
The Brazilian regional issue as determinant for understanding the metropolization process in the 21st century

La cuestión regional brasileña como determinante para comprender el proceso de metropolización en el siglo XXI

A questão regional brasileira como determinante para a compreensão do processo de metropolização no século XXI

Leônidas de Santana Marques ¹ <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6714-4039>

¹ Universidade Federal of Alagoas – Campus do Sertão, Delmiro Gouveia, Alagoas, Brasil, leonidas.marques@delmiro.ufal.br

Received on: 12/30/2023

Accepted for publication on: 04/30/2024

Abstract

Brazil has historically presented a complex regional issue. Our general objective is to analyze the relationship between the Brazilian regional problem and the process of metropolization in our country in the 21st century, connecting to the dynamics of productive restructuring, urban concentration and concentrated deconcentration. We consider both the theoretical debate on the uneven development of capitalist relations in the country and data which denote the concentration process that has been established throughout the last decades. We started from a bibliographic review and data collection from the IBGE. The metropolization of space in the context of the Brazilian regional issue reaffirms structural unevenness, exacerbating the centralization of capital in the Southeast region and further aggravating the challenges of overcoming inequalities.

Keywords: uneven development, regional analysis, concentrated deconcentration.

Resumen

Brasil ha presentado históricamente una fuerte cuestión regional. Intentamos analizar la relación que se establece entre la cuestión regional brasileña y el proceso de metropolización en el siglo XXI, dialogando con las dinámicas de reestructuración productiva, concentración y desconcentración concentrada. Consideramos tanto el debate teórico sobre el desarrollo desigual

[Geopauta](#), Vitória da Conquista, V.8, 2024, e13904

This is an open access article under the CC BY Creative Commons license

de las relaciones capitalistas en el país como datos que denotan el proceso de concentración que se ha instaurado a lo largo de décadas. Partimos de una revisión bibliográfica y recolección de datos del IBGE. La metropolización del espacio bajo la égida de la cuestión regional brasileña reafirma asimetrías estructurales, exacerbando la centralización del capital en la región Sudeste y complicando aún más los desafíos de superación de las desigualdades.

Palabras clave: desarrollo desigual, análisis regional, desconcentración concentrada.

Resumo

O Brasil vem apresentando historicamente uma forte questão regional. Pretendemos analisar a relação que se estabelece entre a questão regional brasileira e o processo de metropolização no nosso país no século XXI, dialogando com as dinâmicas de reestruturação produtiva, concentração e desconcentração concentrada. Consideramos tanto o debate teórico sobre o desenvolvimento desigual das relações capitalistas no país quanto dados que denotam o processo de concentração que vem se estabelecendo nas últimas décadas. Partimos de revisão bibliográfica e do levantamento de dados do IBGE. Argumentamos que a metropolização do espaço sob a égide da questão regional brasileira reafirma nossas assimetrias estruturais, agudizando a centralização de capitais na região sudeste e complexificando ainda mais os desafios de superação das desigualdades no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento desigual, análise regional, desconcentração concentrada.

Introduction

Inequalities in Brazil can be perceived with the naked eye from different perspectives. While walking on the streets, we can identify the perverse way in which capitalist relations develop in our country, such as the high number of homeless people or people living by begging. However, inequalities are also revealed at other levels in Brazil when we take into account the data that summarize the country's national picture in relation to wealth production, participation in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), job creation, etc. Brazil has historically presented a strong regional issue, captured by acute inequalities between different parts of the country. Different data that summarize the national reality show that we would have several 'Brazils' within our country, with different levels of access to income or even basic

factors for human life, such as water or electricity. However, we must see the country as a contradictory unit in its unequal process of space production.

Therefore, we also need to consider that the uneven development of capitalist relations is not specific to Brazil. Quite the contrary, capitalist society as a whole has transformed into an increasingly unequal world, pointing out that, in fact, inequality is at the basis of the reproduction of relations mediated by value. In this context, Smith (1988) highlights that one of the main points that supports the contradictory mode of capitalist development is precisely inequality. This author indicates that “spatial inequality has no meaning, except as part of a whole that is the contradictory development of capitalism” (SMITH, 1988, p. 151). The capitalist mode of production develops on an already differentiated material base, but, from this base, it is consolidated through the reproduction of social relations that exacerbate differences as inequalities. These are clear in the landscape and reveal a contrasting process in which “[...] contradictory tendencies towards differentiation and equalization determine the capitalist production of space. In action, this contradiction that arises at the heart of the capitalist mode of production is marked in the landscape as the existing pattern of unequal development” (SMITH, 1988, p. 151).

As for the tendency towards equalization, the universal process of territorialization of capital is evident, which implies the transformation of all social, economic, cultural relations, etc., according to the logic of capitalist reproduction. Everything tends to become a commodity, and regarding the production of space, we witness a dialectical process of social production with private appropriation. But the tendency towards equalization is established on different bases that, instead of being annulled, are incorporated into the dynamics of value. “Uneven development is, at the very least, the geographical expression of capital’s contradictions. The geographic fixation of use value and the fluidity of exchange value translate into tendencies towards differentiation and equalization” (SMITH, 1988, p. 217). And it is precisely in the mediation of these contradictions that we must understand the process of production of urban space in capitalism, taking into account the particularities of each national reality, as in the case of Brazil.

In this sense, the general objective of this text is to analyze the relationship established between the Brazilian regional issue and the process of metropolization in our country in the 21st century, dialoguing with the dynamics of productive restructuring, concentration, and concentrated deconcentration. We believe that it is essential to discuss from this perspective precisely because we see the primacy of reading the totality which requires debate on the Brazilian regional issue and because we understand that there is no process of producing space that is separate from the particularities of the territorial formation of each national reality.

