The economic history of the Mediterranean is a mystery within a mystery. Economic historians, sociologists, philosophers and, in general, any scholar who works on modern Europe has to consider the question of what Samuel Huntington named the “Great Divergence” or, at least, the economic and cultural effects of the Great Divergence: Colonialism, eurocentrism, orientalism to name a few. Why Europe’s GDP went from being roughly similar to Asia’s GDP to being explosively larger than that of civilizations like China or India, allowing Europeans to impose their economy and their culture to almost every corner of the world, is a mystery that continues to elicit answers that range from religion, culture, chance, slavery, colonialism, climate, race to the entire corpus of Western knowledge. Only a few scholars, however, have investigated the question of this economic divergence not in terms of the West against the rest, but in terms of the crucial divergence between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. Paul Vieille was one of those precious scholars and he should be remembered as a founding father of Mediterranean studies.

Vieille’s crucial importance for the research on the Mediterranean was twofold. On one hand, he and Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples, the journal he directed so energetically, kept the discussion on the Mediterranean alive during a moment of fundamental crisis for Mediterranean studies. On the other hand, his personal contribution on the differences between the economy of the port cities of the Mediterranean, in particular Marseille, and the port cities of Northern Europe, in particular those of the Hanseatic League, provide a fundamental contribution for the
study of the Great Divergence and for the study of what should be called the
Mediterranean Divergence. In both cases, Vieille had the intellectual courage to move
against the prevailing scholarly Zeitgeist to affirm the importance of the study of
Mediterranean societies to understand the dynamics of late capitalism and its remote
history.

His contribution to the field of Mediterranean Studies as promoter and director of
*Peuples méditerranéens*/*Mediterranean peoples* should be more easily acknowledged
today, when there is a renewed interest in the Mediterranean, than it was during the
years when the journal first appeared, when Mediterranean studies was facing a crucial
epistemological crisis. At the end of the 1970s, the anthropologists and sociologists who
had been instrumental in keeping the interest in the Mediterranean alive during the
1960s were becoming critically aware of the role that colonialism had played in creating
Mediterranean Studies as a field. In 1977, when *Peuples méditerranéens*/
*Mediterranean peoples* was first published, John Cole pointed out that the
Mediterranean, particularly Southern Europe, had become an object of research for
anthropologists after decolonization had made most of the ex European colonies unsafe
for western anthropologists. The case of Clifford Geertz, who found himself in the “most
pitiable of conditions: an anthropologist without a people,” when Indonesia became
politically unstable and thus moved his scholarly interests to Morocco, is only the most
famous example of this Mediterraneanism for lack of safe alternatives. The suspicion
that anthropologists looking for “a people” in a secure area had invented the
contemporary Mediterranean as a cozy alternative to the rebelling “natives” of the world
could not inspire confidence in the future of the field.
If the critical self reflection of anthropologists had not been enough, the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, right at the beginning of the adventure of *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples*, sounded a dead bell for any research that clearly tried to transfer the tools elaborated in conjunction with European colonialism to the Mediterranean area. It is not only the combination of the critique of Orientalism and what Said called “reverse orientalism,” the “essentializing valorization of everything that the colonizers had considered backward,” that did not favor a dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean, but it was also the very relation between knowledge and power, reaffirmed by Said, that kept anthropologists (rightly) on their toes. The fact that, for much of the 1960s, anthropological studies on the Mediterranean had been mostly the domain of British and French scholars, the same academic worlds that Said accused for their orientalism, was enough to suggest the need for a critical reexamination of the concepts that had given temporary unit to the Mediterranean, e.g. “honor and shame.”

Moreover, Southern European scholars, some of whom politically invested in affirming the European status of their nations in opposition to the Middle Eastern status of the South shore, started to denounce the Northern European interest in their rural populations as a form of Orientalism. As the Portuguese Pina-Cabral stated in an often cited article, Southern European anthropologists accused their Northern European colleagues of using the Mediterranean as a category to distance themselves from the people they studied. Thus, at the end of the 1970s, the scholarly consensus seemed to move against the Mediterranean from all sides: from the South Shore, where intellectuals were denouncing the will to power behind the will to know of Western
Scholars, and from the North Shore, where intellectuals were denouncing the Northern European scholars’ invention of the “Mediterranean” as an attempt to divide Europe between a modern North and a backward South.

