

Towards New Political Geographies: Bridging East and West

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Chapter 7 São Paulo: Brazil's Geopolitical Anchor of Resistance

De Leon Petta Gomes da Costa

【 Abstract 】 Since the discovery of Brazil, São Paulo State (previously the region) has always exhibited some type of resistance to central authority, initially against the Portuguese Empire and the colonial authorities and later, against the Brazilian Federal government. In the past, some of this rogue behavior was serious enough to trigger military conflicts, such as the 1932 Revolution. Today that level of resistance would be unthinkable, but São Paulo State still persists in its defiant positions. Most of the political and economic resistance movements have started there, including movements against the military dictatorship and lately, the riots against the presidential mandates of Dilma Rouseff. At the same time, São Paulo State refuses any type of Federal intervention or help. The irony in its resistance lies in the fact that São Paulo is the most economical influential state in the Union and is also the state that can claim the most Presidents, both by career and by birth. The following study covers São Paulo state's insubordinations from early in the country's history to the present, showing how São Paulo conducted its resistance, explaining its behavior, and discussing how these incidents have affected Brazilian administrations.

【 Key words 】 Brazil, São Paulo, geopolitics, integration, governance, regionalism, paulistas

Introduction

The history of São Paulo is one of defiance to central and federal leaders. São Paulo's first settlements grew up in the same area where São Paulo state is currently based. The early inhabitants were forced to develop fierce levels of self-determination and devise self-governing policies to survive in this hostile environment, which was distant and isolated from authority. This isolationism evolved a population used to solving its own problems and avoiding external interferences that—even with the demographic and political evolution of Brazil after gaining its independence from the Portuguese empire—remained a challenge for the Brazilian emperors and presidents after the establishment of the republic. São Paulo's stubborn characteristics frequently caused problems for federal governments in various forms including insubordination, protests and in some cases even uprisings. It also, however, created the most dynamic state and city in Brazil (maybe in all of South America) that has always pursued innovation and entrepreneurship to sustain its own autonomy and position of leadership within the country.

Geopolitically, this also developed into a critical geographical division of management that excluded southern Brazil from participating in the feeling of national integration that pervaded the rest of the country, largely because São Paulo was physically isolated at the time that national integration absorbed the political “energy” of the federal government. Indeed, while it is true that separatist movements in southern Brazil are weaker now than in the past, São Paulo is still the area with the greatest amount of secessionist fervor—and this is because São Paulo acted unconsciously to block full national integration of the region. However, weighing the costs and the benefits, despite its

behavior, the balance overall is extremely positive in São Paulo's favor because in its hunger for development, this state became fundamental to the existence of Brazil as a nation-state by concentrating all the geopolitical needs within its borders: economy, politics, population, military, industry, technology and so on. It is fair to say that a crisis in São Paulo would eventually surface as a national crisis in the same way as its prosperity has surfaced—as something that cannot be shared by other states.

The Early Rebels, the Forgetfulness and Defiance to the Portuguese Empire

In the early days of the colonial territory of Portugal (current Brazil), most of the territory was unknown, inhabited by hostile native tribes, and home to diseases caused by several factors. Typically, most of the adventurers who took part in exploring the unknown interior territory of Brazil were searching for gold. Among those explorers, the *Bandeirantes* (a word that can be translated as *those who carry the flag*) of São Paulo deserve special attention; their relationships with Portuguese authorities were always complex and troubled. While most of the Portuguese presence in Brazilian territory was concentrated along the coast and consisted of a population no larger than 5 thousand Portuguese and several hundred thousand Indians, São Paulo village posed a challenge due to its location, which was deeper inland, far from the coast, and surrounded by natives with an intimate knowledge of the local geography who were obviously not pleased with the Portuguese presence.

