

WILSON CANO, INTERPRETER OF REGIONAL AND URBAN ISSUES IN BRAZIL

*Carlos Antônio Brandão**

*Fábio Lucas Pimentel de Oliveira**

*Leonardo Guimarães Neto***

*Valdeci Monteiro dos Santos****

* Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

** Consultoria Econômica e Planejamento (Ceplan), Recife, PE, Brazil.

*** Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Curso de Ciências Econômicas, Recife, PE, Brazil.

Abstract

This article is a tribute by representatives from four generations of researchers, who were taught and supervised by Professor Wilson Cano (1937-2020). The text follows an academic trajectory that bequeathed a fundamental contribution towards the understanding of regional and urban issues in Brazil. The aim is to highlight the most distinctive aspects of his studies, based on a dynamic-historical and contradictory conception of capitalist development and the regional and urban repercussions that have resulted from such a process. Under the aegis of the historical-structural method, we identify, within his analyses, a rigorous investigation into the formation of regional complexes, of the movements of spatial concentration and deconcentration driven by industrialization, and of the determinations of the land issue for urbanization. He sought to situate the regional and urban debate within the context of the need to push forward a national development project, without which, the regions and cities of Brazil would become subjugated to the determinants of neoliberalism and to the loss of the nation's sovereignty.

Keywords

Wilson Cano; Brazil; Regional Issue; Urbanization; National Development Project.

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** Consultoria Econômica e Planejamento (Ceplan), Recife, PE, Brasil.

*** Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Curso de Ciências Econômicas, Recife, PE, Brasil.

Resumo

Este artigo é uma homenagem de representantes de quatro gerações de pesquisadores formados e orientados pelo Professor Wilson Cano (1937-2020). O texto percorre uma trajetória acadêmica que legou contribuições fundamentais à compreensão da questão regional e urbana no Brasil. Procura ressaltar os aspectos mais distintivos dos seus estudos, com base em uma concepção histórico-dinâmica e contraditória do desenvolvimento capitalista e dos rebatimentos regionais e urbanos decorrentes de tal processo. Sob a égide do método histórico-estrutural, identifica-se, em suas análises, o exame rigoroso da formação dos complexos regionais, dos movimentos de concentração e desconcentração espacial impulsionados pela industrialização e das determinações da questão fundiária para a urbanização. Ele buscou situar o debate regional e urbano no Brasil no contexto da necessidade de avançar um projeto nacional de desenvolvimento, sem o qual teriam prosseguimento a subjugação das regiões e cidades brasileiras aos determinantes do neoliberalismo e a perda de soberania da nação.

Palavras-chave

Wilson Cano; Brasil; Questão Regional; Urbanização; Projeto Nacional de Desenvolvimento.

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Introduction

The work of Wilson Cano is of fundamental importance for understanding the regional and urban issue in Brazil¹. He provided a highly original contribution towards understanding the genesis of inequalities and of the socio-spatial processes behind the inequality and heterogeneity of the Brazilian economy. It unfolds onto several fronts, which contemplate the investigation of the socioeconomic and political effects brought about by regional integration and incorporate an approach to urbanization driven by the advance of industrialization and countryside-city migration in view of the itinerant character of agriculture.

Cano was the youngest of six children from a lower-middle-class Spanish immigrant family. Between 1959 and 1962, he worked while studying economics at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). At the end of 1962, he joined the course at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), where he became a professor from 1966 to 1980. In late 1967, invited by the then vice-chancellor of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), he was one of the founders of the so-called School of Economics of Campinas. From 1972 to 1975, he developed his exhaustive doctoral thesis on the roots of industrial concentration in São Paulo (CANO, 1977), a classic, definitive study on the theme of Brazilian regions.

Cano was an eloquent debater, who vigorously expounded his ideas, especially at academic events, and defended them with vehemence and enthusiasm.

1. We are grateful for the notes and suggestions by two anonymous reviewers.

One of the well-known controversies in which he became involved was his heated criticism of attempts to attribute “São Paulo imperialism” to “Northeastern backwardness”².

His work was not only restricted to the fields of regional and urban economics and economic history. Between 1989 and 1991, he undertook research in the United States and Europe on the deleterious impacts of neoliberalism and the conservative advances on the capitalist periphery. In 1997 and 1998, he traveled throughout the Latin American continent in order to investigate these impacts in each country, both historically and comparatively (CANO, 2000). Currently, with the vast available literature on the adherence and adaptability to the contexts and to the hybrid and changing forms of the neoliberalization process (CAHILL, 2019), it is possible to measure more effectively the pioneering spirit of our author in examining this problematic.

Always involved in national issues, for which he fought incessantly, he was one of the first to seek support, from statistics and theories, in order to defend more decisively, the existence of a deindustrialization process in Brazil, at a time when part of this debate either denied or relativized such a movement (including even amongst the heterodox authors).