What some of the participants in these debates seemed to desire so ardently, a sharp division between Europe and the Middle East, mirrored well the lack of academic exchanges among scholars from the two areas. What it did not represent at all, instead, was the economic reality of the Mediterranean. While scholars from the Northern and the Southern shores did not have a forum in common where their research could be shared, most of the commercial exchanges from the South took place with the European North, and not among nations of the South. Since the market of ideas did not overlap with the commercial market, the dominant forces rested squarely in Northern European and capitalist hands, since the European capitalist enterprises saw the entirety of the market, while the intellectuals sympathetic, or even organic, to the struggles around the Mediterranean knew, at best, half of the story. Paul Vieille and the collective around *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples* tried to re-equilibrate the field by creating a virtual space where radical intellectuals could share their research across the division between the Middle East and Europe. To put it bluntly, while the intellectuals invested in the status quo were sharpening the weapons to produce and maintain the impending “clash of civilizations,” Vieille was trying to reaffirm the reasons of a unified struggle of the adversaries of late capitalism.

At the center of this project, Vieille saw the fundamental unity of the region first of all from an economic and social perspective. Rather than accepting a simple binary division between center and periphery, Vieille insisted on a multilayered progression
from center to periphery, where the countries and the regions that bordered the Mediterranean had in common to be the first periphery of Northern Europe, one of the most industrialized areas in the world. This European “first periphery” included Southern France, Portugal, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia and Iran, besides the actual countries that bordered the sea. Such proximity to the industrial North entailed some crucial common elements in the Mediterranean: 1) migration to the North for the populations expelled from the local labor markets by the disappearance of traditional activities; 2) tourism as a major industry in the area; 3) a particularly marked fracture between the cosmopolitan elites, educated to consume European material and immaterial goods, and the rest of the populations, used to consume local products. The combination of these factors placed the Mediterranean in a very special peripheral position, between integration with the core countries and a permanent subaltern position of the popular classes.

Consequently, more integration with the center was desirable to close the gap between part of the elites, who were already integrated, and the subaltern groups, who experienced only the downsides of the peripheral position. The fracture between the integrated elites and the excluded subalterns could push the conflicts between core and periphery along the lines of reactionary identitarian projects, as much in Iran as in the South of France, with the emergence of localist, identitarian movements. Thus, from a political point of view, in the pages of *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples* Vieille conducted a struggle both against the romanticization of an imaginary golden past preached by the new nationalitarian movements, and against the integrated elites not so secretly allied with the economic and political core countries against their own nations. The evolution of the Iranian revolution and the reemergence in Europe of
nationalist and micronationalist movements constituted the historical framework in which Vieille and the other intellectuals around the journal operated, anticipating some of the most explosive trends that have characterized the Mediterranean Basin in the last four decades.

Seen from the perspective of the analysis put forward by *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples*, the emergence in the Mediterranean of reactionary tendencies as a result of the pressure that globalization was starting to place on the “first periphery” was both predictable and predicted. Against the tendencies to repudiate common solutions, both at the theoretical and at the practical level, Vieille went to look for a common perspective across ethnic, religious, national and cultural borders, convinced that the fracture between a common economic reality and the localist approaches to theory had to be analyzed, but not embraced.

It is within this general political and intellectual project that we can understand Vieille’s contribution to the question of the “Mediterranean divergence.” The special peripheral position of the Mediterranean directly called into question what had constituted Europe’s exceptionalism, its becoming economic core while entire areas within Europe or in the Mediterranean had become “first periphery.” Since the 18th century, multiple explanations had appeared to explain the Mediterranean divergence, but none of them, precisely because they generally embraced Europe’s exceptionalism, could be used to overcome the center/periphery dichotomy. On the contrary, most of these theories served the purpose of preserving the balance of power between the North and the South of Europe and the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean.
Much more than the feeble weapons of Mediterranean Studies, the legacy of colonialism had left on the ground the theoretical poisons of racist, climactic, religious explanations of the European industrial revolutions, which condemned forever areas of the world to being periphery. Open racist explanations, with their emphasis on the “white race” down to all the shades of “color” from England, Germany, Northern France to the Mediterranean, to sub-Saharan Africa are too obvious of an example to deserve a discussion in this context. More insidious explanations, which combined “objective” elements with culture, were and still are far from having abandoned the Western common sense, sanctifying the reality of economic disparity more than they explain it. A project that aimed at overcoming the center/periphery opposition in the large Mediterranean, as defined by Vieille, required and requires the debunking of essentialist theories of underdevelopment in the Mediterranean. After all, if climate or religion or culture were at the basis of the European and Western economic divergence, no hope of truly overcoming the divergence could exist except for climate change, the conversion all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean to Calvinism, or into college graduates from Harvard or Cambridge.