Thus, more or less forgotten by the Empire, the people of São Paulo learned how to survive and protect themselves not only from the exotic, unknown and dangerous wildlife in Brazil but also from Indian attacks, especially from the Tamoios tribes, who repeatedly attempted to burn farms, raid warehouses and convoys, and sometimes killed entire families. Those attacks were wars of native resistance against the Portuguese. Some battles, such as the “*Siege of Piratininga*” in 1562 involving Indians from the Guarulhos, Guaianás and Carijós tribes, almost put an end to the isolated *Village of São Paulo of Piratininga* (currently the city of São Paulo), which had been founded just 2 years earlier (Doria, 2012: 44). It is logical to assume that this dangerous environment and relative isolation from the more established Portuguese settlements in the coast was probably the main cause of the resistance to central authority by the future state of São Paulo. This isolation compelled the Paulistas (the demonym for those born in São Paulo state) to search for economic sources of wealth by themselves. Far from the authorities of the Portuguese Empire, they normally defied any outside power that tried to interfere in their affairs, such as when the Jesuits tried to forbid enslavement of the natives, the main source of the Bandeirante's economy (IDEM: 90). Inevitably, São Paulo's distance from the central government also caused the area to install its own administration; even though it was only 70 kilometers from the coast, the journey required at least three days, making São Paulo the most audacious settlement to arise in the interior of the new Portuguese lands (Figueiredo, 2012: 53). The road from the closest coastal settlement, the Village of São Vicente, was difficult because travelers had to cross the steep sea ridge. To observers from the sea, these cliffs look like an intimidating great wall, and at that time the only way across was over extremely narrow roads.

Those Paulistas were described by the nineteenth century historian Joaquim Felício dos Santos as “*blinded by ambition, challenging the greatest dangers; they did not fear the weather, the seasons, the rains and droughts, the cold or the heat, wild beasts and reptiles that could give almost instantaneous death, and more than anything the indomitable and vindictive cannibal Indians, who devoured their prisoners. Disputing their land inch by inch, in a fierce and bitter war, they often travel through deserts as if there is nothing to be feared. For them, there were no impenetrable forests, craggy mountains, rivers, cliffs or unfathomable depths. If they had nothing to eat, they would gnaw the roots of trees, eating lizards, snakes, or frogs that they found along their way when they could not obtain*”

food by hunting or fishing. If they did not have anything to drink, they would suck the blood of animals they killed. They were half men and half barbarians” (Santos, 1868: 9). From a nineteenth-century Eurocentric viewpoint, this is probably an apt description of the type of rough characters that comprised the inhabitants of São Paulo at that time, and helps explain the origins of the area’s rebelliousness and hunger for freedom against federal, royal or any other “outside” authority. Even in the economic field, the region of São Paulo defied the interventions of central authorities. For example, in the 1690s, when the Portuguese government depreciated the currency circulating in Brazil, the Paulistas simply ignored direct orders from the King and the local governor, and sustained the previous rating for several years (Toledo, 2003: 144).

However, despite differences between the crude Paulistas and the Portuguese, their relationship remained relatively stable with few or minor disagreements—largely because the Paulistas were regularly hired by the Portuguese to perform dangerous services for the Crown because of their expertise, toughness and knowledge of the region. Although it was rare for kings to write letters to vassals, especially to ones so distant and isolated, the Portuguese kings did occasionally write letters to the Paulistas, seeking their help in searching for gold in the remote backcountry and jungles, or their aid in fighting against foreign invaders such as the French, Dutch or Spanish—or even, in the War of Palmares, a community of African fugitives slaves or, during the Confederation of Cariris (also known as War of the Barbarians), against a coalition of Indian tribes. Both the latter incidents occurred in northeast Brazil. Due to these “favours” conducted for the Portuguese Crown and the relative freedom to which they were accustomed, the Paulistas also felt free to claim exclusive mining rights over the gold mines they had discovered in the current state of Minas Gerais.

The situation in the region deteriorated when the Emboabas (a pejorative name given by the Paulistas to foreigners) began to challenge the authority of the Paulistas over the right to exploit the gold deposits in the region, leading to the *War of the Emboabas* in 1709. In most of these battles, the Paulistas’ Bandeirantes lost decisively, avoiding total defeat only when the governor at that time, Antônio de Albuquerque Coelho de Carvalho, was sent by the Portuguese king to establish peace between both factions. The Emboabas agreed to lower their guns; however, despite a direct order from the Portuguese royal authority, the Paulistas refused to cooperate—and even made plans to kill the governor for meddling in their affairs. The situation culminated with the launch of a military expedition into Emboaba territory. Despite having three times the manpower of the Emboaba’s militia, the Paulistas inexplicably withdrew after a successful two-day siege for still-unknown reasons (Figueiredo, 2012: 122).

