

Introduction

Fernand Braudel, the *Longue Durée*, and World-Systems Analysis

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Is it possible somehow to convey simultaneously both that conspicuous history which holds our attention by its continual and dramatic changes—and that other, submerged, history, almost silent and always discreet, virtually unsuspected either by its observers or its participants, which is little touched by the obstinate erosion of time?

—Fernand Braudel

Fernand Braudel, preeminently influential French historian and historiographer, has been celebrated to the extent that for decades his name has been cited in its adjectival form. More specifically, his insistence on the plurality of social times, anchored in the *longue durée* as structure, has been a, if not the, fundamental conceptual underpinning of world-systems analysis—underlined by the fact that, as Alain Brunhes writes, in 1977 “his career was consecrated internationally, particularly in the United States, with the founding of the Fernand Braudel Center” (2001: 11, translation—REL) by Immanuel Wallerstein at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Fernand Braudel was born the son of a teacher in 1902, lived his early childhood years in rural France, and went on to study history at the Sorbonne where he took his degree in 1923. He then taught the subject in Algeria from 1923 to 1932; Paris from 1932 to 1935; and Brazil from 1935 to 1937. He was appointed to the IVe section, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris in 1937, by which time he was already working on his thesis. As a German prisoner-of-war from 1940 to 1945, he finished writing most of this thesis, which he defended in 1947 and published as *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* in 1949. In that same year, 1949, he was elected to the Collège de France, succeeding Lucien Febvre. Braudel was as much an organizer and institution-builder as innovator. In 1956, he became editor of the journal *Annales* and president of the VIe section, É.P.H.É., the epicenter of *Annales* scholarship, and from 1962 he served as chief administrator of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. Fernand Braudel was elected to the Académie Française in 1984.

La Méditerranée, itself the product of many years of reflection and research in archives around the Mediterranean, immediately established Braudel's reputation, and his place in the *Annales* tradition in which his influence soon became dominant. The journal, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, founded by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in 1929, changed its name, emphasizing its scope, to *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* in 1946. The movement the journal anchored exhibited a set of interconnected characteristics. History was to be *totale* and its writing problem-oriented; it was to be "*histoire science du passé, science du présent . . . in dialectical opposition*" to traditional history, Ranke's "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*" (Wallerstein 1978: 5); the result was an interdisciplinary outreach to all the sciences of man. Attention broadened from the political and the diplomatic to the economic and the social and the *longue durée*, the time of the long-term structures of social reality, was privileged over the time of events (only "dust" for Braudel).

The plurality of social times grounded by the concept of the *longue durée* is already explicitly specified in *La Méditerranée*. The structure of the book begins with the long-term "history whose passage is almost imperceptible, that of man in his relationship to the environment, a history in which all change is slow, a history

of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles”; continues with the medium term of “slow but perceptible rhythms”; and concludes with “traditional history—history, one might say, on the scale not of man, but of individual men, what Paul Lacombe and François Simiand called ‘*l’histoire événementielle*’, that is, the history of events: surface disturbances” (Braudel 1972a: 20–21).

In 1958, in response to what he considered “a general crisis in the human sciences” (Braudel 2009: 171) and as a plea for their rapprochement, Braudel presented an in-depth clarification of his idea of time as a social construct, rather than a simple chronological parameter, in his “Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée” (*Annales E.S.C.* XIII, 4: 725–53). The intent of this article as critique, and indeed, as “a call for discussion” (Braudel 2009: 203) is apparent from its publication under the rubric *Annales* specifically intended for such interventions, “Débats et Combats.” He reiterated his conception of time as *durée*, duration, and his differentiation of a plurality of social times—the short term of events or episodic history (for instance, political history), the medium term of *conjunctures* (such as, among others, economic cycles), and the long term, the *longue durée*, of structures (the regularities of social life whose change is almost imperceptible). Here, however, he notes a fourth time, that of the very long term (*la très longue durée*, such as to be found in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss), “which knows no chance occurrences, no cyclical phases, no ruptures” and limits “us to the truths that are a bit those of eternal man” (Braudel 2009: 195, 196). In so doing, he thus insists that the *longue durée* is not eternal and thereby avoids the problem of ahistorical generalization in nomothetic social science (unlike the traditional social sciences) as well as the ephemeral quality of the event privileged by traditional history. As Immanuel Wallerstein has written:

Braudel’s insistence on the multiplicity of social times and his emphasis on structural time—what he called the *longue durée*—became central to world-systems analysis. For world-systems analysts, the *longue durée* was the duration of a particular historical system. Generalizations about the functioning of such a system thus avoided the trap of seeming to assert timeless, eternal truths.

If such systems were not eternal, then it followed that they had beginnings, lives during which they “developed,” and terminal transitions (2004: 18).

We are indebted to Maurice Aymard for the original idea of an international series of colloquia commemorating the 50th anniversary of the publication of Braudel’s article at which the chapters included in this volume were presented. As part of this Fernand Braudel Center celebration, Immanuel Wallerstein produced a new translation in English of the French original; it is included here as an appendix. However, these articles are not just a reverent acknowledgment of a debt to the past. They also bear witness to how the crisis Braudel recognized in the mid-1950s is no less of a crisis today, a crisis, however, that developments in world-systems analysis have confronted directly. Certainly one of the hallmarks of this collection is the way in which, as a whole, it conforms to the very first argument Braudel makes in his path-breaking article, namely, that “the first thing we urgently need to do is to come nearer to each other. . . . In addition, the bringing together of the social sciences must be all-inclusive” (Braudel 2009: 172). Indeed, it would be difficult to place any of these articles squarely in the confines of any of the traditional disciplines, even though today in a period of economic downturn and straightened economic circumstances in the major institutions of knowledge production, the universities, the traditional disciplines have reacted typically by circling the wagons and policing their borders against intruders or their own colleagues with cosmopolitan tastes.