The sheer dimension of the project required a collaborative effort that would overcome the abstraction of essentialist explanations to combine rigorous theory with equally rigorous empirical analysis. Besides the analysis and discussion of the Iranian revolution, which I leave to the specialists of Iranian history and society, two articles that Vieille authored and published on *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean peoples* deserve to be considered in some detail to understand the relevance that his research maintains today: the first one, his study on the city of Marseille from the XII to the XVII
century, and the second one, his study on the emergence of “Occitanism” in Southern France. Together, they constitute the blueprint of a crucial research on the sociological history of Southern France from the Middle Ages to the present. In other words, they constitute Vieille’s contribution to his own Mediterranean project as a French intellectual working on the French Mediterranean. If Pina Cabral had accused Mediterraneanists of using the Mediterranean to distance themselves from the peoples they studied, Paul Vieille used his research on Southern France to make the Mediterranean closer to him.

From the title, the study on Marseille clarifies an important methodological point that highlights Vieille’s perspective on the study of the Mediterranean: Braudel’s *longue durée* had to be preserved in order to make sense of the social structure of a Mediterranean city, from the Middle Ages to early Modernity to late Modernity. Despite the homogenizing pressure that French institutions exerted on French society as a whole since the formation of the French territorial state, the Mediterranean cities, he claimed, still defied expectations of normalcy when compared to the rest of France. How and why the Mediterranean cities differed from the French “ideal-type,” was left to impressionistic descriptions and lack scientific clarity. Leaving these differences unexplored, however, opened the door to the manipulation of these differences and transformed them into irrational motivations to support the hegemonic groups.

The task that Vieille decided for himself was to provide a theory of the difference between Northern Europe and Southern Europe that, moving genealogically, avoided the risk of collecting a series of random oddities. Marseille, before Louis XIV radically changed the legal and political structure of the Mediterranean city, became, in Vieille’s analysis, both a field of empirical research and a case study that could be generalized
and transformed into the theory he wanted to achieve. The position of the city within the Medieval world of economic exchanges, the class composition of the city and the political and economic institutions that were created within the framework of the economic life of the city were, along the line of Vieille’s marxist sociological analysis, interpreted as a unity. What made this Mediterranean port city similar to other Mediterranean port cities was the economic importance of long distance trading. The considerable resources accumulated through commerce in the Mediterranean were appropriated by both the city mercantile class and by the city aristocracy. As a consequence, the interests of the two groups converged, rather than clashing.

This stable money match between aristocrats and merchants differentiated Marseille and the other Mediterranean cities with a similar economic structure from the Northern European cities, where a clash of interests between nobles and traders was the norm. Northern European merchants accumulated money by organizing the trade between the city and the local countryside. The land aristocracy that sold the surplus produced in their estates to traders was in direct conflict with the merchants for the extraction of value from the items they sold, since the surplus had to be divided along the lines of the relations of power between the two groups. As long as the aristocracy controlled the political power of both city and countryside, the merchants were forced into a fully subaltern position. During the slow process of creation of the free Northern European cities, the free associations of small merchants organized themselves in guilds to conduct their struggles against the aristocrats and the few wealthy merchants that controlled the cities. The creation of a political space autonomous from the aristocracy was the condition of possibility for the merchants to secure their own
economic position through the appropriation of larger portions of economic surplus. The independent city of Northern Europe was, consequently, the result of the class struggle between aristocrats and merchants: the city became the domain of the merchants as the countryside remained the domain of the aristocracy as a result of the clashing interests of the two groups.

In Marseille, on the contrary, the independence of the city had not been the result of the poor merchants’ struggle to equilibrate the balance of power with their adversaries, but the consequence of the agreement between aristocrats and wealthy traders to protect the port from outsiders. The dominant group in the city was composed by an alliance between wealthy noblemen and wealthy merchants who had bought a title of nobility. These two groups stabilized their alliances through marriage strategies that integrated money and aristocratic blood. This aristocracy was a merchant aristocracy that closely resembled similar groups in Venice or Genoa and was different from the free cities of Northern Europe. The independence of the city was the way for this hybrid group to protect the monopoly that those who controlled the port had in the trading in the Mediterranean. The result of the fusion of merchants and aristocrats into a single group with the city at its center was the modification, rather than the elimination, of the structures of feudalism. Rent and profit lived together in a combination of feudalism and merchant capitalism, rather than opposing each other as the main form of surplus extraction of specific classes.