This episode clarifies two aspects of the region’s history. First, it was very obvious to the Portuguese government that gold mining needed to be directly supervised by increasing the presence of Portuguese authorities. Second, it became clear that São Paulo was unwilling to submit to central authority. It is interesting to note that despite their earlier military defeat, the Paulistas would maintain their hunger for political and economic freedom from outside interference well into the future; they remained hostile to centralized and foreign governments who tried to interfere in local issues. This behavior differed from the typical political behavior of other Brazilian states, which frequently sought more federal presence, not less.

São Paulo: Fount of Rebellion

Throughout the nineteenth century the region of São Paulo State saw its agrarian sector develop steadily, enriching the local planters, particularly those involved in coffee production. This fresh source of income renewed the economic and social capital of the aristocratic Paulista families and their influence over Brazilian politics. Some of the old traditional families, who had previously been allied with the Bandeirantes and dependent on income from the region’s gold mines, used their new economic power from coffee production to influence—and at the same time, to

avoid—the Central government. The Andrada family makes a good example, three members of this family were directly responsible for inducing Brazil to become independent of the Portuguese Empire, in particular José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, a politician and scientist who in 1822 capitalized on his influence with the Brazilian prince at that time, D. Pedro I (future Emperor of Brazil), to help establish the political transitional process that transformed Brazil from a colony to a separate empire (Gomes, 2010: 79, 162). Ironically, just few years later São Paulo was also responsible for initiating the movement that would lead to the abdication of the Brazilian Emperor, forcing D. Pedro to flee to Portugal and pass the throne to his son, D. Pedro II.

At this point it's important to establish the fact that São Paulo State (previously the Province of São Paulo) continuously maintained an oligarchy of families who held great influence within the central government but who were simultaneously hostile to any federal or central authorities (or royal while in the Portuguese rule) who attempted to intervene in São Paulo. Back in the time of the Bandeirantes, families such as the Sá, Paes and Tavares gained economic and political power by controlling gold mining and the slave trade. Later, as coffee production grew in importance, the Andrada family and even later, with industrial and urban development, families such as the Matarazzo and Jafet grew in power. To a greater or lesser degree, São Paulo's rebelliousness can be attributed to its tradition of creating powerful political and economically elite families far from the influence of the federal or central government.

Brazil's transformation from a monarchic Empire to a Republic was also born in São Paulo, starting with the creation of the Republican Party—once more because of the Paulistas' insubordination to central authority. It is correct to say that the coffee plantation landowners (also known as the Coffee Barons or *Barões do Café* in Portuguese) in western São Paulo and the middle class, especially those in the city of São Paulo, embraced the concept because—more than being interested in the creation of a republic—they were interested in creating a Federal system that could lead to more autonomy for the region. The adoption of Federalism would eventually increase the Province's power by promoting it to State status, which allowed it to choose its own governor. In contrast, under the monarchic system the provincial president was appointed by the central monarchic power and was almost always an outsider (Toledo, 2003: 308). Due to this strategic political movement, São Paulo oligarchs were able to institute an electoral system in partnership with the oligarchs of the state of Minas Gerais, an alliance known in Brazil as *Política do Café com Leite* (in English this translates to “coffee and cream politics,” because São Paulo's main source of revenue at that time was coffee, while in Minas Gerais it was dairy), by which the two States jointly controlled Brazilian policy for almost forty years.

In the following decades, São Paulo's leaders capably united political and economic power, gradually changing its main revenue source from coffee by an enormous, intense industrialization effort that led to massive urbanization. It is interesting to consider that while most Brazilian states were reluctant to change their main sources of revenue, doing so only after some economic crisis that forced them to seek new sources of income, São Paulo was able to change its revenue source by diversifying its investments and layering industrial and urban characteristics onto its formerly rural and agrarian economy. For example, the threat of an economic crisis in the coffee market in 1906 pushed the Paulista economy to create an alternative investment strategy by strengthening its industrial capabilities. The result was that when the great crisis of 1929 disrupted the world economy, decimating Brazilian coffee production, the economy of São Paulo, was no longer as dependent on agrarian production. It is consistent to say this is at least partially due to São Paulo's desire to remain less dependent on the rest of the country and the Federal government while at the same time remaining capable of wielding influence over them.