We organized this text into three moments, in addition to this introduction and final considerations. In the first part we focused on building an argument about how we understand, in general terms, the Brazilian regional issue. To this end, we draw on the debate about the relationship between universality and particularity to understand the connection that is established between the general process of capitalist valorization of space and the determinants of the differentiating process that are also structuring capitalist relations. Thinking specifically about the Brazilian case, we draw on the reflections brought by Oliveira (2003a; 2003b) and Cano and Guimarães Neto (1986). In the second moment we present some data on the process of regional concentration of wealth production in the country throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, discussing how these data help us to interpret the Brazilian regional issue. Finally, we argue about how this reality of intense concentration process determines the particularities of the development of capitalist relations in Brazil when we take into account the debate on the metropolization of space, illuminating discussions such as concentrated deconcentration, centralization of capital, and diffuse agglomeration.

The Brazilian regional issue

The dynamics of the reproduction of capitalist relations globally occur in a contradictory way. If, on the one hand, we have the intensification of the process of capitalist valorization of space with the tendency to transform all things into

merchandise, on the other hand we have that this process can never reach a complete homogenization of everything. And, more than that, this incomplete homogenization is crossed by processes of differentiation that are also functional to the logic of reproduction of social relations in the capitalist mode of production. In other words, homogenization and differentiation are processes that, although contradictory, structure the form of capitalist reproduction. And these processes determine the capitalist production of space.

In general terms, this first argument that we present conforms to a macro reading of the processes of space production in capitalism, although with this we do not want to disregard all the particularities that are also inherent to capitalist development. In fact, many of the processes are in fact discernible when we take into account their particular dimension. We believe that the discussion on the regional issue in capitalism passes precisely through this debate. In countries like ours, the demand for extracting more value creates an environment in which inequalities are exacerbated by the symbiosis between the archaic and the modern.

To address the uneven development of capitalist relations, we believe that it is essential to understand the multiscalarity of processes and how the contradictory production of space in capitalism is only discernible when we analyze the national scale not dissociated from the global historical totality. In our view, the entire discussion on the Brazilian regional issue therefore requires a reading that also considers the country in its relationship with the international division of labor. This debate appears, for example, in discussions about the underdeveloped nature of capitalist relations in Brazil. For Oliveira (2003a), it is more than necessary to break with a reading in which the condition of an underdeveloped country would be a stage for the same national State to one day become a developed country, indicating that underdevelopment is a product of the expansion of capitalism, when it is not an anomaly, nor a step. Capitalism shaped itself as such over the centuries, producing inequalities and, in the process, delineating what became known as underdeveloped countries.

[...] On a theoretical level, the concept of underdevelopment as a singular historical-economic formation, polarized around the formal opposition of a “backward” sector and a “modern” sector, does not sustain itself as a singularity: this type of duality is found not only in almost all systems, but in almost all periods. On the other hand, the opposition in most cases is only formal: in fact, the real process shows a symbiosis and organicity, a unity of opposite, in which the so-called “modern” grows and feeds on the existence of the “backward”, if you want to keep the terminology. (Oliveira, 2003a, p. 32)

In this way, this author goes towards refuting the idea of underdevelopment as a truncated evolution. It is only possible, then, to understand the condition of an underdeveloped country taking into account the international division of labor and how it has been reconfigured over the decades. In other words, each country assumes a certain location within this division and it is precisely the relations between the national State, fractions of intra-border capital and fractions of extra-border capital that establish the condition of underdevelopment. With this, Oliveira highlights the dialectical reading of the relationship between universality and particularity to define how it is only possible to think about the uneven development of capitalist relations in Brazil and its resulting regional issue in light of the processes that are established at a global level.

In the author's view, it is by considering the theory of uneven and combined development, through the archaic-modern pair, that we have one of the main analytical keys for unveiling the contradictions of capitalism in the country. In this reasoning, we highlight the way Oliveira treats the notion of primitive accumulation. When we consider the constitution of monopolistic capitalism in the transition from the 19th century to the 20th century, the relations between the central economies and the peripheral economies (many of these former colonies of the former) will be fundamental for the concentration of wealth in the center and poverty in the periphery. But this process is not limited to this space-time context. Throughout the 20th century, new expropriation marches were established, new peripheries were formed, many of these within old peripheries. Thus, what we have is the observation

that capitalism develops by creating peripheries and primitive accumulation is not restricted to specific contexts, it is structural.

In the Brazilian case, what we have is what Oliveira calls 'particular specificity': the development of capitalist relations here first created peripheries that did not previously exist and then established the concentration of capital. This process of creating new peripheries is one of the main consequences of uneven and combined development. In countries like ours, the demand for extracting more value creates an environment in which inequalities are exacerbated by the symbiosis between the archaic and the modern. In what would be a kind of 'Brazilian way', the arguments that are put forward by Oliveira to think about the development of capitalist relations in Brazil lead us to an interpretation of a vicious cycle of the national economy in which internal and external interests combine in the reiteration of the dependent character in the context of the international division of labor. The metaphor used by the author to interpret this particular specificity is that of the platypus. In this, the unequal and combined conditions of the development of capitalist relations become more acute over time.