The use of robust theoretical concepts and a historical-structural methodological approach permeated his work, thereby enabling him to transit, with constancy, from youth to analytical maturity. Thus, using the prerogative of several scholars, we have elaborated transcripts that refer to the young Wilson Cano, he of *Raízes da concentração industrial em São Paulo* [The roots of industrial concentration in São Paulo] (CANO, 1977) and of *Desequilíbrios regionais e concentração industrial no Brasil (1930-70)* [Regional imbalances and industrial concentration in Brazil (1930-70)] (CANO, 1981), fundamental texts on which *Desconcentração produtiva regional no Brasil* [Regional productive deconcentration in Brazil] (CANO, 2008a) was created.

Beside these, we have also considered a bibliographic sample that, over the years, has manifested a broad process of maturation in its reflections and transmission of knowledge, materialized in (i) articles published in periodicals, (ii) books he has authored and organized (iii) texts in newspapers and journal, (iv) complete works published in the annals of congresses and seminars, (v) presentations of

2. We would like to accept the excellent proposal and inspiration of one of the reviewers that “extolling the controversial spirit of Cano would be one way to reinforce the homage paid to him herein, especially within an environment in which the free debate of ideas, including inside the academy, has become so impoverished”.

work and (vi) other types of production. This collection contains more than two hundred titles, a significant part of which are available on an online platform³.

It is important to note, at the outset, that this collection of work constitutes one of the most complete perspectives produced in Brazil regarding the genesis of regional inequalities, the formation of the Brazilian domestic market and the evolution and spatial structure of the national economy. It is by way of this that other authors, and even other interpretative aspects, have established a dialogue that has resulted in enhancing studies on the Brazilian regional issue, thereby positioning the work of Wilson Cano as pioneering and referential.

In order to highlight this finding, the present text has been divided into three sections, in addition to the Introduction, Conclusion and References. In the first, we highlight historical processes as the founding bases of Wilson Cano's studies. He placed great emphasis on the distinctive aspects of regional complexes, the structure and dynamics of which were decisive in positioning them within the process of industrialization in Brazil. The second section highlights the leading role of property structures and of merchant capital in determining the pattern of urbanization, a seminal approach and of remarkable originality. The third section discusses the historical-structural method as a distinctive feature of his work, materialized in his examination of itinerant agriculture, of the effects of productive integration and in the link between economic policy and the regional and urban issue.

1. The genesis and trajectory of regional productive inequalities

In Cano's work (1977), the word *roots* defined not only the trajectory that he intended to follow in understanding inequalities, but also suggested the methodological procedures adopted. He considered that before presenting the concentration mechanisms of industrial growth in São Paulo and the consequent impact on other regions of the country, it was necessary to go back to examine the Brazilian regional complexes implanted during the colonial period, and there to identify and qualify the relations of production and, only then, to analyze the evolutionary process inside each one. Thus, there are differences between (i) the coffee complex, (ii) the Northeastern complex, (iii) the Amazon rubber economy and (iv) the extreme Southern economy; (v) in addition to several state economies.

1.1 The regional complexes: studies on their formation

An in-depth investigation into the formation of the national economy enabled Cano (1977) to explain the vast differences that existed across the regions, of

3. Available at: <http://www.wilsoncano.com.br>. Viewed on: April 28, 2020

which it was composed, with regard to organization and dynamism. By characterizing these different spaces, he was able to provide a manner with which to answer fundamental questions on the genesis and the inequality of industrial development in Brazil. He identified the general features of the Brazilian capitalist formation, both from the regional viewpoint and from the industrialization process. The fundamental findings are hereafter summarized.

It was in the *São Paulo coffee complex* that the most conducive economic conditions were created for the development of the productive forces: advanced capitalist relations of production, an extensive “domestic” market and diversified agriculture were fundamental for the concentration and centralization of capital. As a result of these facts, São Paulo took command of integrating the national market after the Great Depression of the 1930s, defining “center-periphery”-type commercial relations with the rest of the country. It is necessary to highlight the immense difficulties faced by the other regional economies in following a trajectory similar to that of the economy of São Paulo.

In the *Northeastern complex*, the factors were the systematic decline in its export prices, the difficulties in conquering dispersed regional markets for its surpluses, the exiguous urbanization and the predominant traces of the colonial structure. In relation to the *extreme South*, Cano attributed limits regarding the land structure, based on small and medium-sized properties (with the exception of livestock), to a small and medium-sized industrial activity, which was vulnerable to competition with other regional industries, and also to the inability to integrate into the market of the coffee complex, given the more competitive characteristics of the latter’s food agriculture. He stated, with respect to the Amazon, that this very specific form of occupation did not allow the development of commercial food-producing agriculture. In view of the atomization of the surplus and its removal abroad, the marketing structure that was organized did not support the promotion of a vigorous internal accumulation process. Furthermore, with the impact of the decaying rubber economy, the effects of the crisis, into which the regional economy had been plunged before the First World War, were broad and profound (CANO, 1977).

Notwithstanding the great advantage that the advance of capitalist relations represented for the economy of São Paulo, the establishment of a dynamic domestic market and the advanced agricultural market economy not restricted to coffee production, the role of the State should not be minimized.