The impact of Braudel’s thought and the way it has influenced, and continues to nourish, the conceptual development and practical research in world-systems analysis is foregrounded from the very beginning of the book. Dale Tomich is concerned with the practicality of using the concept of the *longue durée* in the construction of an historical social science that emphasizes Braudel’s insistence on objects of enquiry as ensembles of changing relations, or analysis “grounded in a single spatially-temporally differentiated and complex unit subject to multiple determinations” in contrast to “formal comparison of commensurate units.” Substantively, he explores the work of Ernest Labrousse and its impact on Braudel and

the “second *Annales*” followed by an in-depth discussion of Italian microhistory. Braudel himself was concerned with the relationship among his multiple temporalities: if we view the world only in the long term “the role of the individual and the event necessarily dwindles; it is a mere matter of perspective.” Indeed, added Braudel, are we right to take an “Olympian” view? If “we view history from such a distance, what becomes of man, his role in history, his freedom of action” (Braudel 1972b: 1242–43)? But, argues Tomich, after concentrating on the short term as a response to the serial history practiced by the *Annales* school (linking this section to the discussion of Labrousse), “what the microhistorians have yet to do is, in Braudel’s phrase, to turn the hourglass over the second time, that is to say, to reverse the methodological procedure and examine the *longue durée* and structural time through the lens of the short term, the local, the particular.”

Much as Tomich argues that Braudel “recuperates the complexity of historical temporality by prioritizing geophysical-social space,” Jason Moore redeploys Braudel’s emphasis on the geographical structures of the world and the way they shape history by elaborating the processes they underpin. His contribution examines in detail the geo-history, that is the environmental history, of Dutch hegemony—“capitalism as ‘world-ecology’.” This may be seen, he argues, as the march of commodity frontiers (from Poland to the New World) of grain, timber, and metals, and their relationship to the accumulation of capital. Philip McMichael is likewise concerned with environmental questions, reflecting a deepening awareness in world-systems analysis of the relationship between the processes of historical capitalism and the material conditions of the world and the consequences of their differentiation across the globe. Taking up the question of the “metabolic rift” (that Moore has previously explored), McMichael treats it as an epistemological break: “Epistemically, to restore an understanding of ecological constraints means focusing on the limits to capital’s attempt to overcome ecological barriers, limits that express themselves in degradation of natural resources, including global warming” and argues for a reformulation of “what we mean by ‘value’.”

Peter Taylor argues that Braudel uses “his historical concepts to straddle times and spaces.” In consonance with Braudel, Taylor then resuscitates the idea of

the extreme *longue durée* by focusing on city/state relations and uses case studies to investigate city networks in terms of commercial practices. Wilma Dunaway takes off from Braudel's perception of a large-scale inertia of the poor that has characterized the *longue durée* of historical capitalism and that has repeated itself in endlessly renewed cycles. In teasing apart this statement, she examines in detail the processes associated with "households" (above all the semiproletarian household) and especially the dialectical relationship between proletarianization and housewifization. In sum, she concludes that not only is the work of "housewifized laborers . . . a structural necessity of capitalism . . . [but moreover] the deepest secret of the modern world-system is that capitalists acquire much of their wealth by extracting surpluses from and exacting costs to households."

Ravi Arvind Palat's contribution illustrates how the concept of the *longue durée* might be applied in the non-West; indeed, for Braudel, "history is the sum of all possible histories—a set of multiple skills and points of view, those of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The only mistake, in my view, would be to choose one of these histories to the exclusion of all the others" (Braudel 2009: 182). Richard E. Lee offers an example of the way the structures of knowledge approach—directly related to Braudel's statement that "mental frameworks are also prisons of the *longue durée*" (2009: 179)—may be directly applied to a theoretical category, in this case that of "superstructures." Eric Mielants reminds us of the hurdles that remain to be cleared in order to implement a long term approach in social research to reach beyond Eurocentricism and the narrow confines of the traditional disciplines.

Finally José da Mota Lopes links Immanuel Wallerstein to Braudel through an analysis of the former's bi-weekly "Commentaries." These commentaries, published twice monthly and available on the Fernand Braudel Center Web site in thirty-five languages "are intended to be reflections on the contemporary world scene, as seen from the perspective not of the immediate headlines but of the long term." According to the author, the "Commentaries" express a specific epistemological and methodological practice by bringing together the short term of events with a *longue durée* perspective—neither of which according to Braudel could exist alone. Indeed, we can only agree with Mota Lopes that the "Commentaries" express Braudel's

dialectic of continuities, which emerge from the work of the historian's repeated observations. Nothing is more important in our opinion, than this living, intimate, infinitely repeated opposition between the instantaneous and the time that flows slowly. Whether we are dealing with the past or the present, an awareness of the plurality of temporalities is indispensable to a common methodology of the human sciences (Braudel 2009: 173).

The articles presented in this volume thus reflect both the spirit and practice of the intellectual agenda espoused by Fernand Braudel in "History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*." They demonstrate how the home disciplines represented by the scholars included here (history, sociology, and geography) can come together—overcoming the limitations imposed by their isolation—around the concept of the *longue durée*. Indeed, they are evidence of how the dialectic of multiple temporalities and the social production of space that Braudel championed have been carried forward in world-systems analysis for a more socially relevant understanding of the world and its future possibilities.

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