used this argument to explain why he had tried to obtain a regular visa valid for New York from the American ambassador in Lima.

When asked about his "immediate plans" by the customs official, Bacula stated that he would first have to go to Paris and then readjust his political network so that he could eventually return to Peru, where he did indeed return in 1933. The U.S. Attorney lost his patience every time Bacula evaded his questions about opium. "I am not interested," he said "in the details of your political activities. That is none of my business."<sup>43</sup> This interaction between two men who were clearly trying to pull the conversation toward different topics might seem trivial or confusing. Yet, their exchange reveals an interesting discrepancy between two ways of representing transnational connections: United

**42** SFA - E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, internationaler Schmuggler. Petition by Bacula attached to a letter by the head of the Interpol Marcel Sicot to the Swiss Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Narcotics Trafficking, March 28, 1957.

**43** NARA - RG 59 A1 1487 - Bacula, Carlos Fernandez. Statement before the United States Attorney, November 4, 1931.

**44** Geneviève Dorais, *Journey to Indo-América: APRA and the Transnational Politics of Exile, Persecution, and Solidarity, 1918-1945* (Cambridge, 2021), 55–83.

**45** International Institute of Social History Amsterdam (IISHA) - Labour and Socialist International Archives (LSIA) – 2533. Adler to Bacula, February 24, 1933.

**46** Daniel Iglesias, *Les mythes fondateurs du Parti Apriste Péruvien* (Paris, 2014), 45.

**47** "Aus dem Tagebuch eines Rauschgifthändlers," *Neue Berner Zeitung*, November 12, 1938. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

States authorities saw Bacula as a hyperconnected trafficker within a global criminal syndicate that targeted their country, while he depicted himself as a politician campaigning internationally to bring change to only one country, his homeland Peru.

Although both sides surely exaggerated the impact of his connections, Bacula remained dedicated to the cause. His friend Haya de la Torre led a party called *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA). As historian Geneviève Dorais has argued, the Peruvian leaders of this party pursued an agenda of Latin American solidarity, anti-imperialism, and democratic socialism that was shaped by their experiences in Europe in the 1920s, a milieu that Bacula surely knew well.<sup>44</sup> A letter from Switzerland dated 1933 shows that Bacula was acknowledged as a representative of the APRA by the Socialist International and its secretary, Friedrich Adler. In this case, too, connections coexisted with disruption: the APRA networks outside Peru, growing in the years prior to 1931, remained active but faced the repression of their movement at home, against which they tried to mobilize important political and intellectual figures.<sup>45</sup>

As late as 1936, Haya de la Torre sent letters to Bacula in Geneva, where Bacula claimed to act as the APRA contact person at the League of Nations.<sup>46</sup> What irony that Bacula operated as an international politician in the same city that hosted an institution, the LoN Permanent Central Board on Opium, that was busy surveilling him as an international drug trafficker. A similar coincidence was later noted by a Swiss paper: "It may seem bizarre that the center of this narcotics association had its domicile, of all places, in Geneva . . . Here, under the wings of its enemy, this [trafficking] center felt completely safe because nobody would have suspected them in Geneva."<sup>47</sup>

At that time, Bacula was in Switzerland because he had been expelled from France. In this case too, he claimed

his political activities were the reason behind the sanction dated 1934: "I was charged unjustly," he wrote, "with being active in the Left parties" or "as a leftist extremist, since I was a high-ranking member of the political party of the Peruvian opposition, APRA, which has nothing to do with 'leftist extremism' nor with communism."<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Bacula seemed to play both the revolutionary and the career diplomat. In a dossier he submitted to counter the charges that led to his expulsion from France, he included a certificate of his membership in the prestigious International Diplomatic Academy of Paris and letters of praise from Colombian politicians following a speech he made at the League of Nations calling for harmony between Peru and Colombia.<sup>49</sup> However, he also tried to purchase rifles for APRA to start an uprising: "Our day will come!" he wrote as late as 1938 to a friend, denouncing the illegitimate military repression in Peru against the majority of citizens who supported his party.<sup>50</sup> When the French authorities investigated a case of blackmail related to Bacula's purchase of weapons from a dealer near Mulhouse, he first reassured them about his firm sympathy for France and his good relationships with politicians in Paris. Then, quite self-confidently, he stated that he had "full powers" representing APRA in Europe and that he expected to become Peru's next president.<sup>51</sup>