In this regard, Wilson Cano indicated certain moments of this intervention, which consolidated the comparative advantages of the São Paulo economy: (i) acting on the migration issue, facilitating and subsidizing part of the flow of immi-

grants to São Paulo; (ii) implementing the coffee valorization plans, by granting resources and/or loans obtained abroad; and (iii) consolidating the construction and purchase of railroads relevant to the formation of the regional economic space. With regard to the provincial and state governments, which shared, reinforced or opposed the actions of central government, especially in critical moments experienced by the exporting sectors to which they were linked, Cano conducted an important bibliographic mapping, maintaining dialogue with other authors (CANO; GUIMARÃES NETO, 1986).

In addition, Wilson Cano was always aware of the malformations - to use Furtado's expression - that constitute obstacles towards regional development. Emphasis on the dominant role of merchant capital in the regions, which is a defining factor for delaying the process of productive diversification and urbanization itself, highlights one of these impediments (see Section 2, "Urbanization, merchant capital and the land issue").

In general, his work was distinguished in that it went beyond examining the differences in pace that characterized the economic growth of regional spaces. The originality he provided was to identify the structural reasons behind those differentials. Hence, once the industrialization process had begun, it was possible, within the relationships between regional economies, to catch a glimpse of the how the historical features they held were either maintained or disappeared. This was the safe, defining step of the journey he was to embark upon in unravelling his work so as to understand the regional and urban issue in Brazil.

1.2 Industrialization: studies on concentration and deconcentration

His analysis on the formation of regional economies led Wilson Cano to emphasize the differentiated reproduction of the São Paulo coffee capital as being the essence of the national accumulation process until the 1930s. From this point, he sought to establish the relations between a center and its periphery. The explanation of the different moments in the construction of the national economy was catalyzed by the close dialogue maintained with Mello (1982).

In this respect, mention should be made of the noteworthy association between, on the one hand, the phases of regional linking and integration, and on the other, the more general movement of the Brazilian economy, preceded by a preparatory period in which the São Paulo economy predominantly served its domestic market and accelerated its diversification (CANO, 1998).

With the difficulties imposed during the First World War with regard to maintaining the international flows of goods, the process of interregional links gained momentum and continued into the 1920s, through reinvesting the obtained profits

and intense industrial diversification. Throughout this and the following decades, half of São Paulo's exports went towards the foreign market and the state of São Paulo registered an increasing participation in the country's industrial production.

From the 1930s, during the phase of the so-called restricted industrialization, industrial concentration intensified, and continued, on new bases, during the heavy industrialization period. There was a significant leap in the participation of the value of São Paulo's industrial transformation within the national total: from 40.7%, in 1939, to 55.5%, in 1959, and 58.1%, in 1970 (CANO, 1981).

Industrial deconcentration, which began in the 1970s, was characterized by Cano (1981) through two movements, based on the structure and dynamics of public and private investments: one that went from 1970 to 1985, called "the peak of regional industrial deconcentration"⁴, during which the industrial participation of São Paulo, vis-à-vis other regions, suffered significant losses, although the dynamism was maintained; and another that covered the period from 1985 to 1995, when the process took place on "spurious" bases.

The work of Wilson Cano that followed, unfolded into several directions, with emphasis on studies conducted and coordinated on the economy of São Paulo (CANO, 1998; 1992; NEGRI, 1994; CANO et al., 2007). It should also be highlighted that he updated his analysis on the process of regional imbalances until 2005, including the opening of the national economy and the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s (CANO, 2008a).

The effort to understand regional inequalities, always based on the perspective of the national economy as a whole, continued, with the direct and indirect influence of Wilson Cano, at various moments. It is of importance to recall the theses on the topic by Pacheco (1996) and Monteiro Neto (2005), which enter into dialogue with research conducted by the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation (1990) and by Affonso and Silva (1995), Diniz (1987, 1995) and Guimarães Neto (1997). This ensemble analyzes the structure and dynamics of the regional issue in all Brazilian macro-regions.

The foregoing sanctions the conclusion that Wilson Cano elaborated a broad spectrum of work on regional development, from the formation of the domestic market through to the spatial evolution of Brazilian industrialization. Furthermore, he led studies, which had a significant deployment, in that he served as advisor and supervisor of research, theses and dissertations on the regional traits of the national economy and on the São Paulo economy, providing further benefits to the perspective of the country's peripheral regions.

4. This and all other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

1.3 The structure and dynamics of the regional and state economies

Wilson Cano developed studies and research aimed at understanding the dynamics and structural transformations of Brazil's regions (and sub-regions), states and some municipalities. This was achieved collectively and, in general, through theses and dissertations under his supervision, which enabled the critical and heterodox thinking that he helped to cultivate at Unicamp⁵ to become enrooted and legitimized throughout Brazil.

From the viewpoint of the development of the country's macro-regions or sub-regions, there is a body of work related to the North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and Southern regions. From the perspective of the states, some sub-regions and some municipalities, apart from the previously mentioned case in São Paulo, there are some outstanding studies on Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, Pará, Goiás, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Acre and Amapá.

These studies not only replicated theoretical and methodological elements employed by Wilson Cano's research agenda, but also represented advances on transversal thematic issues, namely: transport, telecommunications, innovations, river navigation, the electricity sector, the banking sector, public finance, fiscal war, natural resources, the semiarid region, the labor market, housing and metropolization.