Although its economic and political control over the Federal government remained strong, the weakening power of coffee farmers and the transition from a unitary agrarian economy to a more diversified and industrial economy brought to São Paulo state, especially in the city of São Paulo, a cauldron of ethnicities (due to enormous numbers

of European and Japanese immigrants), ideologies and social classes that augmented its already rebellious behavior, resulting in two major armed conflicts in 1924 and 1932 that once again featured the Paulistas in direct opposition to the Federal government. In 1924, the Lieutenants of the Brazilian army based in the city of São Paulo, aggravated by the runaway currency inflation of that time, launched an uprising against the agrarian elite influence over the federal government. The struggles between these Paulista rebels and federal forces led to the most violent conflict in the history of São Paulo. For the first time in Brazilian history, tanks were deployed, and aerial bombardments targeted civilian areas filled with working-class families. Although the rebels were defeated, some went south to join forces with another Lieutenants' rebellion there, the *Coluna Prestes* (Assunção, 2015). Then, in 1932, São Paulo took up weapons again to fight against the 1930 coup *d' état* by the dictator Getúlio Vargas, who had taken away the states' political freedom to choose their own governors and voided the 1891 constitution. This conflict, similar to the previous one in 1924, ended in a military defeat for the Paulistas; however, they could claim a moral and political victory because after the rebellion, most of the political objectives of the Paulista rebels were met (Pandolfi and Grynszpan, 1997) including the election of a Constituent Assembly and a new Constitution in 1934. So even after yet another military defeat, São Paulo managed to establish its political goals.

The ability to foment rebellion against Federal authorities is not necessarily a consciously organized and orchestrated feeling or strategy on the part of the Paulistas. Neither is it simply a childish opposition to Federal or Central governmental power; instead, it is a cultural behavior tied to the area's historical development, an urge to not only avoid or block interventions from the central government but also to sustain its own economic and political autonomy inside the São Paulo geographical area. Moreover, this is a goal sometimes achieved by adopting not only a selfish policy within its own borders but also by playing a prominent national role. For example during the Military Dictatorship (1964–1985), if São Paulo can be held liable for the moral defeat and political ouster of the president of Brazil, João Goulart, with the “*March of the Family with God for Freedom*” uniting hundreds of thousands of people clamoring for his withdrawal and opening the way for a Military takeover, São Paulo can also be pinpointed as the place where the military government faced most of its political resistance, including the student movement (UNE—*União Nacional dos Estudantes* or National Union of Students), union movements (especially in the ABC region formed by the cities of Santo André, São Bernardo and São Caetano) and even armed guerrilla groups. In both cases, the Federal government—both left wing and right wing forms—suffered from the state of São Paulo's opposition. In fact, it was only after more than one million people in São Paulo took part in the civil unrest movement in 1984 known as “*Diretas Já!*” which demanded direct presidential elections in Brazil that the military government truly recognized the level of popular support for changing the system.

Despite the “redemocratization” of Brazil, São Paulo remained the birthplace of movements that challenged a succession of presidents in the democratic period after 1985. Fernando Collor de Mello, the first directly and democratically elected president, faced opposition from the “*Caras Pintadas*” movement (named Painted Faces because they typically painted their faces with the colors of the Brazilian flag), which demanded his impeachment in front of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP). This movement expanded across the country, resulting in Mello's resignation in 1992 after several financial reforms and a series of corruption charges. More recently, in 2013, São Paulo was yet again the birthplace of a movement that disrupted the country, pitting the Workers' Party (PT—*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) against the government headed by Dilma Rousseff. The unrest initially started with protests against increases in bus, train, and metro ticket prices in the city of São Paulo, ruled by the mayor Fernando Haddad, a member of the same political party as president Dilma (PT). However, harsh police repression of the protesters and the mayor's refusal to negotiate caused the movement to expand quickly to other Brazilian cities and communities stimulated by the events initiated in São Paulo, once again reuniting millions of people across the country in just a couple of days. Those protests would persist into 2014, the year of the Brazilian World Cup. By 2015 most of the

movements demanding the impeachment of president Delarosa were still active in São Paulo, which, rather ironically, was the birthplace of the Workers' Party.