After he was expelled from Paris, trouble continued in Austria. One year later, the Austrian foreign minister justified his decision to expel Bacula saying that he had remained "in touch with a number of international drug-traffickers," although no narcotics were found during a search of his domicile in Vienna.<sup>52</sup> According to investigations carried out by attorneys in Vienna four years later, Bacula had indeed remained active in the illicit drugs trade after this expulsion. He had focused on Yugoslav and Bulgarian opium and heroin – which, as Vladan Jovanović has illustrated, counted among the purest

**48** NARA - RG 59, A1 1487, Bacula. Statement by Bacula before the Swiss authorities, June 7, 1938; SFA - E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, internationaler Schmuggler. Petition by Bacula attached to a letter by the head of the Interpol Marcel Sicot to the Swiss Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Narcotics Trafficking, March 28, 1957.

**49** ANF – 19940434/9. Carlos Fernandez Bacula. Annexes to minutes by the French police, October 10, 1934.

**50** ANF – F 7 14839. Bacula to Alfred Orpen, May 18, 1938.

**51** ANF – 19940434/9. Carlos Fernandez Bacula. Statement by Bacula, 1934. On the weapons affair, see: ANF – BB 18 6094 390.

**52** LNDA – Illicit Traffic, Activities of Carlos Fernandez Bacula, R4794/12/17953/387. The Austrian Foreign Minister to the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs, March 7, 1935.

**53** NARA – RG 59 A1 1487 – Bacula, Carlos Fernandez. Statement before the United States Attorney, November 4, 1931. On the opium trade in the interwar Balkans: Vladan Jovanović, *Opijum Na Balkanu: Proizvodnja i Promet Opojnih Droga 1918.-1941* (Zagreb, 2020). Bacula also made eight trips from Vienna to Bulgaria within only fifteen months, which raised the suspicions of French authorities: ANF - F 7 14839. Statement by the Head of the Bulgarian Police, August 5, 1938.

**54** NARA - RG 59, A1 1487, Bacula. Statement by Bacula before the Swiss authorities, June 7, 1938. Bacula’s lawyer even managed to obtain a statement by the main suspect, the Yugoslav citizen Tomašević, in which the latter denied knowing Bacula in the first place. ANF – F 7 14839. Tomašević to Borella, October 21, 1938. See also: Jovanović, *Opijum*, 257-258.

**55** SFA - E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, internationaler Schmuggler. The Police of the Zürich Canton to the Direction of the Swiss intelligence, July 28, 1948.

and was coveted by traffickers – for the purchase of which he had organized meetings in Belgrade and Dubrovnik.<sup>53</sup> Yet once again, Bacula claimed that the expulsion from Vienna had nothing to do with drugs: “I am looked upon in Germany [referring to Austria after the Anschluss] as a Communist, although I am an enemy of Communism.”<sup>54</sup> Bacula then moved back to Switzerland until the extradition request from Vienna – now part of the Nazi “Third Reich” – was accepted by the Swiss government. In April 1940, he was handed over to the German authorities. In the meantime, French Vichy justice also demanded his extradition due to a verdict against him pronounced in 1940 in absentia.<sup>55</sup>

This is how Bacula landed in the concentration camp of Tourelles in Paris, as mentioned at the beginning. The camp was the site of a last *coup de théâtre*, this time linking politics and trafficking. In his request he forwarded after the war to be removed from the Interpol list of dangerous traffickers, Bacula proudly claimed that he “escape[d] from the Gestapo’s claws and enter[ed], with ‘false names,’ the *Forces Françaises Combattantes* as a volunteer.”<sup>56</sup> Yet, this is not the only version of what happened. A confidential CIA document brings narcotics back into the picture. In 1944, the American intelligence service collected information about a prominent figure of the Corsican “milieu” in occupied Marseille, Simon Sabiani.<sup>57</sup> “Information from a confidential source” alleged that it was the notorious trafficker Paul Carbone, who had been connected to Bacula in the Raskin affair investigation of 1928,

**56** SFA - E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, internationaler Schmuggler. Petition by Bacula attached to

a letter by the head of the Interpol Marcel Sicot to the Swiss Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Narcotics Trafficking, March 28, 1957.