Throughout these dissertations and theses, the influence of Wilson Cano is present in the search for the specificities of the socioeconomic structures of each analyzed territory; in identifying national constraints (macroeconomic policies, national and regional development strategies); fitting in, depending on the case, with the logic of the interregional division of labor; and in the options of the temporal cross-sections of the analyzes performed.

1.4 International experiences and the perspective of localism as a regional development strategy

Continuing with the role of Wilson Cano in the production on regional development, it is essential to mention his participation in two other sets of studies regarding the regions. The first refers to international experiences in regional development (CANO, 1993). This takes stock of the European experience of regional development, involving objectives, instruments and a parallel between the regional issue in Europe and that of Brazil.

5. A list of the master's dissertations and doctoral theses supervised by Wilson Cano is available at: http://repositorio.unicamp.br/browse?type=advisor&value=Cano%2C+Wilson%2C+1937-&sort_by=1&order=ASC&rpp=100&etal=0&submit_browse=Atualizar. Viewed on: April 20, 2020.

With regard to the conception of regional and local plans, Wilson Cano's direct and indirect contributions were of particular note in relation to assessing what *localism* is capable of as a development strategy. In respect of this, it is important to recall his critical references to this paradigm, systematized in the preface by Brandão (2012).

Cano indicated the need – within the context of financial globalization – to reconsider an appropriate macroeconomic agenda for coordinating regional and even local actions to revive a national development strategy, under threat of harmful disputes persisting between regions, states and municipalities. Thus, it may be stated, based on Cano (2012), that the ballast of localism was the little-discussed and less-understood process of deindustrialization, which assumed a different nature in underdeveloped countries such as Brazil, in relation to what occurred in the central countries.

2. Urbanization, merchant capital and the land issue

The starting point for Wilson Cano's work related to the theme of urbanization was to address the interrelationships maintained with the rural environment, and demonstrated links and contradictions arising from them in order to define the accumulation in the city. Endowed with a pragmatic method, oblivious to restrictive empiricism and theoreticist universalism (BRANDÃO, 2021), he *warned* of the necessary historical framework of the process that was intended for analysis (CANO, 2011a; 2011b).

In the internal analysis of the urban, Cano emphasized the multiplicity of relations between the industrial and service sectors and shed some light on the autonomous, somewhat vegetative dynamics, which the demographic and economic movement had induced and impressed upon urban social dynamics.

One crucial point lies in the fact that he always situated the urban and the region in which it was contained, within the evolutionary historical framework of the inter-regional division of labor. From this point, it was important for him to *examine* the processes of opening, transforming and integrating markets (production, labor, consumption, etc.), which involved the countryside and the city.

To this broader perspective of the urbanization process, Wilson Cano also linked complementary emphases. He considered that the *urban blooms from property structures*. Understanding it urged him to investigate the transformations in the contradictory relationships between countryside and city (or between rural and urban) and the somewhat unequal, exclusionary and backward pattern of urban space, which appears and evolves in each particular regional formation.

It is essential to refer the reader to a moment before the integration of the markets, when the protective regional insulation originated the alliance between unproductive latifundia and urban speculation, presided over by merchant capital. With the rupturing of regional isolation, the merchant capitalist agents settled in the competitive spaces left by the more advanced forms of capital that had entered them, often dressed up in more modern appearances. This was a rural that *was reproduced in the urban* (CANO, 1981).

As a result, the expansive processes of the Brazilian economy took on a particular spatial logic. The cushioned fratricidal effects of intercapitalist competition enabled the “peaceful” coexistence of more advanced forms of capital, originating from the pole, with merchant capital on the national periphery. Under the institutional seal of the State, this *forward-leaning itinerant outbreak* gained new, broad territorial borders of valorization that opened up across the country, preventing the social and political transformations required by the expanded accumulation (CANO, 2001, 2002a).

Wilson Cano demonstrated, therefore, that the process of regional integration, which took place via the accumulation of productive capital, amalgamated the interests of modern fractions of capital with the persistence and deepening of traditional relations of domination under the tutelage of merchant capital. This *structural heterogeneity*, which typifies underdevelopment, is maintained precisely because of the untouchability of rural or urban land ownership structures, the effect of which was to make the technical, economic, social, political backwardness endure, concatenated in an iron reproduction of power.

Interpreting the processes of inter- and intraregional coexistence between retrograde and modern capitalist forms, within the framework of an integrated system with mutual interactions and links, contains the relational trait between the various stages and states of developing the productive forces. There are constellations of socio-spatial formations in coexistence; outstanding would be the interaction between backwardness and coeval contemporaneity, in addition to heterogeneous and hybrid forms between “the old” and “the new”.

One good example is the *loci* where merchant capital operates: the urban-regional and sectoral interstices that are “left over”, enabling an accommodated, profitable coexistence with the most advanced forms. However, there are still transformations: past forms are being subsumed, so they do not disappear, they become metamorphosed. This is how the essence of the old merchant capital *appears* in real estate, in civil construction, in the so-called modern services, in urban and interregional transport. Not infrequently, it also involves parcels of productive activities with little transformation of goods.