The Geopolitical Context of São Paulo

Beyond nurturing resistance movements to the Federal government that sometimes develop to the point where the high tension levels are capable of disrupting central governance or hampering the administration, São Paulo is also a main “keystone” in the Brazilian geopolitical realm due to the convergence of several factors that hold Brazil in deep dependence on this state. The first is its sheer demographic weight. São Paulo state alone is home to almost 45 million people—a level that equals some 21% of the total 205 million population of the entire country. In fact, the city of São Paulo by itself has 12 million residents, while the greater São Paulo metropolitan area hosts approximately 20 million (IBGE, 2015). That means nearly 10% of the entire population of Brazil is concentrated in only 8,000 square kilometers. Second, São Paulo state is not only the richest state in Brazil but also is still solely responsible for a huge portion of Brazil's GDP (\$ 1,800 trillion by one 2015 estimate), corresponding to 32.6% of the total Brazilian economy by itself, including 31.3% of Brazilian industrial output (CNI, 2014: 127). Even scientific research is largely based in São Paulo; between 2002 and 2006 the state was responsible for 51% (FAPESP, 2010: 18) of scientific output.

Even in the security realm São Paulo tries to face its challengers alone. During the public Security crisis of 2006 and 2012, the Federal government offered São Paulo state the support of the National Public Security Force (Fracional de Segurança Pública) and even military support to quell raids by the organized crime faction known as the PCC (First Command of the Capital) (Alencar, 2006; G1, 2012). However, the governor refused federal help, choosing to address the problem on its own. Indeed, such support from the Federal government would have been extremely limited and largely symbolic. Federal forces were offering around one thousand soldiers or a bit more in a scenario where São Paulo possesses almost 94 thousand military cops (Gambaroni, 2014) or even more by including the Civil Police. According to political analysts and journalists, São Paulo's refusal of help from the Federal government was related to a political rivalry between the political party of the governor of São Paulo (Geraldo Alckmin—PSDB) and the President's party (LuísInácio Lula da Silva in 2006 and Dilma Rousseff in 2012, both from PT). However, in my opinion, other than cooperation in intelligence and information, it would have been difficult for the Federal government to provide any other realistic help; moreover, even if the Governor and President had belonged to the same party, the governor would have ended up hampered by local state interests and São Paulo would have been compelled to solve the crisis by itself.

Another important characteristic of São Paulo is Brazilian geography, which features a sort of natural wall called *the Grand Escarpment*, an area that includes some of the most important Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Vitória, Florianópolis and Porto Alegre. This escarpment was directly responsible for shaping the historical development of the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo; however, São Paulo has sufficiently flat geography that it was able to follow a more typical development pattern to build its substantial and diversified economy. Furthermore, it is the only part of Brazil that possesses anything resembling a modern and integrated infrastructure (Stratfor, 2012) on a large scale—large enough to sustain a well-developed and diversified industry.

This confluence of Brazilian geography and the historical evolution of São Paulo have created a type of critical division in the political geography of Brazil, making management by central governments difficult and that I would say influenced separatist feelings in southern Brazil to become the strongest in the nation. It is indeed true that the history of Brazil includes many episodes of separatist movements in other parts of the country, such as the Confederation of the Equator in 1824 in the northeast; however, separatist feelings had materialized in the south as far back

as the Ragamuffin War (1835–45), when secessionists were able to create the independent *Riograndense Republic* that lasted for nearly a decade (Hartman, 2002: 79). Moreover, even in more recent decades, separatist groups with organized political structures are still active in the southern region (Paraná, Santa Catarina e Rio Grande do Sul states). In their speeches justifying eventual independence can be found elements of the area’s strong cultural and traditional identity (the *gaucho*), history (the Ragamuffin War), ethnic origins (mostly Europeans, especially those of German and Italian heritage), and economic status—the separatists feel they are being harmed by federal tax rate distributions (they pay more in taxes than they receive because the general distribution includes the poor areas of Brazil in the north and northeast) (Luvizotto, 2009: 40). However, despite such speeches I still point to São Paulo’s geopolitical factors as primarily responsible for such sentiments.

