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# SEASONAL VARIATIONS ON SOME MEDITERRANEAN THEMES

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"Social life does not continue at the same level throughout the year, it goes through regular, successive phases of increased and decreased intensity, of activity and response, of exertion and recuperation" (Mauss 1979: 78-79).

"The sea's climate, with its own clearly defined seasons, regulates Mediterranean life into two phases, year in, year out, sending the Mediterranean people by turns to their summer then to their winter quarters" (Braudel 1972: 246).

Many writers have attempted to link climate to social behaviour.<sup>2</sup> The French, perhaps because their country embraces such diverse climates — but perhaps also because they have a penchant for grand theories — have given this interesting subject considerable attention. The ideas of Mauss and Braudel have been particularly significant. Mauss (1904) examined the impact of seasonal variation on the social life of the Eskimo. He showed how the starkly contrasting summer and winter seasons are accompanied by equally distinct patterns of social behaviour. While the details of this difference need not concern us here, the seasonal variation of social behaviour he demonstrated does. Braudel (1949) reworked this theme in a specifically Mediterranean context. In his classic study of the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II he demonstrated that the economic, social and political life of Mediterranean societies in the 16th century was strongly influenced by the seasons. Winter was a time of hardship and rest. In contrast, summer was a period of hyperactivity. Four centuries have passed since Philip II

1. These preliminary thoughts were formulated in March 1981 while I was Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and presented to the Third International Congress of Studies on Cultures of the Western Mediterranean, Djerba, Tunisia, 3-9 April, 1981. I am grateful to Dirkjan Beukenhorst, Inga Boissevain, Joe and Theresa Friggieri, Dymphna Hermans, and Maja Maur for discussing the weather with me.
2. Among others Montesquieu (1748); de Staël (1800); Taine (1865); Durkheim (1897); Huntington (1924); Markham (1947).

reigned. During this period man has become more independent of seasonal constraints. In what measure has this independence affected the relation between seasons and social behaviour in the societies on the North shore of the Mediterranean?

The climate of Mediterranean coastal areas is characterised by two distinct seasons. A long, hot and exceedingly dry summer extends roughly from April to October. The first rains in September herald the arrival of the raw, wet and stormy winter season, which lasts from November through March. The break between the two seasons, often announced by a sudden, violent deluge, brings much the same excitement as the onslaught of the monsoon in Asia. It signals in dramatic fashion the transition between two social seasons. Braudel described winter in the 16th century Mediterranean as a standstill. It was a period during which there was little traffic. Many ships were laid up between October and April to avoid the fierce winter storms. Travel and commerce were thus severely restricted. During these months the agricultural cycle required minimal labour. Winter was a period of introversion and limited communication. It was also a time of hardship. The extreme discomfort of winter life in houses built to withstand heat rather than cold, with lofty ceilings, draughty windows and tiled floors, must be experienced to be understood. Winter was a time of harsh poverty as food and energy supplies dwindled (cf. Chambers, 1979). It was also a period when quiet diplomatic negotiations and planning took place. Since transportation was limited by storm at sea and floods and mud inland, piracy, revolts and military expeditions were also severely restricted. Winter was thus a time of consolidation, introspection, hardship and peace.

Summer, in contrast, brought renewed activity. April was perhaps the busiest month. Ships were fitted out and military expeditions prepared and sent forth. Above all, in societies heavily dependent on both agriculture and trade, crops and commerce demanded increasing attention. Late ploughing took place in April. Then followed a succession of harvests: grain, figs, grapes and olives. At the end of summer the ground had to be ploughed again before winter rains made the soil too heavy to work. Summer with its warm weather and abundant food supply was also a period of feasting. Patron Saints were honoured and weddings celebrated. Such celebrations were also traditional times of courtship. The tight social control characteristic of small inward-looking communities relaxed somewhat in summer. The celebrations and much of the daily round of business and domestic activities took place outdoors, in public. With no rain to interrupt them, people who met accidentally in public, spent hours in conversation. Summer was a time of intense transaction with travellers from near and far. But summer was also the season of piracy and war. Braudel noted that most major

Mediterranean battles, governed as they were by the movement of men across water, occurred in the summer, when the sea is often as tranquil as a pond. Summer was a period of work, travel, celebration, and war, of activity and relaxed conversation.