For this reason, Wilson Cano defended the need for localized studies on the varied and combined functioning of commercial logic in urban-regional spaces. This would necessarily involve understanding the choices and decisions of social agents, particularly the action and strategies of the elites to maintain, preserve or even expand the power exercised over economic spaces. In general, this conduct is practiced through archaic political instruments, which project local despotism onto a national scale through the federative apparatus of the State (CANO, 1995).

This political-economic apparatus is unable to deal with the propagation, reproduction and complexification of typically urban problems, observed according to a temporal linkage between structure and dynamics. Wilson Cano was not surprised by the widespread proliferation of the ills of Brazilian urbanization (violence, pollution, environmental degradation, socio-spatial segregation, precarious social and urban facilities, etc.) in the large urban centers through to the intermediary and even small cities, regardless of hierarchies and centralities.

In historical terms, the reproduction, with no confrontation, of the various processes of destitution refers to the damaging effects of the urban “explosion” in the 1970s, which engendered and accumulated sequelae within the context of the severe economic and social crisis during the following decade, which continued through to the current period of neoliberalization. Wilson Cano warned that, as the volume of problems increase, with no contraposition from appropriate public policies, so the costs, time and resources needed to mitigate them would grow exponentially.

Thus, he argued that studying state action in urban problems should contribute to dimensioning the effectiveness of concrete public policies. Wilson Cano translated this proposal into rigorous analyzes of the fiscal-financial and management capacity of all national federated entities. He considered that this emphasis met with the discussions on land use, the role of the collective means of consumption, the offer of urban transport, housing, sanitation, health, education, public safety, etc., which are fundamental for understanding the coalitions of power that involve the main actors (public and private) within the scenario of the city.

Another striking aspect of the investigations conducted by Wilson Cano is the demographic analysis of urban-regional processes, associated with the specific nature of the pattern existing in each space. The migration flows enabled a more effective understanding of the reasons and meanings (on various scales) that were assumed into the structure and dynamics of urbanization, identifying, by examining the poles of attraction/expulsion of migrants and net intra-regional population exchanges, the hierarchies and different degrees of the centrality of cities.

These complement and deepen this perspective of the approaches adopted by Wilson Cano to the labor market, which he always considered in terms of the logic of the interregional division. He addressed the historical evolution of occupational capacity, both in quantity and quality, provided by industrialization, anticipating precarious determinations peculiar to the urbanization process, by examining the behavior of the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors, particularly the latter, given the great complexity surrounding it. This effort provided a basis for discussion on the distribution of income in interpersonal and functional terms, in addition to the lower or greater concentration of urban-regional wealth, and of the characteristics of poverty and abject poverty in the different spaces.

As was customary, Cano returned to the great historical-structural movements to analyze the urbanization process. Thus, he was concerned with the transition in the urban area from a situation of “chaos” to that of “pandemonium”, well into the twenty-first century, due to the faltering economic growth of the previous forty years. Failure to resolve the structural issues and the insufficient public social protection policies for populational groups on the edge of the modernization process and incorporation into the labor market may be explosive (CANO, 2003, 2011b).

Buffers to the social chaos and explosive tendencies were created and perfected for the Brazilian continental territory. Agricultural frontiers that were veritable escape valves to curtail the pressures arising from failing to confront the “weight of the past” and of bringing things to account in the structural delay: “[...] the expansion of the agricultural frontier reproduced the patterns of concentrating property, income and power, the ‘elastic supply’ of labor, in this case excluded not only from property, but also from tenure, maintaining the predominant structure of social relations: patrimonialism, submission and social marginality” (CANO, 2002a, p. 119).

Such backwardness, as Wilson Cano noted, was marked by the preservation of archaic land structures, despite incorporating modern forms, and by maintaining spaces reserved for the reproduction of merchant capital, as may be observed in the state of Paraná (1940-1960), and Maranhão (1950-1960), in the MidWest region (1960-1980) and in the Northern region of the country (1970-1990), a logic that continued into the beginning of the twenty-first century, as exemplified by the agro-export production of MATOPIBA⁶.

Thus, his work allows us to construe that the urbanization process, driven by “restricted” or “heavy” industrialization or by deindustrialization, has reached higher levels of differentiation and conflicts vis-à-vis the irresolute issues of rural and urban land. Wilson Cano thus demonstrated the simultaneous reproductive

6. An acronym resulting from the initials of the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia.

and vegetative capacity of an interiorized and extensive urban, defined by the different arrangements between the various partial forms of capital.

It is no coincidence that some regions found themselves trapped by the yoke of merchant capital, because “as profit margins on the periphery tend to be low, companies do not renew equipment and facilities, whereby they lose competitiveness and the margins become even lower. As a result, the ‘leftover’ capitals may move onto more modern compartments - when they have enough ‘breath’, within the region itself, or move outwards, in search of speculation or real estate investments” Cano (1981, p. 186).