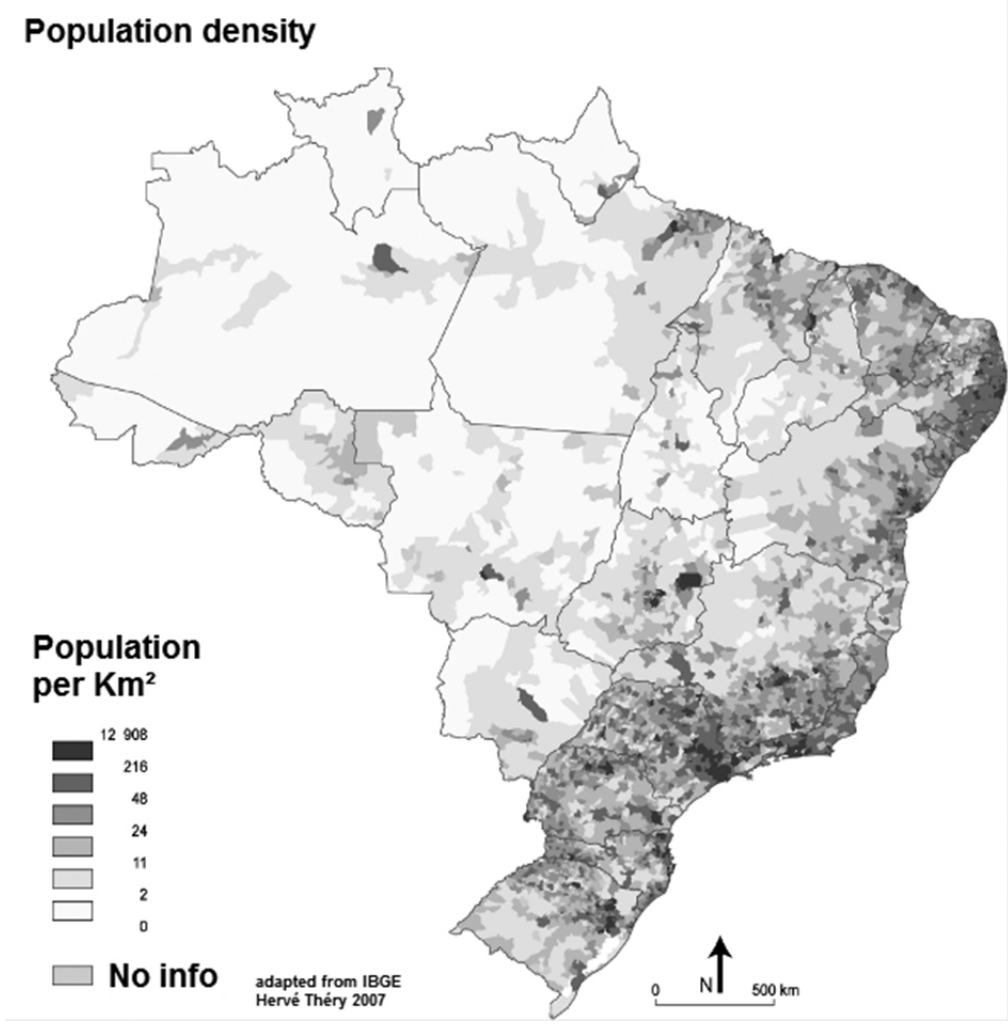


Figure 7.1

Source: Archela, Théry, 2008

Due to its economic and politic pursuit of relative autonomy from central government, the state of São Paulo created a geopolitical barrier between the south and the rest of the country that has promoted southern separatist aspirations. São Paulo unconsciously operated to block the country’s regional integration efforts when those were aimed toward the south. Respecting the obvious differences of scale, São Paulo state would typically have been some type of “buffer state” inside the national territory of Brazil, but instead of a weak, puppet, or satellite state as such buffer states typically tend to be, São Paulo emanates its own political energy and dynamism. Even though São

Paulo's geography does not function as a complete wall between the south and the rest of country—the northern portion of the Paraná state (in the southern region) shares a boundary with Mato Grosso do Sul (the west-central region)—most of the Brazilian population is heavily concentrated along the coast, while the interior of the country, where both states have boundaries, is less populated. In other words, the interior has insufficient demography and infrastructure to sustain a comfortable integration. Of course this may not be a permanent situation; it could change in the future. However, change is unlikely; at this point it is clear that São Paulo was—and maybe still is—an unintentional national actor playing the part of a geopolitical divisor.

Based on economic factors, São Paulo attracted not only immigrants from other states, particularly from the Northeast but also became a geographical “sponge” that absorbed a large portion of the Brazilian population and thus deepened the emotional and administrative division within the country. The following map demonstrates this division by showing the net interstate migration in 2000. In fact, a similar map for previous decades (e. g. , 1970s or 1980s) would show a similar role for São Paulo state; the only difference would be that the flows would be less substantive.