**57** On Sabiani’s trajectory: Paul Jankowski, *Communism and Collaboration: Simon Sabiani and Politics in Marseille, 1919 - 1944* (New Haven, 1989).

who interceded with the German authorities to release Bacula from the camp. Carbone collaborated with the Germans and offered Bacula's services to the *Abwehr II*, the Nazi intelligence. The American source only mentions that the "Abwehr II was content for the time being merely to obtain from him particulars concerning [Bacula's] career." Bacula was freed from the camp and Carbone provided him with a home in France that he probably did leave to join the Resistance.<sup>58</sup> According to American intelligence, however, a German officer provided Bacula with false documents in the name of Bauer that allowed him to live in wartime Paris without being bothered by the French police or the Gestapo.<sup>59</sup>

After the war Bacula continued to be on the radar of Interpol and of several national law enforcement agencies like the FBN and the Swiss police. Although he was never arrested after the end of the Second World War, his file was only closed, upon his request, in 1957, when the Swiss police confirmed to Interpol that he had never been arrested in Switzerland, that he was already 69 years old, and that the last verdict against him, dated 1940, was established without rigorous juridical criteria ("*suffisance de droit*"). Already around 1950, Bacula had moved back to Peru. In the same request, he stressed that he was well aware of the booming illicit market in cocaine from his homeland, but that he had never traded in this drug. He concluded with a note about his last change of residence, from Lima to Santiago in Chile, where he moved "to reside in peace and breathe the pure air of freedom, so rare in the 'democratic' countries of Latin America."<sup>60</sup> Once again, he invoked politics as the reason for his mobility while denying all allegations of trafficking.

Bacula's trajectory in the interwar period and during the Second World War shows many intersections with both international narcotics trafficking and international politics. Swiss, French, German, Austrian, and American surveillance institutions were also often communicating and cooperating with one another. While this is doubtlessly a sign of increasing

**58** NARA – RG 263, A1 88, Sabiani, Simon. Secret Note by the Central Intelligence Agency, October 19, 1944.

**59** NARA – RG 59, A1 1487, Bacula. Secret note received from the United States Bureau of Customs, January 18, 1945.

**60** SFA – E4321A#1991/114#267, Bacula, Carlos Fernandez, internationaler Schmuggler. Petition by Bacula attached to a letter by the head of the Interpol Marcel Sicot to the Swiss Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Narcotics Trafficking, March 28, 1957; Answer by the Swiss Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Narcotics Trafficking, July 6, 1957.

61 LNDA – Illicit Traffic, Activities of Carlos Fernandez Bacula, R4794/12/17953/387. The Swiss Foreign Ministry to the Directeur of the Sections on Traffic in Opium and Social Questions of the League of Nations, February 27, 1939.

62 "Poudre blanche," *Déetective*, 344, May 30, 1935.

63 "Aus dem Tagebuch eines Rauschgift­händlers," *Neue Berner Zeitung*, November 12, 1938.

connectivity in the world of policing, each institution followed its own agenda and elaborated specific accusations. When the Swiss police, for example, arrested Bacula in 1938, they acknowledged pending criminal charges in France and Germany, but they also hesitated to extradite him since "both extradition requests show very little evidence that Bacula personally partook in these criminal actions."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, most institutions chasing and surveilling him showed little interest in Bacula's political activities. He must have sensed this and therefore emphasized his activism whenever he talked to officials.