Hence, the harmonization between the power of the archaic logics of the polymorphic commercial capitals (speculative, usurious, real estate, etc.) and the power of the “modern capitals” is largely responsible for the sense of production and the regional circulation of surpluses and, moreover, defines the political, productive and social structural barriers of underdeveloped urbanization.

3. The historical-structural approach as a distinctive feature

Wilson Cano’s work is not a register of disconnected and excessive abstractions. What predominated was an examination of historical and contradictory processes, which, although they sought and defended the need for theoretical frameworks, demanded greater “flexibility”. This was achieved with the objective of apprehending, on the one hand, dynamics, changes and ruptures, and, on the other, continuities and permanencies, without, however, predetermining or pre-establishing directions followed by the socioeconomic dynamics.

For this very reason, it is not easy to discuss the theories behind the research and elaborations that Wilson Cano conducted throughout half a century. They are precise and elaborate, although, in most cases, are embedded, i.e., applied and not explicit, given the privilege conferred on the practical observation of real economic systems. It was with the ballast of historical-structural critical thinking, towards which he directly contributed, when he gave courses to ECLAC, that he operationalized the distancing of abstract models and theories in favor of analyzing the specificities of underdevelopment over time and space (BRANDÃO, 2021).

By forging a practical, objective and politically engaged theoretical project, Wilson Cano provided reflections in order to face and transform the economic and political structures of structural backwardness. Over the years, he perfected instruments of thought and action with which to generate ruptures in relation to the asymmetric mechanisms of creation and perpetuation of inequalities, calling into question the correlation of forces sustained by structural heterogeneities. Its ultimate proposal was to enable the deliberate construction of national autonomy.

Wilson Cano moved, being never deterred, between the multiple scales (worldwide, national, regional) that allowed him to face the diversity of situations and contexts, based on different historical and cultural roots, investigating the determinations and conditioning of the productive structures, property, occupation, and distribution of income and wealth, etc. This vivid reality, approached in a systemic and multidimensional manner, is what prevails and informs the conceptual arsenal to be used, and not the contrary.

Three concrete processes, applied to the reality of Latin American underdevelopment, constitute a sample of the focus he adopted: the analysis of itinerant agriculture, interrelated to development; the effects of Brazilian regional productive integration; and the link between economic policy and the regional and urban issue.

3.1 Itinerant agriculture and underdevelopment

The entire work of Wilson Cano is permeated by the marked methodological influence of ECLAC structuralism. In a collection of texts that he organized, two themes are linked to the theoretical basis of underdevelopment: the historical foundations of regional imbalances and the agrarian specificity of Brazil (CANO, 2002a).

Here, Wilson Cano drew attention to the itinerant character of agriculture in the process of forming the country's different socioeconomic spaces. He argued that it had resulted from the enrooted, historical perpetuation of social structures marked by the concentration of land and income ownership, thereby defining a rigid economic, social and power structure (CANO, 2002a).

This problem strongly emerged in the mid-1950s, when the political and theoretical debate on the chronic problems of the Northeast, of a social and economic nature, inaugurated the regional issue in Brazil. Cano (2002a) highlighted the important contribution of Celso Furtado in formulating the foundations of a policy for developing the Northeast that, amongst other actions, would attack the fundamentals of the region's backwardness.

Based on the synthesis document regarding the diagnoses and proposals of the Working Group for the Development of the Northeast (GTDN), drawn up by Furtado, Wilson Cano proffered several critical considerations on the arguments that had structured it (GUIMARÃES NETO; ARAÚJO, 2020). Thus, it was possible to build interpretative advances regarding the regional economic imbalances that defined the activities of the Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast (known as Sudene).

The most notable of these is attributed to the analyzes of the "Young Wilson Cano": the impossibility, in the Northeast, of replicating an industrialization pro-

cess similar to that of the then Mid-Southern region. This was due to the formation aspects of the regional complexes that allowed São Paulo to take the lead in the spatial integration of the Brazilian economy.

Wilson Cano's criticism, as registered by Furtado (1989), reinforced the perception that the northeastern economic power base, based at that time on the sugar and textile industries and subsistence agriculture, had mobilized political power to preserve spaces of mercantile accumulation. This constituted a veritable barrier against the transformations that had been projected for the industrialization of the Northeast, particularly those aimed at the agrarian problem, which were discarded even before the 1964 coup.

As seen in Section 2, this mercantile-political collusion was also confirmed in other regions of the country. However, Cano (2008a) drew attention to the fact that itinerancy was no longer associated only with subsistence activities, but also with the dictates of conservative modernization aimed at making an agricultural export sector compatible with the deindustrialization that had been placed on course since the 1990s.

From the end of the 1980s, the itinerant frontier, being over and above a simple export base, has become a privileged locus of large international businesses and local negotiations, facilitated by, amongst other factors, foreign exchange deregulation, financial opening and the state's inability to regulate and supervise the production of space, easily seized by criminal operations engendered by newly installed local groups and/or historically constituted in the new agricultural frontiers.

3.2 The deconstruction of myths: the effects of productive integration in Brazil

The wealth of information generated by the analysis on the problematics of integrating the national market, in Wilson Cano, is enormous and could go unnoticed because, as always, he addressed it in a very particular manner. Contained within it, there are leastways the influences of Braudel, Marx, Lenin, Myrdal, Perroux, Hirschman and Sereni.

