

Reciprocity and Mobility in Braudel's Mediterranean: A Conversation

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Editors' Note: Although a last-minute travel disruption prevented Professor Roberta Morosini (UCLA) from participating in the November 2024 symposium, she subsequently reflected on the theme of "mobility" in a conversation with historian Egidio Ivetic.



Roberta Morosini (RM): Braudel provides a geopolitical map of the Mediterranean through movements, depicting how societies interact with geography in terms of reciprocity. This, if I understand correctly, represents a vision of "total history," a world where "everything influences everything else reciprocally": economics intertwines with politics, culture, and society. Thus, we see an image of a society, even before history, entirely open to contingency, with no deterministic principle or latent structure. As a temporal structure that contrasts with the event-driven (which Braudel considered mere "dust"), it almost geologically realizes itself through society's interactions with geography. How much does this osmosis and reciprocity impact mobility in the Mediterranean?

Egidio Ivetic (EI): In his first masterpiece, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel begins with "The Environment" (Part One), which corresponds in his interpretation to the *long durée*, the deep structural history of the Mediterranean. Human mobility, the movement from one place to another, is not treated as a specific theme but rather as a natural trait depending on the contexts examined in his grand tableau. There are mountain dwellers who come down

to the plains and reach cities, perhaps to sell something, to work, and then return—seasonal movements. Some do settle in cities, urbanizing, though they remain few. Braudel was among the first to reflect on mountain diaspora as a shared trait across the various Mediterranean shores, each defined, as we know, by mountain ranges. Not by chance, he titles an early section: *Mountain Life, the First History of the Mediterranean?* Following this are chapters on plains, where transhumance appears, particularly in Castile, where it was famously practiced. Braudel enumerates the seasonal nomadism that characterizes mobility between the Sahara and the Mediterranean shores, or in the Balkans.

The idea is that migrations are an intrinsic part of the circulation within an organism—the Mediterranean—which, as a maritime system, relies fundamentally on the movement of people and goods. These are recurring phenomena, both on a small scale and regional level, season by season. It is not about an exodus or mass migration that transforms a place's demographic features, but rather about small, individual migrations that enable adaptation. This was the Mediterranean of the sixteenth century. Braudel applies this model to the mountains, the plains, and maritime regions, particularly island contexts. Here he addresses island emigrants. There are also, of course, commercial migrations, such as merchant colonies that settled in Levantine trading posts, the famous *fondacos*, which had extraterritorial status. And it was through precise, negotiated terms that the meeting between Europeans/Christians and Muslims occurred, with economic considerations taking precedence. These dynamics follow a premodern rhythm; Braudel emphasizes that in the preindustrial world, seasons determined the rhythm of everything, with seasonal cycles imposing a determinism that influenced economic life. Year after year, this cycle repeated. Thus, mobility also appears as a known, recurring cycle, part of the whole. But it is almost always individual, familial, or small group mobility, an agreed-upon mobility, always preceded by well-established economic patterns—a mobility that sixteenth-century Mediterranean civilizations accept and incorporate while remaining fundamentally themselves. In Braudel's period of study, the late sixteenth century, the Christian and Ottoman/Muslim Mediterranean coexist in parallel historical tracks.

RM: Through Braudel's historical geography, conceived as shifting along the long and medium term, we transition from studying "events" to studying structures and interconnections, which allows for the recovery of certain subjects relegated to the margins of history. From your perspective as a Mediterranean historian, how might this characteristic mobility reintegrate a Mediterranean perspective in university classrooms that goes beyond trends, inviting a reflection on migration—a theme to which you dedicate a chapter in your recent book, *Il grande racconto del Mediterraneo* (Il Mulino, 2023)?

EI: Braudel invites us to consider capillarity, small movements; and in a similar way, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell discuss smaller, minimal movements, such as coastal cabotage, which played a vital role in Mediterranean life compared

to large-scale navigation, more documented and thus more studied. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of organized colonization in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, i.e., the relocation of entire communities—agreements with sovereign authorities to repopulate abandoned Mediterranean territories. These were Orthodox Greek and Albanian communities, for example, who relocated to the Kingdom of Naples. Many of these colonizing efforts ultimately failed. Still, today we have a clearer idea of mobility in the early modern Mediterranean, including the influx of European renegades to North African ports. Nonetheless, on the whole, these phenomena did not involve significant numbers. The early modern Mediterranean was commercially dynamic, not in decline, and was generally socially conservative. The Mediterranean logic did not envision progress as we conceive it post-nineteenth century; it was about survival, conserving what one had and was.

RM: How does the concept of connectivity from Purcell and Horden, linking distant places through both sound and movement like on a map, differ from the central aspect of Braudel's historical poetics? Also, what are your thoughts on mobility and the *long durée* and the urgency of reevaluating Braudel now that Purcell and Horden have introduced the concept of connectivity—a spatial connection that doesn't account for the factor of time?

EI: Horden and Purcell have offered an epistemology for Mediterranean history, going beyond Braudel. They discuss fragmentation, precariousness, and connectivity as the paradigms on which the Mediterranean, understood as an organism, is based—an organism because it had the capacity to adapt to various historical shifts while remaining fundamentally the same on a structural level between roughly 1000 BC and 1800 AD. With the nineteenth century, everything changes: modernity transforms the Mediterranean, segmenting it according to state-national logic. This brings us to the present. Today the Mediterranean is first and foremost a matter of geopolitics, then everything else. Historians agree on this. But before, for a couple of millennia, the Mediterranean was what I call a "system of systems." But that was a different Mediterranean, the one we study.

RM: How significant is Braudel's experience of "exile" in his conception of "mobility," which informs his Mediterranean?¹

EI: Exile in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries was part of individual destinies, less so of "collective destinies," to use Braudel's phrase. Certainly, we have the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and then the Moriscos from Catholic Spain. These are well-known events. The exile of entire communities of 200–300,000 people benefited the Ottoman Empire, strengthening North African and Balkan cities economically. However, it is essential to be precise, distinguishing territorial mobility, which is economic and social, from exile, which has deeper political, religious, cultural, and

¹ I refer here to John. A. Marino, "The Exile and His Kingdom: The Reception of Braudel's Mediterranean," *The Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 3 (2004): 622–52.

symbolic connotations. Exile events are exceptions, while mobility is a phenomenon—structural, at least from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Once again, things have changed since the nineteenth century. There has been mass immigration of the French into Algeria, Italians into Tunisia, the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1923 involving millions, and the exodus of millions of French from Algeria in 1960–62. Mass exile resurfaces after every war. Today, the Global South knocks on the doors of the West—that is, the European Union, specifically Italy, in the Mediterranean. This is our own time: Exile has become a mass phenomenon. A