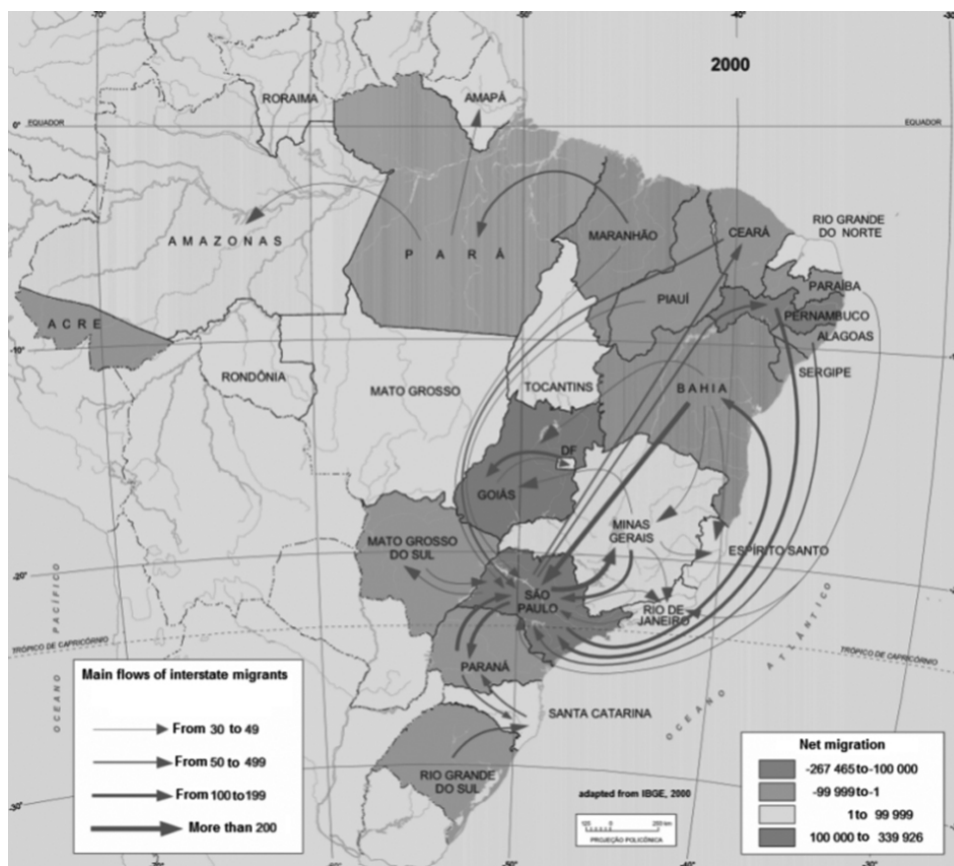


Figure 7. 2

Source: IBGE, 2003

Even though the city of São Paulo is not on the coast, the distance is only 70 km, a line along which several other very dense cities are positioned, creating a massive concentration of humanity between the coast, starting with the lowlands of Santos (*Baixada Santista*) (population 1,663,085), extending up to the escarpment within the Greater São Paulo region (population 19,677,506), and embracing the micro-regions of Sorocaba (population 1,308,111), Jundiaí (population 607,712), the metropolitan region of Campinas (population 2,770,862) and the

micro-region of São José dos Campos (population 1,395,905) totaling 27,640,577 people (IBGE, 2015). This huge amorphous mass of people, bolstered by a constant flow of migrants over many decades, dampened the effects of any direct interactions between the coastal population from southern Brazil with the coastal population in the rest of the country, especially when the former federal capital of Brazil was Rio de Janeiro. Even after the federal capital was transferred to the planned city of Brasília in the center of the country in 1960, this lack of geographical interaction was still maintained. It is fair to insist that São Paulo state, due to its independence and geographical position, compartmentalized the geopolitical administration of the country. Figure 7.3 illustrates the area's integration of the most populated areas.