That's what the platypus is: there is no possibility of remaining underdeveloped and taking advantage of the gaps that the Second Industrial Revolution provided. There is no possibility of moving forward, towards digital-molecular accumulation: the internal bases of accumulation are insufficient, they fall short of the needs for a rupture of this magnitude. Only "primitive accumulations" remain, such as privatizations provided: but now with the dominance of financial capital, they are just transfers of assets, they are not, strictly speaking, "accumulation". The platypus is condemned to subject everything to the whirlwind of financialization, a kind of "black hole": now it will be social security, but this will precisely deprive it of redistributing income and creating a new market that would lay the foundations for digital-molecular accumulation. The capitalist platypus is a truncated accumulation and an inequalitarian society without remission. (Oliveira, 2003b, p. 150)

Thus, both primitive accumulation and uneven and combined development are important foundations raised by the author to think about Brazil, and many other national scenarios around the world, in the context of the 21st century. These are theoretical constructs that are not condemned to explain only the constitution of

imperialist capitalism in the transition of the 19th and 20th centuries, quite the opposite. The specific form of reproduction of capital in contexts of economic dependence implies considering these determinations, without disregarding the new facets of capitalist development in contemporary times.

Considering the intra-border processes that were established in Brazil mainly from the 19th century onwards, we believe that the production of the regional issue in the country is established taking as a starting point the combination of the different spatial contexts of a diverse territory such as Brazil with the homogenizing dynamics of the process of capitalist valorization of space from the colonial enterprise. In this way, different scenarios for the development of relations (capitalist or not) were formed in the Brazilian territory throughout the colonial period. Thus, we agree with Cano and Guimarães Neto (1986, p.170) when they state that

The attempt at a correct understanding of the regional issue involves, in our understanding, the study of the historical process of the different regions and their interrelations, and the demarcation of capital accumulation that tends to occur in different ways in the different economic spaces.

There are, therefore, peculiar processes within the very particularity of the development of capitalist relations in Brazil. In our view, it will be precisely these particularities that will set the tone for Brazil's uneven development, even though, as we have said, this cannot be seen as an island separated from the expanded process of development of the capitalist mode of production throughout the world. When we take into account the specificities of some parts of the country, for example, we can clarify a little better how we understand the inequalities of this movement.

If we consider the relations that were established in the Amazon basin region, we have a first interesting example. Due to the spatial organization itself, considering the mobility of work due to the arrangement of the branches and tributaries of the Amazon River, a form of production flow (mainly natural rubber) was established, which generated a concentration of stages of the commodity cycle in the called supply houses, places where workers both sold their production and accessed much of the goods needed to support their families on a daily basis. This type of social

relationship that was established, based on the sparse (if not non-existent) salaried workforce, generated a low-complexity regional economy coexisting with architectural sumptuousness, as in the case of some churches in Belém or the Amazonas Theater in Manaus. Much of the wealth derived from this form of extraction flowed outside the region or took the form of luxury items and buildings.

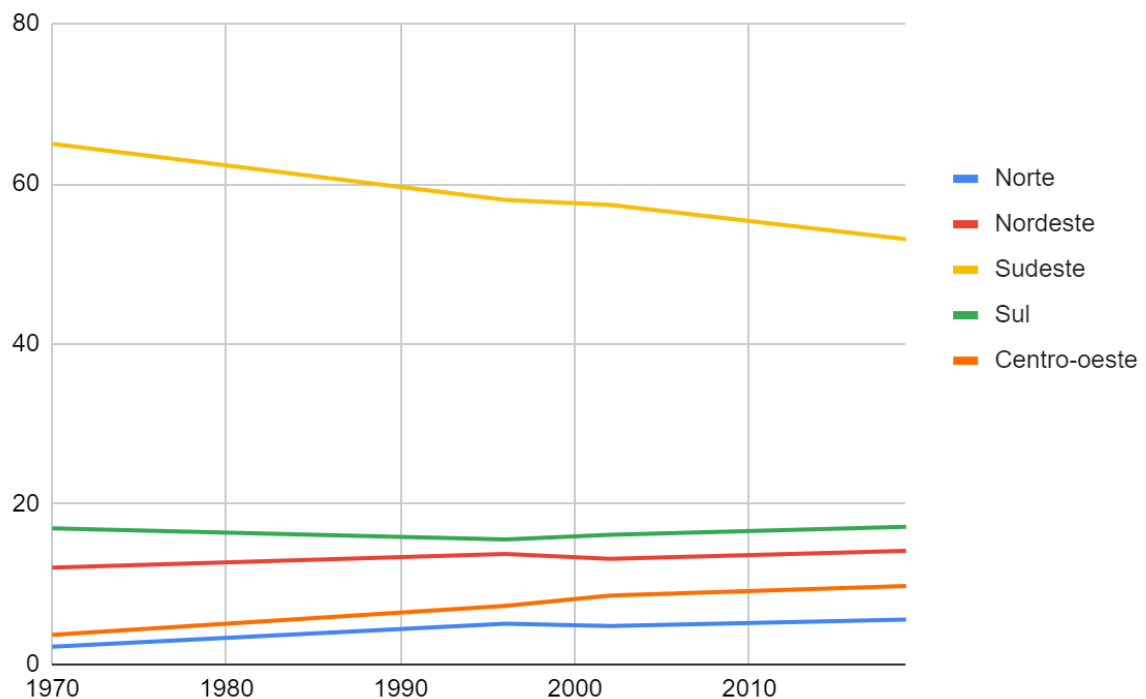
When we consider the northeastern reality, we have another important example of this development of the Brazilian regional issue. Also characterized by a low complexity of capitalist relations in several parts of the region, the Brazilian Northeast had intense moments of wealth production linked to sugar cane and cotton crops. However, precisely the agrarian structure marked by high land concentration ended up generating an environment of little dynamic capitalist relations, especially in relation to low wages. With greater complexity and development of capitalist relations compared to the Amazon basin region, the Brazilian Northeast presented some more intense forms of wage labor, although in combination with archaic social relations and structures derived from the golden period of colonial production.