The numerous conflicts within the city were the result of the struggles of factions with very similar social composition, ideologically motivated by conflicts that took place at the international level. At the center of these conflicts was the role of political power
within the city, since political power was the crucial tool to determine the portions of rent that were extracted from the commercial activities. In the absence of class organizations, like the free associations of merchants and artisans in Northern Europe, families were and remained the crucial element of stability around which political alliances were constructed and maintained.

Clientelism, the placement of family members and associates within the state’s bureaucratic machine to secure the position of power of the leaders and to reward with a stable income the members of one’s own party, emerges in premodern times as one of the features of the Mediterranean city. The legitimation of the different groups that took control of Marseille rested upon these systems of alliances and on the ability to mediate, both within the city among the different factions and without the city with the surrounding and hostile world of aristocratic power. In analyzing the causes of the failed industrialization of Marseille in the century following the ones covered by his historical reconstruction, Vieille relied on what he had identified as characteristics of the Mediterranean city in opposition to its Northern equivalent to try to address the question of the Mediterranean divergence.

From the beginning, he rejected any interpretation that isolated culture from the socio economic context in which it operates and accepted to read the role of mentality in industrial development, e.g. the supposed hostility of merchants against factories, as a symptom of the socioeconomic structure. The crucial role plaid by families in the organization of the distribution of wealth within the port city, for instance, became for Vieille one of the reasons that explained why anonymous commercial societies never fully developed in the Mediterranean cities. Since the different factions were not
organized along conflicting class interests, but, as we have seen, they existed on the basis of personal and family relations created around a leader, they were stable only in the presence of personal, and above all, family alliances. In other words, the political and social organization of the Mediterranean cities favored conflicts and clientelism, while discouraging anonymous collaboration and impersonal association.

Since the social structure of Marseille had developed by fusing two social groups and by preserving feudal forms and non feudal forms of economic organization, the chimeric nature of the city continued to reemerge in many areas of its economic and cultural development. In the relation between merchant aristocrats and the countryside, for example, Vieille pointed out that the ownership of land absolved mostly a symbolic function for the urban aristocracy and, consequently, an effective organization of the land for its economic exploitation was not encouraged. Similarly, since most of the profits for the merchants derive from long distance trading, little pressure came from them on the local artisan associations for a more efficient organization of their production. Both in the city and in the countryside, political compromises with the local social structure in order to preserve social peace and maximize profit in the exploitation of the long distance trading was the rule. Thus, if conflicts of class had forced the merchants and artisans of Northern Europe to take the lead in the modernization of both the economic and the political structure of their free cities, the merchant aristocrats of Marseille had established and maintained their power in the process of mediation between factional interests, making the entire city into a corporation for the exploitation of surplus produced elsewhere and traded in the Mediterranean.
When we compare Vieille’s conclusions and methodology with some of the new research on the forces behind the European “great divergence,” we can appreciate how much some of the points that Vieille was making at the end of the 1970s would benefit scholars of the “great divergence” today. In particular Vieille’s study on the influence of long distance trade in Marseille should be confronted and contrasted with the recent study conducted by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson on the crucial effects that long distance trading in the Atlantic played in the Northern European economic take off since the XVI century. Both Vieille and the three authors of “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth” underline how the original accumulation of capital through trade is not enough to explain, even in a marxist perspective, the question of the origins of capitalist development, if it is not combined with an analysis of the institutional reality and evolution of the societies invested by the arrival of capital from long distance trading.

Acemoglu and his coauthors have documented how the opening of the Atlantic trade impressed an acceleration to the rhythm of economic growth of the nation states involved in the new commercial routes: Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Both the data on urbanization growth and on GDP growth show a very significant differential between “Atlantic Europe” on one side, and the rest of Europe on the other side. Despite significant differences in the starting points, the European countries that had no access to the Atlantic trade had similar growth rates both in their levels of urbanization— slightly less than a factor of 2 in the period between 1500 and 1850— and in their GDP growth— around 30% between 1500 and 1850. Both in GDP and urbanization, Atlantic Europe significantly outperformed non-Atlantic Europe in the
considered period, and while the Mediterranean cities without access to the Atlantic grew at the same rate as their inlands, Atlantic ports grew much faster than the other European cities. Moreover, the regions in Spain and Portugal that were not directly involved in the Atlantic trade grew at a rate lower than the average rate in Western Europe, while the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic ports grew at a faster than average rate.

