

Rolling the dice: Capitalism, trafficking and speculation across the Western Mediterranean

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This paper ruminates alongside two hashish traffickers whose lives span the Strait of Gibraltar in light of their simultaneous critique and embrace of the speculative underpinnings of contemporary capitalism. Drawing inspiration from Walter Benjamin's allegorical image of chance, illustrated in his delightful portraits of the gambler, I foreground these traffickers' distinctive engagements with and recounting of uncertainty in their profession. Faced with disempowerment and marginalization, these men chose to redress structural exclusions by embracing the perils and possibilities of the illegal drug trade. In the borderlands in which they operate, where amassing wealth relies on playing the hinge between licit and illicit, private and public, violence and law, traffickers constantly make decisions in the absence of full knowledge. They speculate to accumulate. Yet rather than distorting markets or disfiguring 'true' value, I show how such practices illuminate positionings central to contemporary economic life. Outlawed chancers submerged in the Western Mediterranean's circuits of desire, accumulation and reasoning, traffickers may very well offer a refracted image of capitalism's speculative strictures.

More Information

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