Both the Amazonian and the Northeastern examples (and together with these, we could think of many others, including at different geographic scales of analysis), show us how Brazil, which reached the end of the 19th century, is extremely complex and the intensification of the valorization process capitalist space that has been taking place since then encounters regional diversity that increasingly turns into regional inequality. When we have, therefore, the heightened process of industrialization in the country, mainly in the state of São Paulo, the uneven development of capitalist relations in Brazil gives the mark of the structuring contradiction that today is the basis for understanding the Brazilian regional issue. The particular characteristics of São Paulo, having, among other factors, a distinct social structure and the presence of a salaried workforce with a greater degree of consolidation, guaranteed a significant regional concentration of wealth. In the next topic, we will talk a little about some data that express this concentration, directly derived from the uneven process of industrialization in Brazil throughout the 20th century.

Regional inequalities over the last decades

The entire context of regional inequalities that we witness today must contain in its explanation the historical process of development of capitalist relations in the country. As we have argued, the homogenization of social relations mediated by value occurs by generating asymmetries, such as the intense process of concentration. This does not only occur in Brazil, but is better understood as something determining the capitalist mode of production. However, in our country, this concentration is evident from different perspectives. By analyzing Graph 1, we have one of these perspectives from the economic dimension.

Graph 1 - Distribution of Brazilian GDP (%) in macro-regions between 1970 and 2019



Source: prepared from Diniz (2015) and IBGE (2021).

As can be seen, the southeast region of the country has as one of its main characteristics the high concentration of wealth. Considering the entire historical period indicated in the graph, in the last five decades this region, despite representing just over 40% of the population and 10% of the country's territorial area, has concentrated more than half of Brazil's GDP. Despite all this concentration in the southeast region, it is still possible to notice that there is a slight tendency towards deconcentration throughout this historical period. In fact, data prior to the 1970s

shows an even higher concentration in this region, especially when we consider the state of São Paulo. Starting from another variable, brought by Cano and Guimarães Neto (1986, p. 181), we can historically see how, throughout the 20th century, concentration occurred in relation to the value of industrial transformation (Table 1).

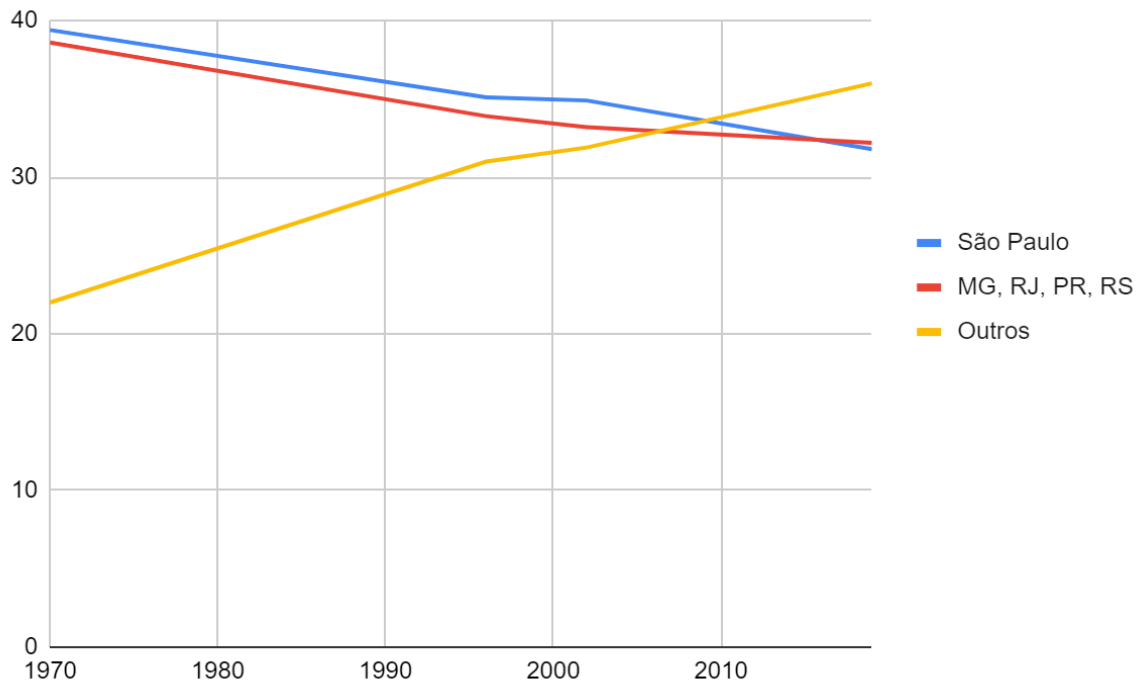
Table 1 - Regional distribution of the industrial transformation value of the manufacturing industry (%)

	1919	1939	1949	1959	1970	1980
North	1,47	1,11	0,74	0,94	0,82	2,39
Northeast	16,05	10,91	9,12	6,89	5,74	8,06
South	16,43	13,49	13,14	12,36	11,99	15,75
Midwest	0,37	0,35	0,52	0,64	0,79	1,16
Southeast	65,65	74,14	76,48	79,17	80,66	72,64
São Paulo	32,20	40,74	48,85	55,55	58,23	53,43

Source: prepared based on Cano and Guimarães Neto (1986).