#### IV. Constructing the "Dope Ring Diplomat"

Until 1938, Bacula remained a character primarily known to traffickers, police, and prosecutors. He became notorious and infamous only when the so-called "*affaire Lyon*" erupted in France. This incident allowed the French as well as the international press to retrospectively connect the dots of mysterious global crime syndicates all the way back to the Raskin-Eliopoulos case of 1928-1931. The *affaire* referred to an event in 1935: on a May afternoon, a massive explosion happened at 220 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in Paris, very close to the Arc de Triomphe. The explosion revealed that a two-store *pavillon* in the courtyard served as a clandestine heroine factory, and that one of the two chemists involved had managed to escape while he was being taken to the hospital. This story immediately spread through the "true crime" press interested in the "underground life of the modern gangsters of Paris."<sup>62</sup> Three years later, based on a notebook found in the cell of a Sing-Sing inmate who had committed suicide, European police agencies were given names allegedly connected with a worldwide network.<sup>63</sup> While the head of this ring was a Frenchman, Louis Lyon, Bacula was mentioned as a close friend and important broker capable of supplying Paris with large quantities of opium produced in or transiting through the Balkans. What

nourished these suspicions was the fact that Bacula co-owned an apparently innocuous lingerie shop a few steps away from the *pavillon*.<sup>64</sup> This store was thought to be a sort of informal office connected to the illicit business. The press quickly noticed that the previously unknown Peruvian trafficker had an unusual profile which it could mobilize to amplify scandals.

Dozens of articles written on him in 1938-1939 were archived together with the police documents on the same affair. Most newspapers and magazines added very little – and not always accurate – information to the intrigues disclosed by the police and the prosecutors. They also resembled one another, since the basic information was taken from press agencies. Still, nuances in the way the characters of the story were portrayed inform us about how the trope of the “international drug trade” intersected with different perceptions of morality concerning society and politics.

The arrest of Bacula following the Lyon affair was made known by American newspapers on May 30, 1938. The Associated Press, referred to by several newspapers, quoted the head of the FBN, Harry Aslinger, rejoicing about the arrest that targeted “one of the biggest men in the narcotic business” and “smashe[d] a ring which did an enormous business both in the United States and Europe.”<sup>65</sup> The European press found Bacula’s diplomatic status especially intriguing. *Paris-Soir* described the moment of his arrest in Switzerland as follows: “- Are you Fernandez Bacula? - Correct, said the man with a distant smile. - Please follow me to the police station, you are under arrest. - But I am a Peruvian diplomat! You will regret your boldness!” The French newspaper highlighted Bacula’s self-confidence as he allegedly falsely claimed to be a diplomat while law enforcement officers carried out the arrest unimpressed. It also portrayed the role of *le diplomate trafiquant* as pivotal, claiming that “heroin, *coco* [cocaine], and opium continue to flow undisturbed throughout the world through certain diplomatic luggage.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> ANF – F 7 14839. Note by the French police, July 18, 1933.

<sup>65</sup> “Ex-envoy jailed as Drug Smuggler,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1938.

<sup>66</sup> “Des tonnes d’héroïne transportées par voie diplomatique,” *Paris-Soir*, June 4, 1938.

**67** John Kobler, "Behind the Capture of the 'Dope Ring Diplomat,'" *New York Mirror*, July 3, 1938.

**68** LNDA – Illicit Traffic, Activities of Carlos Fernandez Bacula, R4794/12/17953/387. Report by the French police, November 2, 1938.