He discussed the links, the coercion and cohesion imposed by interregional competition during the different moments of the pattern of national accumulation. Impulses of a relational, interdependent and contradictory nature, resulting from entering the nationalized intercapitalist competition, not only represented market opportunities, but also threats to regional productive bases.

In this formulation, each Brazilian region should be analyzed specifically, by balancing the pressures exerted by a combination of the effects of stimulus, inhibition/blocking and destruction, before, during and after the integration and linkage process of the region in question to the dynamics of the whole nation (CANO, 2008a).

This relational-comparative-procedural methodology of the interdependencies and the positionality of the regional parts in the national whole, which, for Wilson Cano, constituted in his program of studies and of numerous supervisions, over the years, represents nothing less than the current critical frontier of economic geography critique.

This is how he proceeded when he sought to understand the constitution of the Brazilian domestic market vis-à-vis the national industrialization movement that had been in existence since the 1930s. The crisis of 1929 was a moment of rupture from the old pattern of primary-export accumulation and a fact which forced the march towards integration between the different regions of the country, since the recovery policies that followed, functional to restricted industrialization, also took the direction of expanding agricultural and industrial complementarity.

The movement, which began in the mid-1950s, indicated that the inter-regional links took on three major fronts: i) an expansion of the flow of goods throughout the Brazilian territory, under the domination of the São Paulo economy; ii) a massive migratory flow, the state of São Paulo being the net recipient; and (iii) a greater circulation of capital amongst the Brazilian regions, provided by the beginning of the process of heavy industrialization and the support of Sudene policies (CANO, 1981).

Within the scope of this movement and with the purpose of delimiting the structural transformations that occurred in the regional complexes, which had then become integrated, Wilson Cano made wide use of concepts proposed by Albert Hirschman. Thus, he concluded that the “stimulus effects” far outweighed the “blocking/inhibition effects” and “destruction” throughout the integration process, indicating the potential of the development strategy based on industrialization for all regions of the country, as demonstrated by the unprecedented regional productive deconcentration since the 1970s (CANO, 1994).

Cano (1981; 2008a) conducted in-depth analysis on the distinct intertwining nature of the differentiated regions, which was due to the degree reached by the development of productive forces both in the center and on the periphery of the country. Each space constituting regional diversity ultimately succumbed, in a singular manner, to the framing and hierarchy of the hegemonic regional space. With the consolidation of the formation and integration of the national market, the peripheral regional economies, *activated* by the command of the economy of the center, were prevented from carrying out any project that was antagonistic to the interests of the dominant region.

Wilson Cano highlighted the main strength of the stimulus effects in structuring the integrating complementarities of the Brazilian domestic market. Obser-

ving them on a national or macro-regional scale, he left an important methodological legacy, which could operationalize a downscaling procedure. When completed, this procedure should demonstrate, with great probability, that the country's time-spatial diversity has expressed a greater number of cases of inhibition, blocking and destruction effects than those resulting from the effects he reported.

Moreover, Cano (2008a) contributed a set of arguments through which he demonstrated and dismantled a series of equivocal facts – whether deliberate or not - recorded in diagnoses, assessments and even in progressive political programs regarding the results of productive integration. He deconstructed several myths, starting with the fallacy that the solution to some of the problems faced by regions whose economies were not very dynamic, such as the Northeast, passed exclusively through industrial expansion, even more so when this became a state intervention restricted to the secondary sector that ignored the intersectoral and procedural character of industrialization.

One further point that he raised was the impossibility, once the integration process was initiated, of generating, in the peripheral regions, a dense, integrated and complete productive matrix, emulating the pattern of the hegemonic region. It remained for them to abandon strategies of productive autonomy and integrate themselves complementarily to the economy of the dynamic pole, which, due to the structural conditions that it possessed, would dictate the pace and nature of incorporating each region into the national productive system.

Wilson Cano also criticized the ideological and regionalist bias embedded in the idea that the economic problems of the national periphery rested in the flow of income and surpluses in favor of São Paulo. The “myth of São Paulo imperialism” concealed contradictions in colonization policies made without altering the land and agrarian base, which generated a disordered capitalist advance in the countryside and an exacerbation of the speculative land market, which favored merchant capital.

Finally, he indicated an exaggerated belief in the efficiency of the various regional plans that had been implemented, especially after 1964, impregnated with an authoritarian, technical and compartmentalized view of essentially socio-political problems.

3.3 Economic policy and the regional and urban issue

Within the context of liberalization and economic opening and of the productive restructuring that was initiated during the 1990s, Wilson Cano's assessment of the regional issue in Brazil did not fail to presuppose the country's peripheral condition, which has since been subject to the dictates of financial globalization.

Faced with a state prostrated by a “straitjacket” that ties the macroeconomic agenda to the interests of global finance, what was achieved in spatial terms were selective actions insufficient to the interests of the nation, defined by private agents. Thus, over the past three decades, the natural and historical differences that have characterized Brazilian regions have become accentuated, contributing to a potential deepening of inequalities (CANO, 2017).