With this table, it is possible to notice how São Paulo has, since the beginning of the 20th century, had an important concentration of all the wealth that is produced in the country, with emphasis on the industrial sector. In these data brought by Cano and Guimarães Neto, what we see is that, even with a slight drop in the 1980s, the state of São Paulo alone managed to represent almost half of all industrial transformation value throughout the 20th century. Thus, despite several initiatives by the Brazilian State aimed at a possible reduction of these regional inequalities, Brazil reaches the 21st century with an intense concentration in the state of São Paulo and the southeast region in general. Following another cut of the distribution of national GDP for the period between 1970 and 2018, we have Graph 2.

Graph 2 - Distribution of Brazilian GDP (%) in approximate three-thirds between 1970 and 2019

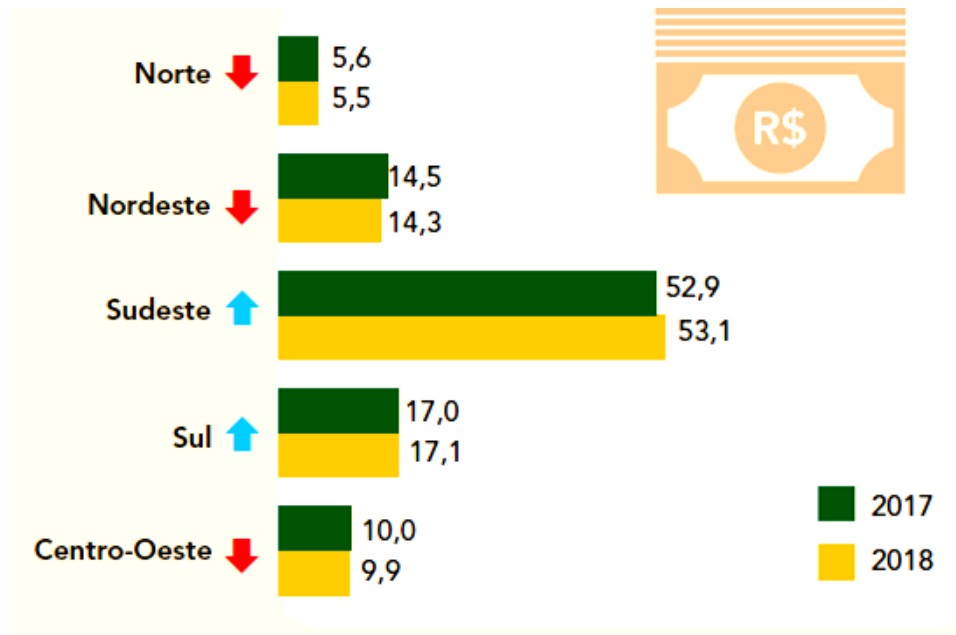


Source: prepared from Diniz (2015) and IBGE (2021).

In this graph we have a division presented by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020, 2022) to have an idea of what would be, approximately, the three thirds of the distribution of wealth produced in Brazil. One of these thirds is represented by the state of São Paulo which, alone, and even with a noticeable downward trend over the last few decades, manages to present high concentration numbers. This state has less than 22% of the population and around 3% of Brazil's territorial area. The other third is made up of the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul, all located in what is recognized as the central-south region of the country. This shows that, although São Paulo alone cannot concentrate the majority of the country's GDP, the asymmetry is revealed on other scales, showing that concentration goes beyond the state limits of São Paulo, but occurs in states that, in a certain way, are in your surroundings. The third and final third, formed by the other states of the federation, has shown over time an increasing trend in the national share of GDP production, although this continues to be extremely uneven when we consider the details of each state.

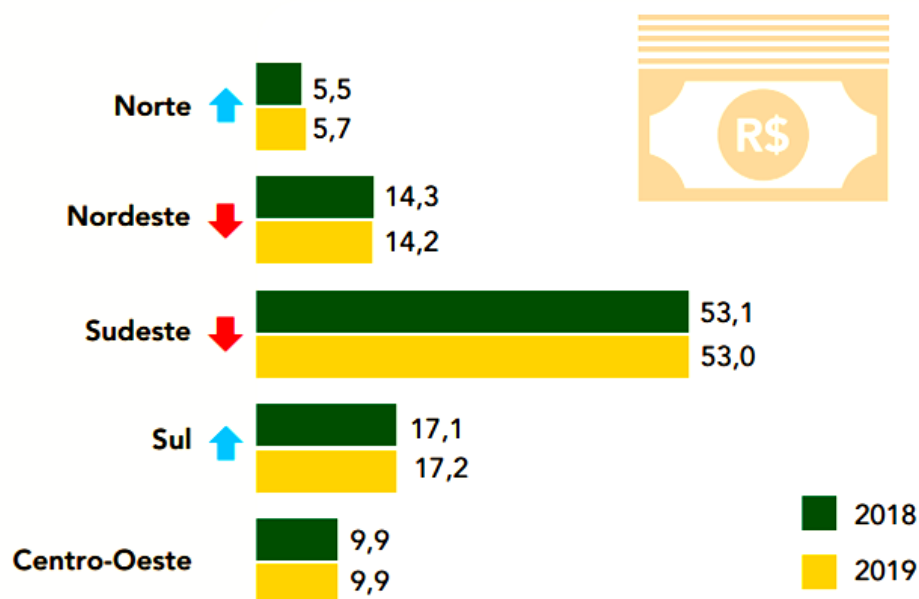
Despite what the data has shown regarding a tendency towards a decrease in GDP concentration in the southeast region, the latest data presented by IBGE (2020; 2021), referring to the comparison between the years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, have indicated that the Southeast and South regions, in this recent three-year interval, registered an increase in the share of Brazilian GDP (graph 3 and 4).