In July, the *New York Mirror* published an illustrated story about the "Dope-Ring Diplomat." The story mentioned the methods and objects used for smuggling heroin (bowling balls, not mentioned in other sources) by "Senor Bacula." It described him as a "polished gentleman" whom "nobody could touch" because of his former diplomatic immunity. Bacula – the "man of mystery" and "Peruvian playboy" – had enjoyed "fine schooling, and his parents, wealthy and prominent, gave him the advantages of culture." Once posted to Vienna, "Bacula had the time of his life" spending a fortune until, "reluctant to lower his standard of living, he became desperate." The tabloid explained how he became involved with traffickers who blackmailed him, a "game from which you withdraw only in an ambulance – or a coffin." This was a story of rise and fall in which the winners worth praising were American law enforcement and customs officers who, with Bacula's arrest, significantly reduced the moral danger posed by heroin in their country. The perspective connecting trafficking with American society was well visible through images of peddlers and addicts that surrounded Bacula's photograph in the article.<sup>67</sup>

The journalists highlighted Bacula's diplomatic immunity, even though they knew that his special passport was no longer valid in 1938. They also knew that international trafficking scandals based on events of ten years earlier, such as the omnipresent references to the Eliopoulos case, were less interesting for their readers than delving into current ones. Quickly, then, they became interested in another plot revolving around Bacula's connections to Victoria Salti, née Behar, co-owner of Bacula's lingerie shop in Paris. She was described as a friend of Louis Lyon's and as Bacula's mistress, thereby composing a criminal, transnational triangle at the core of the 1935 explosion in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and the corresponding heroin trafficking.<sup>68</sup> Salti lived in London and was portrayed by the English press as a "fashion expert" whose association with a "restaurant keeper" (Lyon) and a former diplomat surely was as bizarre as it was intriguing for the

readers.<sup>69</sup> The tabloids emphasized Mme “Vickie” Salti’s taste for dresses and cars, which also testified to Bacula’s stature as a *viveur*. In an interview with the London *Daily Express*, Salti claimed that Bacula “is one of the best-dressed men in Europe, very distinguished looking” who “used to entertain lavishly” with “magnificent” parties. Salti’s account of Bacula revealed not only a glamorous lifestyle but also allegations of Bacula’s shipping “bombs and other munitions” to the APRA and even to Spain during the Civil War.<sup>70</sup>

The Bacula case also had implications for national politics, especially in France, where the explosion and the investigations had happened. The French press attacked corruption within its own justice and political system. This was evident in newspapers with an explicit political line, both on the far left and the far right. Among those close to the leftist *Front Populaire*, *L’Humanité* and *Ce soir* were the two that dedicated the most space to the Lyon-Bacula affair. At the other extreme of the political spectrum, the philo-fascist, ultranationalist, and antisemitic *Le Défi* also took a stance on the issue. Writing for *L’Humanité*, Lucien Sampaix vehemently attacked the “marquis and fascist” Lionel de Tastes due to his complicity with Lyon as well as Bacula. De Tastes was Lyon’s lawyer, and he had accompanied Bacula on one of the latter’s suspicious travels to New York. The lawyer was a target for the left for another reason as well: he had participated in the attempted right-wing, fascist and anti-republican riot in Paris in 1934 that preceded the electoral victory of the *Front Populaire*.<sup>71</sup> Sampaix went further and accused the prefect of Paris, Jean Chiappe, of complicity with the fascist rioters.<sup>72</sup> Protecting drug traffickers and protecting fascists was seen as a common feature of the right. Insisting on the dangerous ties between Bacula – whose alleged leftist sympathies remained unmentioned – and many high-ranking politicians in France, the journalist claimed: “We find the same gang of corrupting and corrupt ones, of buyers and of sellouts [*d’acheteurs et de vendus*]. And now, willy nilly, it is necessary to get rid of this!”<sup>73</sup>