Thus, the historical data collected by economic historians for the entire European continent confirm the fact that neither culture nor religion, not to mention climate and race, played any significant part in the economic growth of Europe. Spain and England, the Netherlands and Portugal belong to one category, while Italy, Germany and Russia, to mention a few, belong to another. Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson equally rejected the historical models that focused only on the role of colonialism and slavery in explaining the economic transformation of Atlantic Europe. Accepting the conclusions reached in the 1970s by Stanley Engerman and confirmed in the early 1980s by Patrick O'Brian and again, in the early 2000s, by Joseph Inikori, they recognize that the accumulation of capital produced by slavery and colonialism was not relevant enough to explain such a sudden and dramatic divergence from Asia in the economic growth of Europe. As in Vieille’s analysis of the Mediterranean cities, the effects of long distance trading could be properly analyzed and understood if they are considered in the context of the effects that they had on the institutions of the nations involved in the long distance trade.

In fact, if the growth rate in the areas of Europe involved in the Atlantic trade was higher than the one in the rest of the continent, Acemoglu’s, Johnson’s and Robinson’s
study highlights an equally significant difference in growth: that between the countries ruled by absolutist monarchies and those ruled by republican institutions or, at least, constitutional monarchies. Spain and Portugal grew more than non Atlantic Europe, but less than England and the Netherlands, with France in an intermediate position between England and Spain. Moreover, in the long period analyzed, the countries with more republican institutions ended up with both more economic growth and even more Republican institutions. The thesis of the three authors is, therefore, that the countries where merchants and slave traders had the opportunity to restrain the power of the government to extract most of the surplus imported in Europe from the Atlantic trade, the merchants used portions of their newly acquired wealth to further expand their political influence over the political power. Thus, the countries where XVI century merchants had inherited institutions autonomous from the control of the aristocracy and knew how to use these institutions in the struggle over the appropriation of surplus were the ones who took advantage of the newly available “Atlantic” capital and started the modern European economic expansion.

What Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson could have added to their mosaic if they had known of Vieille’s study on Marseille are the crucial tesserae that the Mediterranean port cities provided. Once culture, race, climate and religion had been proven to be insignificant for the Great Divergence to refocus on the effects of long distance trading and institutions, scholars are forced to ask why the Mediterranean ports remained in a peripheral position compared not only to the first comers, but also to late comers like Germany. Vieille’s study suggests that the Mediterranean ports remained peripheral not only because they did not participate in the Atlantic trade, but also because the political
institutions that had been developed to manage the Mediterranean trade were inapt to support the successive phase of European economic expansion. In other words, despite their republican institutions, cities like Venice, Marseille or Genoa had institutional arrangements disadvantageous for the industrial revolution, albeit in a way that differed from the problems presented by absolute monarchies.

By combining a historical materialist approach that highlights the role of class struggle and of the original accumulation of capital with a neoclassical attention for institutions and their effects for the development of capitalism, a clear thesis emerges for those interested in studying the Great Divergence and the Mediterranean Divergence. Following Vieille’s study on Marseille, the availability of capital from long distance trading can inhibit the development of the institutional conditions for the economic development of a society by fostering the consuming habits of a cosmopolitan elite and clientelism. On the contrary, the availability of capital becomes a developing factor when class struggle has created institutions that are unwilling to fuse with the aristocratic rentiers. Within an institutional framework that puts the rentiers in check, the availability of capital accelerates the development of anti-aristocratic institutions and, in turn, economic development; within an institutional framework born out of a stable compromise of aristocrats and merchants, conflicts no longer happen along class lines, but along the personal and family alliances around groups ideologically connected with foreign superpowers.

When we substitute the spices and silver of Medieval and Early Modern economies with oil in today’s Mediterranean economies, the coherence of Vieille’s intellectual project emerges in all its clarity. The sudden availability of capital derived
from trading with distant, richer economies was not resulting in economic development for the economies of Vieille’s large Mediterranean. On the contrary, familism, tribalism, clientelism, ideological dependency from foreign powers and economic underdevelopment were the bitter fruits of oil trading. The cultural, racial or religious ideological weapons deployed by the imperialist powers to justify their superiority over the Southern shore, or even the Northern shore of the Mediterranean, were debunked by serious historical analysis that used history to verify economic theories. If the historical analysis of medieval Marseille could cast some light on the economic reality of Saudi Arabia or Iraq in the 20th century was not because these societies were culturally or religiously backwards, but because economic backwardness followed rules of development that could not be ignored by those interested in the economic reform of these countries. Without the creation of coherent institutions that counterbalanced the feudal structure of some Mediterranean nations, the alternative could only be between remaining “first periphery” of the industrialized world under the leadership of cosmopolitan autocrats, or the reactionary isolationism of the local elites who dreamt of an imaginary golden past.