Graph 3 - Participation of GDP of major regions in Brazil's GDP (%) 2017-2018



Source: IBGE (2020).

Graph 4 - Participation of GDP of major regions in Brazil's GDP (%) 2018-2019



Source: IBGE (2020).

In these more recent data we have a possible reversal of the general trend that has been observed since the 1970s, although it is still too early to say that this movement is something structural or just cyclical. It is worth remembering the period of crisis that the country has been experiencing since the middle of the last decade, which has led to a retraction of state policies, including those relating to a possible reduction in the concentration of wealth production in Brazil.

Nevertheless, all the data presented here help us to materialize the scenario that we discussed in the previous item, that is, the Brazilian regional issue is marked by an intense concentration in the southeast region of the country, with emphasis on the state of São Paulo. And this concentration, despite possible scenarios of deconcentration over the last few decades, determined the capitalist production process of urban space in Brazil, especially when we refer to the constitution of our metropolises. In other words, our final line of argument now moves towards a reading of the relationship between all this structuring inequality in Brazil and the metropolitan agglomerations that have been forming here throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Productive restructuring, concentration, and deconcentration concentrated in Brazil

Understanding the processes of space production in capitalism follows the historical determination of relations mediated by value. So, as we stated in the first part, these more general processes condition our reading of the uneven development of capitalist relations in Brazil, but this does not remove the need to understand the particularities of this process on a national scale. Thus, at the same time that we reaffirm the existence of a capitalist production of space as universal, we highlight a capitalist production of space in Brazil, determined by the particularities of the development of capitalist relations in our country considering all the historical processes we have experienced. When we then think about the production of urban space, we derive a reading that is historically and geographically determined. Therefore, we talk about capitalist production of urban space in Brazil in the 21st century. Having said that, and considering the arguments we brought in the two

previous parts of this text, we can move forward in the debate about how all this concentration of capital that occurred historically in the southeastern region of Brazil, with emphasis on the state of São Paulo, determined the production of metropolises as we treat them today.

The large population stock in regions with little economic dynamism, predominantly rural, alongside high rates of demographic growth, the inability to generate jobs and lower per capita income, caused, from the second half of the 19th century, strong migratory movements from regions of ancient occupation (Northeast and Minas Gerais) to economically dynamic regions. Initially, these migratory movements headed towards Rio de Janeiro, later expanding to the agricultural borders of São Paulo and then Paraná and Goiás and, finally, to other areas of the Midwest and the North of the country. In the last six decades, these inter-regional migratory movements were complemented by strong intra-regional migratory movements, of a rural-urban nature, in all Brazilian regions, due to the attraction caused by industrial growth and urban services and by structural transformations in the agriculture. The result was rapid urban growth, not only in dynamic regions but also in the metropolises of backward regions, configuring a dramatic experience of urbanization and poverty (Diniz, 2015, p. 24-26).

As argued by this author, one of the main hallmarks of the processes of urbanization and production of large urban agglomerations in Brazil was precisely the connection between these and poverty. However, the concentration of poverty cannot be seen as an anomaly of the capitalist process of urbanization. Quite the contrary, the production of wealth has as its antithesis the production of misery, although in the Brazilian case these pockets of poverty are even more evident given the acute way in which these processes occur in late-capitalist countries.

When we consider the reality of the 21st century, in turn, we can identify other processes that would be, so to speak, more recent in the contemporary dynamics of urban space development in Brazil. As shown in some of the graphs indicated above, despite all the concentration we still have in the country, we are witnessing processes of deconcentration, with a relative loss mainly of the state of São Paulo in the calculation of the production of national wealth. In Lencioni's view, this trend towards industrial deconcentration inaugurates a new process, called

metropolization, in the dynamics of the reproduction of capitalist relations in the country.

[...] the process of metropolization marks a new era that emerges from the dynamics of the global economy and produces a new type of metropolis. In the specific case of São Paulo, this process originates in the 70s of the 20th century and is associated with the process of industrial deconcentration that occurred in the State of São Paulo, leader in industrial production in Brazil. (Lencioni, 2011, p. 137)

Thus, derived from processes that occur nationally, such as the State's actions in combating regional concentration in the country, and internationally, such as the process of productive restructuring that capitalism has undergone since the 1970s, we have important developments in unequal development of capitalist relations in Brazil. This is because, although we are witnessing a process of industrial deconcentration, for example, this is marked by the persistence, if not intensification, of the centralization of capital. In other words, we could state that the Brazilian regional issue and the related production of urban/metropolitan space in the country took on, from the 1970s onwards, a change that was not only quantitative, but qualitative. We have had a new type of uneven geographical development in Brazil since then, which distributes the production of national wealth in a less concentrated way while intensifying territorial control, further concentrating the command of production management through the process of centralization of capital. And in this process, we have the prominence of the city of São Paulo and the cities around it. Lencioni (2008), with 2007 data from Fundação Getúlio Vargas, shows that a third of the headquarters of the one hundred largest companies in Brazil were located in the city of São Paulo or in other cities no more than 100km away from it. The other third of the headquarters were located in the states of Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, and the last third in the rest of the country.