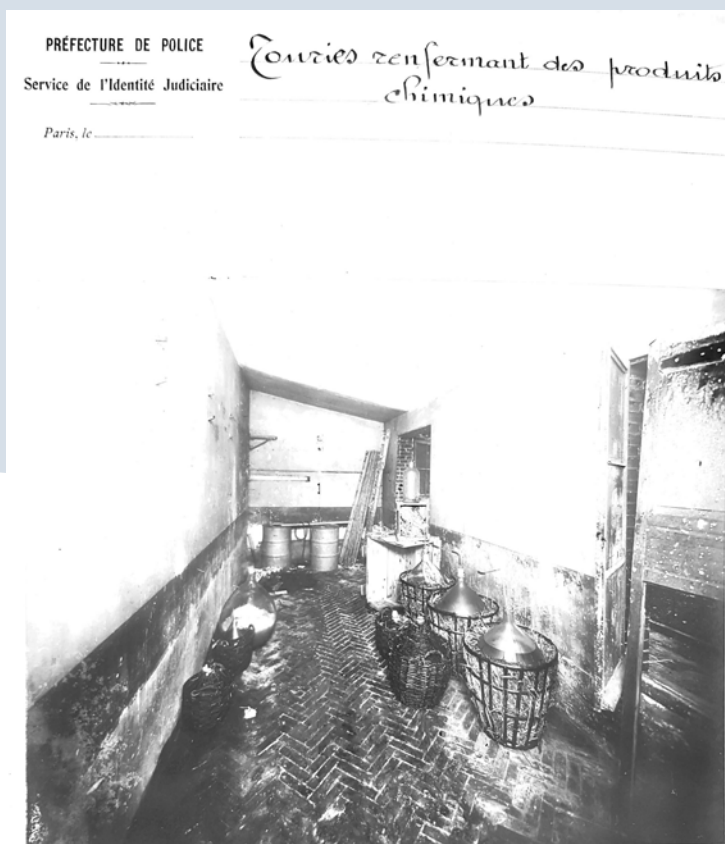
**69** “French Police Offer Guard to Ms. Salti,” *The Daily Express*, June 11, 1938.

**70** “London Drug Ring Witness Talks to the Daily Express,” *The Daily Express*, June 10, 1938

**71** Brian Jenkins and Chris Millington, *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* (London, 2015), 88.

**72** On Chiappe’s role during the February riots: Emmanuel Blanchard, “Le 6 Février 1934, Une Crise Policière?,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 128, no. 4 (2015): 15–28.

**73** Lucien Sampaix, “Le gang de la drogue et ses protecteurs,” *L’Humanité*, June 13, 1938.



**Figure 3.** One of the rooms in the building at 220 Faubourg Saint-Honoré after the 1935 explosion. Archives Nationales (France), F7 14839.

**74** Roger Dorsel, "La drogue," *Ce soir*, June 22, 1938.

**75** "Un document écrasant de la main de TL.-Th. Lyon," *Ce soir*, June 23, 1938.

*Ce soir*, the newspaper founded by the communist writer and journalist Louis Aragon, equally accused de Tastès, although its less politically virulent criticism was primarily directed against the inefficiency of the justice apparatus. The international connections behind the Lyon-Bacula affair were used to discredit the French police: "All police institutions around the world have been working on these poisoning elements [*ces empoisonneurs*], the *Sûreté nationale* has its own dossiers; let them be known. It knows the names, let them be published!"<sup>74</sup> One day later, *Ce soir* revealed that the "king of dope" Louis Lyon had been a counterespionage agent for the French state and an informant of the national police after the First World War. *Ce soir* also quoted Lyon accusing the prefecture of Paris of protecting Eliopoulos, which raised the rhetorical question: "Can the *Sûreté* freely investigate one of its collaborators?"<sup>75</sup>

Interestingly, the connections between de Tastès, Lyon, and Bacula were also used by Jean-Charles Legrand, the leader

of the far-right *Front de la jeunesse*, who attacked de Tastes based on personal frictions. In his newspaper *Le Défi*, Legrand denounced “the dope workforce: Lyon, Bacula, de Tastes, Dormoy [former interior minister and *député* of the French Socialist Party], Sarraut [former prime minister and interior minister at that time, member of the Radical Party], marquis, mischievous ones, and all the rest.”<sup>76</sup> With the same rightist-populist tone, Legrand regretted that, while de Tastes was still free, “any average citizen, without support and ties, would already sit in prison” for the same misdeeds: “Why does such a regime of favors benefit de Tastes? How did he acquire and pay for this? Who is paying? Who is squealing [*qui chante*]? Who is protecting de Tastes?”<sup>77</sup> Here again, the protection of cross-border criminal rings was deplored as detrimental to France’s integrity: this rhetoric resonated well with the tone of the “true crime” magazines. Bacula and his associates were always described as glamorous, cosmopolitan, wealthy Parisians, “wholesalers of dope, who meet in the bars of the Champs Élysées, and whose smallest business paid in *casch* [sic!] reaches up to a half million francs at least.”<sup>78</sup>