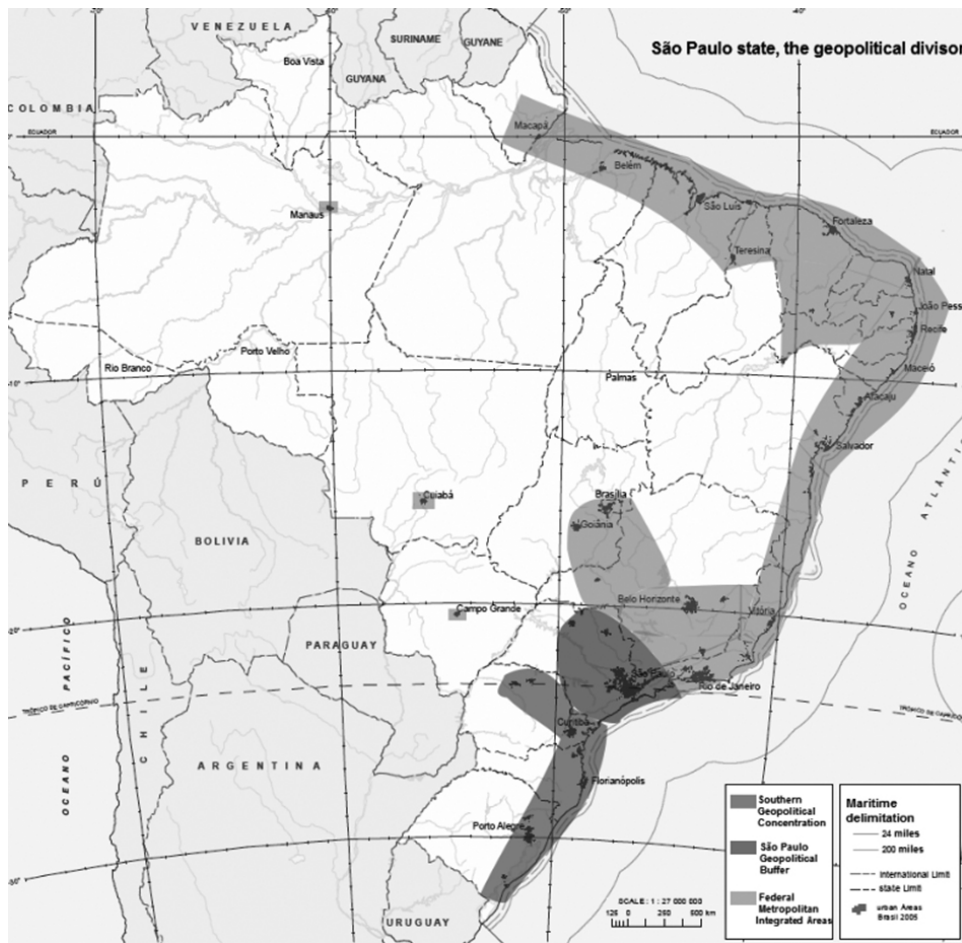


Figure 7.3

Conclusion

At first glance, this paper’s portrait of São Paulo as a geopolitical divisor may lead readers to make the common mistake of assigning to São Paulo a negative view of a rogue and problematic State that also anchors Brazilian management and development. However, that view is far from reality. Because of its strong hunger for self-determination, São Paulo functions as a backup to the rest of Brazil and as a historical pioneer, creating innovations for the rest of the country to sustain its own demands and needs. If it is a fact that on one side São Paulo functions as a geopolitical buffer, blocking the South from a stronger national cohesion, then the other side is also true—a failed São Paulo would probably wreck all of Brazil. At the same time that São Paulo is an anchor whose administration hinders

presidential and federal authority, the state of São Paulo also prevents reckless rulers from freely taking complete control of the country and establishing an excessively centralized government, an action that would eventually prove even worse, and efforts toward which have previously led to catastrophic situations such as São Paulo's opposition to the unification of the states promoted by Getúlio Vargas in 1932.

It is difficult to determine whether São Paulo will persist in its role as a geopolitical divisor in the future. Eventually, an economic crisis may deepen the existing regional division, resulting in changes to the political system that could lead to deformations in the current political geography of Brazil, which would be tragic for both Brazilian history and Brazil's geopolitical existence. On the other hand, regional integration accomplished by overriding São Paulo's autonomy could also be disastrous if it weakens this bold state, which has been so vital for Brazil. After all, although São Paulo's autonomy and insubordination can be a thorn in the side of the federal government, such characteristics are fundamental to the existence of Brazil as a national state as well. São Paulo has always taken a protagonist's role in its historical involvements—which is not easy for a country that is not a protagonist of its own history.

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