Thus, considering the data on the deconcentration of wealth production in the country with the persistence of capital centralization in the southeast region, we point to the understanding of the metropolitanization process of space as deeply contradictory. We therefore have what can be called a concentrated deconcentration.

All these transformations are part of a scenario of progressive and intense centralization of capital, in which merges, absorptions, and associations of companies reinforce oligopolies and economic groups. This aspect is fundamental to understanding the formation of this city-region. This is because the territorial dispersion of the industry, in the case of oligopolies and economic groups in which the capital appreciation cycle is segmented into several territorially dispersed units, requires a management center that can coordinate capital appreciation to guarantee its reproduction. This management center has an important territorial point in the city of São Paulo. (Lencioni, 2011, 146)

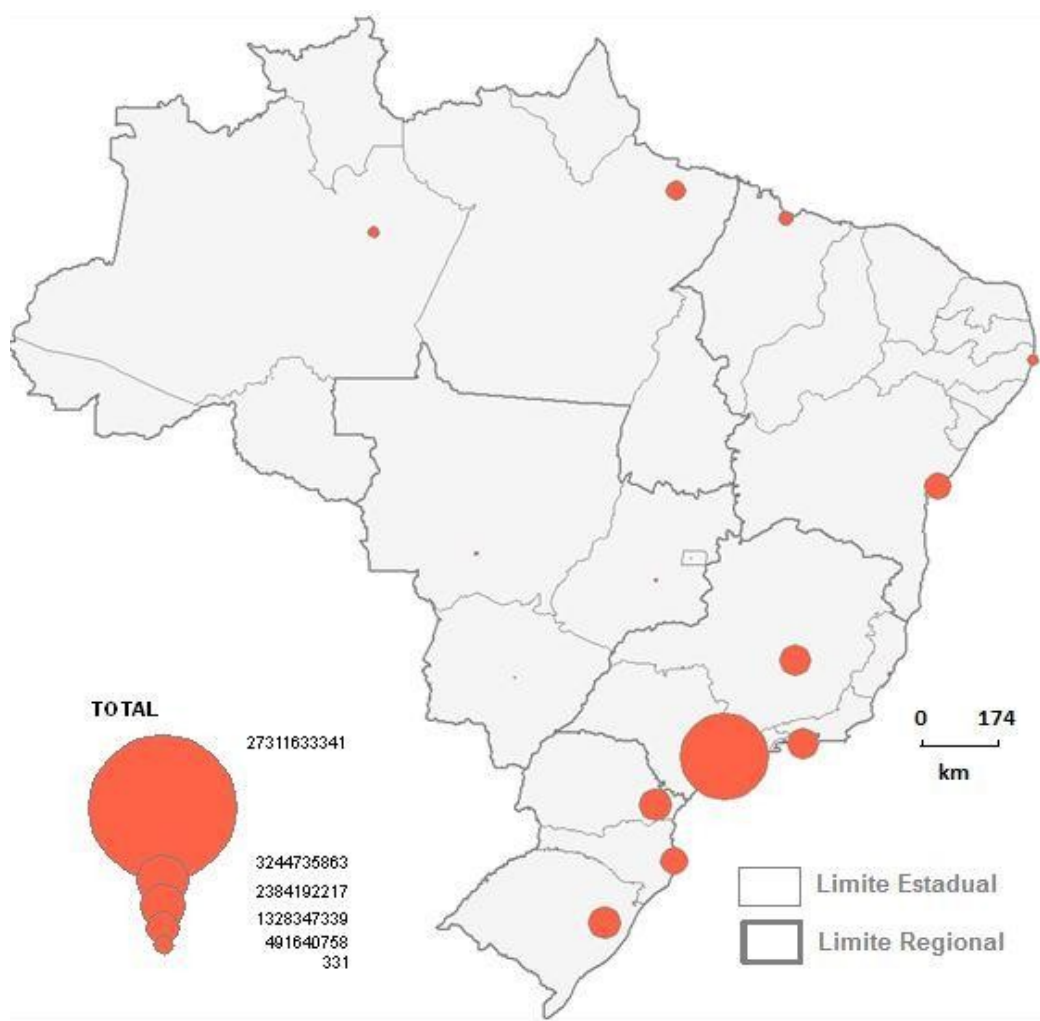
And this way in which the metropolization process is shaping up indicates the intensification of inequalities in the country. The migration of manufacturing plants only points to the search for better conditions for exploiting the workforce and access to tax benefits that, sometimes, are no longer available in the management center of large companies. From the point of view of spatial form, these processes are embodied in the 21st century metropolis as a diffuse agglomeration.

This combination of dispersion and concentration is what configures the space of the contemporary metropolis. The cohesive metropolis, like “big city”, is the classic form of the metropolis. Its spread across an extensive territory and its imprecise limits can lead us to understand that what is dispersed is not the agglomeration, but the new level of urbanization. This is just an appearance, since what is dispersed is the form that the agglomeration takes. Whatever the metropolitan configuration, whether it is a denser or more dispersed space, this space is a condition, process and product associated with urbanization, which has the idea of agglomeration as one of the

central elements of its definition. Therefore, what is dispersed is its form (Lencioni, 2008, p. 9, emphasis in original).

In accordance with the author, it is increasingly evident in 21st century capitalism that the process of metropolization and the very notion of the centrality of the metropolis in the face of the deconcentration concentrated in Brazil are explained by the centralization of capital. In other words, São Paulo as a metropolis continues to present a prominent position in the Brazilian regional issue due to being, until now, the central locus of capital management in the country. And this can be seen even more clearly when some other data are considered, especially those linked to innovation or processes involving high technology. Map 1 below, prepared by Tunes (2017), denotes this.