After Khomeini’s triumph in Iran, the problem of how to address the rise of these political movements with “nationalitarian” (nationalist and identitarian) ideologies became politically urgent, and Vieille offered a precious contribution to our understanding of Mediterranean societies in the age of globalization. Thus, after a long series of interventions and editorial efforts on the Iranian revolution, Vieille published an important article on the rise of “Occitanism” in Southern France. Both methodologically and politically, this article provides another important lesson for the future of
Mediterranean Studies today. When we look at this article from the perspective created by his study on Marseille, in fact, the implicit lesson of this research should become transparent.

Vieille started his analysis of the Southern French farmers and lower strata who were lending their support to the emergent micro-nationalist movement with a long qualitative description of their lives. He narrated the role of hunting, the forms of cultural expression and the associative practices of these Frenchmen (the culture he describes is a male culture and women are not analyzed) with an anthropological gaze. As in the case of his research on Marseille, the effect is both of proximity —he clearly has a direct, personal knowledge of these people— and of general relevance. Contrary to the anthropologists educated in Northern Europe who were looking at the Mediterranean in search of “a people,” Vieille studies his fellow citizens, albeit culturally different from him. Nonetheless, the results of his research are both specific and relevant for the entire Mediterranean basin, most obviously for Italy, where the Lega Nord would become a major political party only a few years later, but also in the South shore where the nationalitarian movements were wearing religious clothes.

In line with his commitment to a research politically engaged, Vieille asked himself and his like-minded readers if marxists had to see as progress the dissolution of local cultures and the processes of deterritorialization put in motion by capitalist development. After all, he argued, the dissolution of local communities opened up the space for the development of alternative forms of solidarity, most crucially class solidarity. If the answer to this question was positive, then the regionalist and nationalitarian movements were simply reactionary movements. However, this
perspective simply ignored that the culture of the subaltern groups was also a form of class struggle and that the resistance against the homogenizing forces of late capitalism was both a commitment to culture and to the transformation of culture. Consequently, the relation with these movements could neither be dismissive nor ignore the real trauma that the processes of deterritorialization and cultural homogenization were provoking to the subaltern groups.

Thus, the crisis of the nation states was exposing marginal groups that had previously found a niche within the protective framework of the nation to the creative destruction of capitalist development. Since modern capitalism was attacking the limited forms of autonomy that the nation states had allowed for the subaltern subjects, the popular reaction was conservative. Vieille between abstract principles of development and solidarity with the subaltern classes chose the second. The cultural intervention in the Mediterranean that he often advocated was also directed at overcoming the cultural fracture between the elites and the subaltern groups. Fostering a sense of superiority of the intellectual Left over the cultural reactions of the subaltern classes against the destruction of their own forms of living, both in the Northern and in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean was not part of his political project.

Despite the breath and vastness of his research interests, when looked at from the perspective of his commitment to a radical transformation of the Mediterranean, Vieille’s research appears extraordinarily coherent. With an intellectual toolbox that included economic, sociological, historical and anthropological analysis, he engaged in a fight against the power-serving abstractions of Eurocentrism to highlight the common dynamics that agitated the Mediterranean, from Iran to Southern France. His analysis of
the Mediterranean divergence went hand to hand with the discussion of the role of oil in contemporary societies of the South shore. His analysis of the birth of the nationalitarian movements in Southern Europe resonated with his research on the winning side of the Iranian revolution. Altogether, his commitment to the creation of a common Mediterranean perspective for the subaltern groups aimed at providing the analytical and synthetic tools to the subaltern groups to struggle for their own liberation and had nothing of the patronizing liberal invitation to intercultural dialogue. Mediterranean studies, at least those who are willing to move away from the Northern-European-centric perspectives of the age of decolonization, should continue to learn from Paul Vieille’s research and intellectual perspective. I, for one, will continue to read his work as a source of inspiration and as a source of thorough, original and engaged historical analysis.