It is significant that for the North European, if not for the local, the summer semester became stereotypical of the Mediterranean world. The feasting, dancing, swimming and singing in summer became familiar through the writings of North Europeans who rarely stayed longer than September<sup>3</sup>. The winter season, no less typical of the Mediterranean, remained largely under-reported and, therefore, unfamiliar to the northerner.

There have been many striking technological and political-economic developments since the age of Philip II. Transport technology has reduced to a lake what was once a vast, almost limitless sea. It can be crossed now at any time of the year. Airports have replaced harbours as the most important communication centres. Marseilles, Barcelona, Genoa, Venice and Ragusa have ceded pride of place to Madrid, Rome, Belgrade and Beirut. Telephones, radio, television and teleprinters link cities to their hinterlands, and northern Europe to the Mediterranean world. Communication that took months in the 16th century has become a matter of minutes. Even the constraints of climate have been softened by new sources of energy applied to heating, air conditioning, irrigation.

The Mediterranean world has entered into a more intense symbiotic relationship with north-west Europe. The industrialisation, urbanisation, even the labour relations and climate of northern Europe now directly affect the lives of millions around the Mediterranean. The rapid industrialisation of Europe was made possible by the reserve army of Mediterranean labourers that surged northward following World War II. Economies of scale have brought industrial concentration, urban overcrowding, conveyor belt specialisation and environmental pollution in the north. Growing protest about these conditions is providing some relief for many. This has included both the right to holidays away from work and the financial means to enjoy them. During the past 15 years virtually all north European workers have become able to take a two to three week break to charge themselves physically and mentally. The need to escape, to recover increases as the pressure for higher productivity continues to mount. It is in this sense that northern Europe and the

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3. A random selection of travellers to Malta and Sicily, for example, demonstrates their preference for the summer: Brydone (1776) travelled from 14 May to 1 August, 1770, De Non (1790) from May through September, 1778 and Melon (1885) from 10 April through 11 June, 1884. Only De Borch, (1782) visited the islands in winter. Perhaps for this reason he disagreed sharply with some of Brydone's observations.

Mediterranean world are becoming increasingly interdependent. The north European, whether executive or manual worker, searches for as complete a change as possible during his annual holiday. He prefers rural to urban environment, agrarian to industrial surroundings, sunny, warm weather to his habitual cool cloudy climate. Above all he looks for a sociable, gregarious lifestyle to contrast with the reserve of his customary social surroundings. Because the Mediterranean in summer offers these contrasts, over one hundred million visitors swarm into the region annually. They spend upwards of US\$7 billion (Boissevain 1979). Paradoxically, many of the same attributes that forced Mediterranean labour into northern industry — the ubiquitous sea, the hot, dry summers, the rough terrain, the primitive rural technology and the agro-pastoral setting — are now attracting tourists. For centuries these conditions were responsible for much of the region's relative poverty. They have now become major economic resources.

Have these sweeping, radical developments fundamentally changed the traditional pattern of summer activity and winter standstill that Braudel noted?

Summer by the Mediterranean is still characterised by great activity. From June through August the new tourist harvest takes place. In three months an important supplement to (if not the entire annual) income must be gathered from summer visitors. To do this locals often work 18-hour days, seven days a week for 14-16 weeks. Many must use stimulants to keep going (Hermans 1980, Stott 1979). A 22-year old waiter in Cambrills described the experience:

Your income for a whole year is there waiting if you work like crazy for those three months. Fine, you don't look forward to it; you have no life for those three months; you take pep-pills but are still so exhausted you can hardly see straight.

...when it's finally September and a bit less hectic, you're too tired to go out or enjoy the weather. Often I'm sick; not really sick but lifeless and tired and not interested in anything. That can last weeks — and then it's winter again! (Hermans 1980: 103, 104).

During summer there is not only an exaggerated movement into the region — there is travel within it and out of it. If they can afford it, Mediterranean urbanites and, increasingly, people from rural towns and villages move to the mountains and seaside to escape summer heat. They also travel to the north of Europe. Growing affluence is increasing (summer dispersion of Mediterranean peoples away from their normal places of residence.