Wilson Cano’s more recent analyzes of the urban and regional issue in Brazil have registered, also due to the introjection of neoliberal ideas in the State, the gradual loss of a spatial focus in public policies, in favor of sectorialized, dispersed interventions by public bureaucracy.

It is not by chance that the National Policy for Regional Development (2003-2007) suffered from results that reflected the holistic character of its conception, in contrast to initiatives that preceded it, such as the National Axes of Development and Integration (END) or even the fiscal war between the subnational federated units.

Thus, Wilson Cano directed arguments towards the fact that it is not possible to advance in formulating any regional development policy in the country, while the current economic-institutional model persists. This is why he considered that this is, above all, a problem of national sovereignty, even more so in light of the historical trajectory of the Brazilian State, subdivided into three stages: : (i) during the period of setting up institutions and instruments that guided development policies, whose antecedents go back to 1940-1950; (ii) in the context of executing the development policy under the guidelines of Sudene, even though such action only took place, in democratic terms, during a five-year period; and (iii) in the period after 1980, during which the material limitations caused by the fiscal and financial crisis were accompanied by neoliberal policies and the spread of the ideology of local power, which enabled loopholes for intensifying the fiscal war.

A break with the neoliberal model is a precondition for formulating urgent regional planning capable of delivering feasible results oriented towards social justice. Thus, Wilson Cano called for an effort to clarify to society some crucial issues that need to be faced: the restructuring of the public budget and debt; the strategic control of exchange rate fluctuations and capital flows in favor of productive forces and to the detriment of speculation; the need to rebuild the public financial system; and the reformulation of the State planning apparatus.

To achieve this new model, Cano (2002b) identified four interdependent, complex actions: i) policies that avoid resuming high levels of inflation, but that arbitrate the losses resulting from the efforts of stabilization, with the criteria of greater social justice; ii) political engineering for broad national negotiation, whi-

ch is capable of politicizing the economy; iii) a broad range of structural reforms that may lead towards the completion of “tidying up the house”; and iv) a selective process of social and productive prioritization, based on compatible taxation and internal capacity of credit.

As may be observed, this is an approach that favors the development of the nation and which, proposed by Wilson Cano, presupposes the interregional transmission of the effects of this process. It may therefore be stated that, in the analyzes he bequeathed, there is no predilection, nor even overvalorization, of a specific scalar cross-section, but rather a valorization of the disputed arenas, with a view to achieving effective social conquests.

Conclusions

Wilson Cano had a marked influence over the production of knowledge regarding the national economy and developed in-depth analyzes of Brazilian regions. He not only emphasized the differentiated relationships between them, but also the causes of spatial inequalities in Brazil’s economic development.

His work on the regional issue enabled him to capture the complexity of a country in which development policies could not be limited to macroeconomic stimuli to the productive process and, thereby, restricted to the industrial sector: they required holistic economic interventions, which, above all, were oriented towards social justice. They therefore required the recovery and presence of a national State whose practice would stretch beyond the industrialization or modernization of the production process.

In an interview with the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), in 2008, Wilson Cano elaborated reflections on the future of Brazil (CANO, 2008b). One of them concerned overcoming underdevelopment. He considered that this was practically impossible, due to the recurrence of national socio-political and economic arrangements and the deviations that Brazilian society had been exploring.

This led to yet another issue that he had been highlighting: the lack of clarity with regards to defining national strategic objectives. By completely neglecting the social issue, the country had accumulated a number of problems: poor education, illiteracy, poor public health, child mortality, diseases, etc., all of which have recrudesced during the current period of neoliberalization.

Wilson Cano made it clear that this may only be resolved with economic growth and income distribution, but, above all, with the prerogative of redefining and finding an inclusive development path. To think of it in terms of regional and urban coherence was one of the great objectives of his work as the honored economist, professor, activist, planner, democrat and Brazilian that he was, a tireless fighter for a just and solidary nation.

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Carlos Antônio Brandão

Doctorate, Habilitation and Full Professor in Economics at Unicamp. Full professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Institute of Urban and Regional Planning and Research (IPPUR/UFRJ). CNPq researcher.

Email: brandaoufrj@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-9014-6681

Authorship contribution: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Fábio Lucas Pimentel de Oliveira

Doctorate at Institute of Economics at Unicamp. Adjunct professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Institute of Urban and Regional Planning and Research (IPPUR/UFRJ).

Email: fabio.oliveira@ippur.ufrj.br

ORCID: 0000-0002-6210-7394

Authorship contribution: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Leonardo Guimarães Neto

Doctorate in Economics at Unicamp. Researcher at Consultoria Econômica e Planejamento (Ceplan), ex-professor at the Institute of Economics at Unicamp and at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and ex-researcher at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (Fundaj).

Email: leonardo@ceplanconsult.com.br

ORCID: 0000-0003-2445-378

Authorship contribution: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Valdeci Monteiro dos Santos

Doctorate in Economics at Unicamp. Adjunct Professor at the Catholic University of Pernambuco (Unicap).

Email: valdecimsantos@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-0865-8400

Authorship contribution: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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