Map 1 - Brazil: Exports of high technology products by Brazilian states – 2012



Source: Tunes (2017).

In relation to data on exports of high-technology products, it is clear that what has actually become less concentrated in the country over the last few decades are portions of the national GDP that add little value. In the long term, this could even mean the marks of an essentially fragile process of combating regional inequalities. Perhaps the data presented at the end of the second part of this text may indicate this (graph 3 and 4). The recent process of economic crisis that the country has been going through may be showing a setback in the deconcentration that we have seen in recent decades, which can be read as an unfolding of a regional development process that deconcentrates without decentralizing. In any case, for now, what can be said is that the primacy of São Paulo is reaffirmed, as Tunes points out:

[...] São Paulo's hegemony in exports of high-technology products helps to highlight the difference in São Paulo's production in relation to other states. If we understand that export is part of the general production process that with circulation is completed and the product is transformed into merchandise, São Paulo's primacy in the circulation of highly technologically intensive products reveals its primacy position in the territorial division of labor with regard to products with greater technological content. (Tunes , 2017, s/p)

In short, on the one hand, the process of decreasing concentration experienced in Brazil over the last few decades reveals itself as concentrated deconcentration, precisely because it does not attack the core of controlling the production of wealth. On the other hand, even recognizing that there was some form of deconcentration, this did not prove to be significant in sectors that present higher added value, such as those that involve greater capacity for innovation or those that produce high-technology exportable items.

Final considerations

The Brazilian regional issue is marked by a strong process of concentration of wealth production in the southeast region, with emphasis on the city of São Paulo and its closest surroundings. This process developed throughout the 20th century, clearly a derivation of the extremely complex picture of unequal development of capitalist relations that has been established regionally in Brazil since the colonial

period. This, however, should not be read as a strict view that the regional issue in our country can be explained only by what occurred or is occurring in Brazilian territory. The entire development dynamics of capitalism globally has also determined the processes here, and this assertion is equally valid for the historical understanding of more distant social processes, such as the demands for industrialized products that the country had to respond to in the first half of the 20th century and the industrialization of the state of São Paulo, how much is valid for thinking about the productive restructuring that capitalist relations have undergone in recent decades and the process of diffuse agglomeration of the contemporary metropolis. Thus, understanding the regional issue necessarily involves reading the relationship between universality and particularity, between global determinations of capitalism and regional determinations of Brazil's particularities.

The data we present here demonstrate how intense the process of regional concentration was that the country experienced and, in a certain way, continues to experience, whether due to the maintenance/intensification of the centralization of capital in the southeast region, or due to the concentrated permanence of certain productive sectors involved with the generation of items with greater added value. Dialoguing with the arguments brought by Oliveira (2003a), we could understand that the entire concentration process that we experienced throughout the 20th century revealed itself as a dynamic that created peripheries within a late-capitalist country. The dynamics of the development of capitalist relations demand the generation of inequalities and asymmetries that enable the acute exploitation of the workforce and the realization of merchandise. Thus, even though there are possible efforts to deconcentrate, for example, through some public policies, these come up against the core of the social relations that underlie Brazilian development, which necessarily produces barriers and limits.

Finally, it is worth returning to the way we understand the relationship established between the metropolization of space in our country and the Brazilian regional issue. Despite the universality of capitalist space production processes

throughout the world, they are also determined by the regional particularities of national economies. Each country will present particular forms and processes of metropolization of space, and in the Brazilian case, we have concentrated deconcentration as a foundation in contemporary times. In other words, the metropolization of space under the auspices of the Brazilian regional issue reaffirms our structural asymmetries, worsening the centralization of capital in the southeast region, especially in São Paulo, and further complicating the challenges of overcoming inequalities in Brazil.

References

CANO, W.; GUIMARÃES NETO, L. A questão regional no Brasil: traços gerais de sua evolução histórica. **Pensamento Iberoamericano – Revista de Economia Política**, n; 10, p. 167-186, 1986.

DINIZ, C. C. Impactos territoriais da reestruturação produtiva. In: RIBEIRO, L. C. Q. (org.). **O futuro das metrópoles: desigualdades e governabilidade**. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Letra Capital, 2015. 21-62p

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Sistema de Contas Regionais: Brasil 2018. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2020.

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Sistema de Contas Regionais: Brasil 2019. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2021.

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Sistema de Contas Regionais: Brasil 2020. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2022.

LENCIONI, S. Concentração e centralização das atividades urbanas: uma perspectiva multiescalar. Reflexões a partir do caso de São Paulo. **Revista de Geografia Norte Grande**, n. 39, p. 7-20, 2008.

LENCIONI, S. A metamorfose de São Paulo: o anúncio de um novo mundo de aglomerações difusas. **Revista Paranaense de Desenvolvimento**, n. 120, p. 133-148, 2011.

OLIVEIRA, F. Crítica à razão dualista. In: OLIVEIRA, F. **Crítica à razão dualista. O ornitorrinco**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2003a. 25-119p

OLIVEIRA, F. O ornitorrinco. In: OLIVEIRA, F. **Crítica à razão dualista. O ornitorrinco**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2003b. 121-150p

SMITH, N. **Desenvolvimento desigual**: natureza, capital e a produção de espaço. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1988.

TUNES, R. H. O reforço às desigualdades regionais no Brasil no século XXI: concentração espacial do processo de aprendizagem e da produção inovadora. **Confins**, n. 32, 2017.