

thanks to manganese mining (270 cruzeiros). In the other areas it was between 116 cruzeiros (Pará) and 193 cruzeiros (Acre).

The level of prosperity was low. 47% of the active population earned a monthly income of less than 150 cruzeiros. 45% of the population of five years and older could not read and write. In 66% of the homes there was no running water or a well available.

Only two cities were really significant and they owed this mainly to their collecting and distribution function. Belém was the most developed and served the entire Amazon basin, including the nearby Belém–Bragança zone, the most populous and most colonised region of the Amazon Basin. Because of their transport and trade function, their infrastructure and their population, both cities had managed to attract the larger part of the northern Brazilian industry.

Until 1970, other parts of the vast country of Brazil had been increasingly more attractive as settlement areas than the Amazon Basin, with its tropical jungle, high average annual temperatures, abundant rainfall, high humidity and danger of disease. It had received little attention over the centuries from private investors, the mother country Portugal and the government of independent Brazil. There was no question of a development policy for the region. The North was just a resource frontier. All federal development activities focused on the Southeast (also referred to as Centro-Sul), as did private initiative. The North attracted mainly poor population from the Northeast.

In 1946, it was decreed that 3% of federal tax revenues should be used for a period of at least 20 years to promote the progress of the North. However, it was not until 1953 that the Superintendência do Plano de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia (SPVEA) was created to coordinate the intended development activities. By no means every year were the funds earmarked for the North actually set aside, while the funds that did eventually become available partly disappeared through corruption or could otherwise be used only for a limited number of projects, such as the establishment of some jute processing industries, construction of a small petroleum refinery near Manaus and the construction of the road from Brasília to Belém. The socio-economic structure was not transformed by these measures and there was, in fact, no noticeable progress.

In 1966 there was a clear turnaround in the interest of the Brazilian government. Since then, the latter made it increasingly clear that it was serious about opening up the North better, colonising it more intensively, integrating it more into the national economy and thus developing it more. To what extent it has succeeded in this will become apparent in Volume 2.

Population size and distribution

Northern Brazil has often been characterised as a “demographic vacuum.” Because of the low range of (high) temperatures, the constant high humidity, the incidence of various tropical diseases, the dense tropical forest and the predominance of soils which rapidly lose their fertility after clearance, Northern Brazil has always been a difficult area of settlement. It would be inaccurate, however, to attribute the fact that this enormous forest region still remained largely uncolonised, until the 1970s, to the generally unfavourable environment of the humid tropics. Other circumstances must also be considered in explanation.

A very important factor is that Brazil proved to be a country where one form of agricultural activity or another could be practised everywhere and that areas in eastern Brazil offered more attractive possibilities than the Amazon Basin. The immigrants accordingly moved mainly to those areas, so that population growth took place predominantly in the East.

It is not without significance in this connection that many Portuguese did not emigrate to Brazil with the intention of earning a livelihood through hard work, but were seeking rather to make a quick and easy fortune, preferably through the mining of precious metals (*imediatismo*). As far as agricultural production was concerned, many quickly came to the conclusion that the Amazon region was suitable only for the gathering of forest products. This conception persisted for a long time and was not unreasonable, but nevertheless acted as brake on the efficient occupation of the region, which consequently remained primarily the domain of the Indigenous population.

Added to this was a great lack of manpower. Portugal had for centuries a very small population, so that it was not able to supply many colonists. It was also opposed to the immigration of foreigners. Moreover, the natural increase of the colonial population was for a long time very low. Consequently, when independence began, the whole of Brazil had a population of no more than about 4 million on a territory with an area falling between that of Australia and Canada.

When millions of migrants set out for the New World in the nineteenth century the migration currents were not directed towards the Amazon region, which was regarded as a "green hell," where it was almost impossible for whites to make a decent living. Hardly any investments were made there. This changed when the Amazon region began to emerge as an important rubber producer after 1870, but the change was short-lived, as we have mentioned.

During the 20th century the population of Brazil has greatly increased and many areas, particularly the North East, have already had to contend with population pressure for a considerable time. Until about 1960, however, the Amazon region was still so undeveloped and inaccessible that the only prospect for many people was an arduous pioneer existence. This frightened off a great many potential colonists; many poor country people preferred to move to the cities in their search for better opportunities.

The tardiness in developing the Amazon region arose partly from the fact that, after the rubber boom, the government had little further interest in the region. Nor did private enterprises show much interest, with the result that almost all government and private investment was made elsewhere. The region had lost its attraction.