As these examples show, the international connectivity of drug trafficking could be displayed in different terms. In most cases, the connections were a steppingstone to denounce or highlight other aspects, such as the dangers for society, frivolous and glamorous lifestyles, as well as social and political critique addressing one specific country.

## Conclusion

The three main sections of this article have demonstrated that Bacula was regarded as the epitome of the interwar drug smuggler. All sides involved, from the national police authorities to international law enforcement organizations and the press, saw him as a peculiar character who, however, became interesting only through his connections to a larger web of transnational contacts, transactions, mobility, and flow of

<sup>76</sup> Jean-Charles Legrand, “Saute, Marquis,” *Le Défi*, June 19, 1938.

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Charles Legrand, “Marquis de Tastes Prince de la drogue,” *Le Défi*, June 26, 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Marcel Montarron, “Les courtiers de la drogue,” *Detective*, June 16, 1938.

goods. Interestingly, Bacula's voice has been retrieved only in the answers that he delivered – never in public – to official queries: when forced to answer questions at customs or when asking for surveillance to stop, Bacula did talk and write in detail about himself, although he always described his connections and movements as fragile, forced by necessity, or indeed as playing out in a domain in which his addressees were little interested: Peruvian politics. The same connections that made him a special character were also those that caused him trouble: a new government in Peru removed him from the consular service and other traffickers denounced him, leading to his deportation when the mandate to arrest him was executed in Switzerland. Does Bacula's trajectory imply that, after all the scandals in which he had been involved, he "got away with it" – after a relatively easy internment experience during the Second World War, growing old in Chile free from trouble? Or does it imply that, based on the very limited evidence put forth against him, since he was never caught in the act, he was a victim of conspiracies and the institutions' obsession with crime syndicates?

While these questions must be left unanswered, this article has shown some aspects related to the potential and limits of inquiring into cross-border connections, the theme of this special thematic forum, through "dope affairs" and the individual smugglers that they bring into focus. Bacula's case shows that trafficking networks relied on individual mobility, which was as vital as it was fragile, since stratagems of smuggling stood in perpetual tension with stratagems of border surveillance. It also shows that connections of mobility could be represented in contradictory, incongruent, and hyperbolic terms. Played off against each other, the two dimensions highlighted by the police and by Bacula – trafficking and politics in exile – did not produce a coherent story, yet they both invoked cross-border connections as a motive of anxiety for state authorities. A third element revealed by the article is the tension between the strongly repetitive representation

of smuggling by the press – based on detailed but occasional accounts – and the diverse implications that stories and pleas addressing the readers could have, ranging from praise of law enforcement to the denunciation of corruption.

While these conclusions point to the advantages of an actor-centered approach to the global history of narcotics, they also invite us to be cautious about overstressing a biographic perspective. The problem here is the volatility of information based on references to the same few sources. In Bacula's case, the bulk of what we know comes from the statement by Elie Eliopolous (itself produced vis-à-vis anti-narcotics authorities), the answers Bacula gave to the United States attorney in 1931, or the summary of accusations produced by the Nazi German prosecutors. It is a hazardous task to carve a "subject" and a consistent "personal" story out of this fragile record. It is more promising to use the different narratives and tropes related to criminal connectivity irradiating around a person like Bacula to investigate the social, political, and cultural realities with which the narcotics trade intersected. In other words, it was an increasingly strict international border regime, the coexistence of exile politics and international organizations in Europe, as well as a discourse on the corruption of institutions and society which made the 1930s a fertile ground for investigations and scandals about hyper-connected drug traffickers.

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