Communal rituals are becoming more intense in summer. Traditional folklore events and the joyous celebration of community patron saints are not only prime tourist assets. More than ever they serve as

symbols of community identity for the indigeneous minority flooded by waves of strangers. In Malta, if not elsewhere, the scale of such celebrations is growing (Boissevain 1981). Winter festas are being shifted to summer. This is done as much to provide entertainment for visitors as it is to protect the growing treasure of decorations from winter storm damage. Secular entertainment has also intensified. Night clubs, restaurants and discos have sprouted all along the Mediterranean. Built ostensibly for foreign tourists, they cater increasingly to locals.

Escalation of summer entertainment and long hours of work away from family control heighten the traditional summer relaxation of moral standards. The holiday influx of hordes of unattached, provocatively dressed north European girls with more flexible sexual morals are turning the erotic dreams of countless Mediterranean machos into reality. Mediterranean women are under increasing pressure to relax their own stricter sexual codes or virtually to lose sight of their men until winter (Boissevain 1979; Hermans 1980; Scott 1979).

The increased work load and the flux of outsiders has reduced interaction between locals. Those over 30 are too involved with their exhausting work to socialise. The younger ones use their greater energy after work to communicate with tourists. The pressure of work has also altered traditional patterns of summer leisure. Those involved in the tourist harvest have no time for family meals, siestas, beach outings, fishing expeditions and conversation in the cool of the evening. These were once important components of the "Mediterranean" way of life.

Many summer visitors are not foreign. They are migrants returning from the north to celebrate their annual holidays at home. To the locals they are very special. They are neighbours and kinsmen who must be welcomed home and feasted. Family prestige depends upon the lavishness of such hospitality. Summers, when hospitality can take place outside, in public, is thus also the season during which duelling for prestige is most pronounced. Money carefully saved during the rest of the year in summer flows like water. Summer is a time for spending, winter for saving.

Despite increased technology that has made it possible to travel almost instantly between Mediterranean countries at all times of the year, most people still move in the summer. They do so not solely for pleasure. Many travel for war. Summer is still the time of Mediterranean coups and invasions. All major military acts in the Mediterranean area since the 1943 Allied summer invasion of Italy have taken place from April through October (Steinberg 1979):

1948 May	War erupts in Palestine
1952 July	General Nguib seizes power in Egypt
1956 June	British and French attack Suez
October	Israel invades Egypt

1965 June	President Ben Bela of Algeria deposed by Colonial Boumédienne
1967 April	King Idris of Libya deposed in coup
June	Military coup in Greece
1969 September	Six day war between Israel and Egypt
1974 April	Portuguese government overthrown by Military
July	President Makarios overthrown by military coup. Turkey invade Cyprus
1980 August	Libyan warship threatens Maltese offshore oil operations.

The list can, and alas in future will, be extended. Armed military violence is still as much a summer activity as it was in the 16th century.

Summer by the Mediterranean thus still embraces the work, travel and celebration that characterised it in the age of Philip II. But in tourist zones these characteristics are becoming grossly distorted, dissonant.

More than before, winter is the period during which Mediterranean societies repair the ravages of summer. Many people take months to recover from the summer work frenzy, from the tidal wave of visitors, from the exhausting demands of pleasure. As the wave recedes, traditional social rhythms are re-established. Social control tightens as neighbours become visible once again. Church-going becomes more pronounced and the movement of girls more carefully watched. Interaction between locals increases as they rediscover each other during evening promenade and in cafes. In town, locals again stage operas, plays and exhibitions for each other. Communal and personal bonds are consolidated and tightened. As in the past, winter is still a period of standstill, of rest and peace.

Thus despite sweeping developments, the seasonal variation of behaviour is today just as pronounced as it was in the 16th century. If anything it has become more extreme. Technology and political-economic developments have not changed the underlying realities; they have exaggerated them. But there has been a change of another order. Increasingly numbers no longer welcome summer as a release from the idleness and hardships of winter, as a time of joyous celebration. Winter now provides release from summer. For many the winter standstill, not the summer frenzy embodies the quintessence of Mediterranean life and culture. But perhaps it always has. Braudel notwithstanding, it seems likely that Mediterranean artists, architects and scientists were most active and creative after September's oppressive humidity and before the onset of the debilitating heat of summer.

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