In view of this situation, it is not surprising that the "North" had a population of only 332 847 in 1872, i.e. 3.4% of the total Brazilian population, although it accounted for 42.1% of the area of the country. There was a fairly marked increase up to 1920, related mainly to the rise of the rubber gathering economy and the expansion of employment indirectly connected with it. During the period 1872–1920 the population quadrupled, as a result of which the North gradually even came to account for a larger share of the total Brazilian population (Table 1). During the period 1920–1940, however, growth gave way to a marked stagnation.

Table 1. *Population Change in North Brazil, 1872–1970*

Year	Population		Population growth relative to previous census, in %	
	Absolute	% of total Brazilian population	North Brazil	Brazil
1872	32 847	3.35	—	—
1890	476 370	3.32	43.1	44.3
1900	695 112	3.99	45.9	21.6
1920	1 439 052	4.70	107.0	75.7
1940	1 462 420	3.55	1.6	34.6
1950	1 844 655	3.55	26.1	26.0
1960	2 601 519	3.67	41.0	36.7
1970	3 650 750	3.90	40.3	33.7

Source: Sinopse Estatística 1971.

After 1940 there was again an increase, and at a level not greatly different from the national rate of increase during that period. This increase was related, among other things, to the enhanced interest in the Amazon region during the World War II (for rubber collection), the development of some mining (Amapá), the colonisation activities of Japanese immigrants and – partly because of this successful colonisation – a gradually more favourable perception of the production potential of Amazônia. Last, but not least, there was a further expansion of shifting cultivation arising from a greater natural increase of population. The latter became possible because, at that time, the Amazon region had recovered from the deleterious effects on the age structure of the large-scale exodus which took place after 1920. A further factor was that medical facilities had somewhat improved, causing a further fall in the death rate. It was, in fact, particularly the natural increase which was responsible for the more rapid growth after 1940. Up to 1970 there was no large-scale immigration into Amazônia.

Despite the changes which occurred in the growth pattern after 1940, the North still contained only 3.7%, of the Brazilian population in 1960 and 3.9% in 1970. It was not without reason, therefore, that reference was made to a “demographic vacuum.” This description appears all the more appropriate, since the population of the Amazon region at that time was very unevenly distributed. Of the approximately 2.6 million inhabitants in 1960 no less than 1.55 million (59.6%) were concentrated in the state of Pará, while the much larger state of Amazonas, with its approximately 721 000 inhabitants, accounted for only 27.7% of the region’s population. Within both states the majority of the inhabitants lived in the vicinity of the main river, the principal, if not the only significant traffic axis. Marked areas of concentration within these zones were the cities of Belém and Manaus, which historically performed an important function as commercial collection and distribution centres and had also succeeded in attracting to themselves a large part of the other tertiary activities. The two cities together, therefore, contained 22.2% of the northern population.

Table 2. Distribution of the North Brazilian population between the different states and territories and the percentage resident in the metropolitan municipalities; 1960 and 1970

State/ Territory	Population			Metropolitan Municipality		Population in Metropolitan Municipality			
	1960	1970 Abs.	1970 %	Name	Area (of State/ Terri- tory)	1960		1970 (sept.)	
						Abs.	%	Abs.	%
Pará	1550935	2 197 072	60.2	Belém	0.06	402 170	25.9	642 514	29.3
Amazonas	721 215	960 934	26.3	Manaus	0.9	175 343	24.3	314 197	32.7
Acre	160 208	218 006	6.0	Rio Branco	9.4	47 882	29.9	84 845	39.0
Rondônia	70 783	116 620	3.2	Pôrto Velho	24.0	51 049	72.1	88 856	76.2
Amapá	68 889	116 480	3.2	Macapá	20.0	46 905	68.1	87 755	75.3
Roraima	29 489	41 638	1.1	Boa Vista	41.9	26 168	88.7	37 062	89.0
Northern Brazil	2 601 519	3 650 750	100.0	All Municp.	5.9	749 517	28.8	1 255 229	34.4

Source: IBGE, Sinopse Estatística 1970; Sinopse Preliminar do Censo Demográfico 1980.

Special mention should also be made of the north-eastern corner of the state of Pará and, in particular, the area between the cities of Belém and Bragança. Because the occupation process had been largely concentrated here after 1600 and had even been intensified during the second half of the nineteenth century under the influence of the rapid growth of the city of Belém, a considerable intensification of agricultural activities had taken place in the course of time. This zone, including the city of Belém, which is formed roughly by the micro-regions of Salgado (023), Bragantina (024) and Belém (025) and covers 1.6 % of the state of Pará, accommodated no less than 29.2 % of the population of North Brazil in 1970 (See Figs. 4 and 9 in the chapter on Population Change, Part Three).

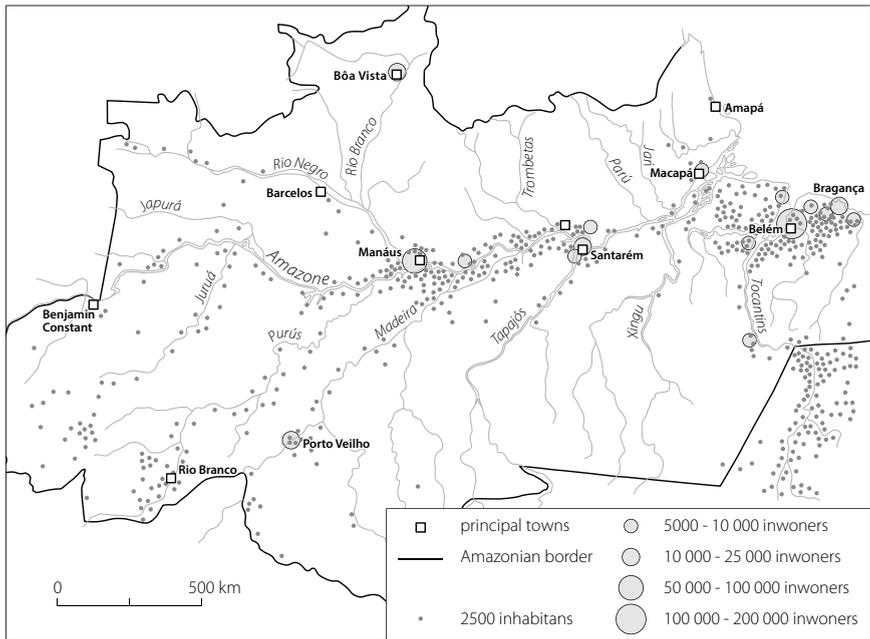
A similar concentration occurred in the state of Amazonas in the area around Manaus. The statistical meso-region of Manaus, which covers only 13 % of the area of the state, but is incidentally nearly as large as Great Britain, accommodated, with the city of Manaus, nearly 15 % of the population of the North in 1970.¹

As far as the other states and territories are concerned, it is noteworthy that also in 1960 and 1970 a considerable part of the total population was concentrated in or relatively close to the metropolitan core. This concentration was particularly marked in Rondônia, Amapá and Roraima.

Figure 1 gives a picture of the population distribution in around 1960 and shows clearly that most of the population outside the metropolitan municipalities lived in small towns, villages and hamlets near the waterways which opened up the region.

¹ The boundaries of this meso-region correspond with those of the micro-region of Médio Amazonas (Fig. 4, Part Three, Chapter on Population Change).

Figure 1. Population distribution in the Brazilian North about 1960



Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the Belém–Bragança zone the rural population densities reached 15–20 inhabitants per square kilometre; near the main river rural densities were in many places 1–5, but elsewhere they often fell to well below one inhabitant per sq km. For the North as a whole the average density in 1960 was only 0.72 per sq km and 1.02 in 1970 (0.09 in 1872) (Fig. 1).

Another impression is obtained if one considers not the North, but *Amazônia Legal*, the legally defined planning region which is the field of operation of the regional development body created in 1966 and to which many government measures for the benefit of the Amazon region apply. Apart from the North as it is customarily defined (see note 1), *Amazônia Legal* also includes the part of Goiás lying north of the 13th parallel, the whole of the recently created state of Mato Grosso and the part of Maranhão situated west of the 44th meridian. While North Brazil, with an area of 3.58 million sq km, covers 42.1% of the total land area of Brazil, *Amazônia Legal*, with its 4.98 million sq km, occupies no less than 58.5% of the total area of Brazil. Because the occupation process had already advanced further in North Goiás, Mato Grosso and western Maranhão, these marginal areas had a relatively large population in 1960 (see Part 3). As a consequence of this, *Amazônia Legal* had a population of 5.16 million in 1960, i.e. nearly twice as many people as the North and 7.3% of the Brazilian population.

References

- Burns, E. Bradford. 1980. *A History of Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). 1971. *Sinopse Estatística do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE.
- James, Preston E. 1969. *Latin America*. New York: The Odyssey Press.
- Kleinpenning, Jan M. G. 1973. *Brazilië*. Roermond: Romen.