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# **Migration and colonization of a territory under territorial dispute in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico**

**Ignacio Alonso Velasco**

Dr. en Derecho por la Universidad de Quintana Roo (Quintana Roo, México)

velasco@uqroo.edu.mx

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5256-2107>



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## ARTICLE SECTION

### **Migration and colonization of a territory under territorial dispute in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico**

*Abstract:* Since the 1950s a colonizing policy was carried out in Mexico with the idea of taking advantage of the "empty spaces" occupied by the jungle, in delicate areas such as border areas, and allocating them to productive activities such as agriculture. The appropriation by the inhabitants of space and land use are complementary and complex socio-economic processes, since natural situations and anthropogenic activities interact; consequently, their analysis should consider, among other elements, the population and colonization they performed in the area. The objective of this article is to expose what were the motivations and circumstances of the migratory process, as well as the moment in which the area under study, located in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, experienced its settlement. To this end, the review of bibliographic, institutional and hemerographic sources was carried out, but, above all, this article is the result of the field work carried out through surveys and non-participant observation, with the use of a photographic camera.

*Key words:* Campeche, conflict bordering, Quintana Roo, natives.

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## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Las zonas fronterizas son complejas, en las que es evidente la poca presencia del Estado.</li><li>2. Los pobladores pertenecen simultáneamente a dos entidades federativas diferentes, sujetos a jurisdicciones diversas.</li><li>3. Estas comunidades se encuentran alejadas de centros urbanos de rango medio o alto.</li><li>4. Mediante la coordinación institucional se acabaría con la ingovernabilidad existente en el territorio en conflicto.</li><li>5. Lo que prima es la voluntad política. Ésta parece no coincidir con las aspiraciones poblacionales.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Border areas are complex, with a clear lack of state presence.</li><li>2. The inhabitants simultaneously belong to two different states, subject to different jurisdictions.</li><li>3. These communities are located far from mid- or high-ranking urban centres.</li><li>4. Institutional coordination would put an end to the existing ungovernability in the territory in conflict.</li><li>5. What prevails is the political will. This seems not to coincide with the aspirations of the population.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Les zones frontereres són complexes, en les quals és evident la poca presència de l'Estat.</li><li>2. Els pobladors pertanyen simultàniament a dues entitats federatives diferents, subjectes a jurisdiccions diverses.</li><li>3. Aquestes comunitats es troben allunyades de centres urbans de rang mitjà o alt.</li><li>4. Mitjançant la coordinació institucional s'acabaria amb la ingovernabilitat existent en el territori en conflicte.</li><li>5. El que prima és la voluntat política. Aquesta sembla no coincidir amb les aspiracions poblacionals.</li></ol> |
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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Since the federal territory of Quintana Roo was formed in 1902 in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, there has been a dispute over a strip of land greater than 10 thousand 200 km<sup>2</sup>. Given the political situation, there is no early solution to the problem, as the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation still does not rule on it, through contentious means, and the federal entities involved do not agree on the delimitation of their state territories, through an a friendly agreement.

The inhabitants of the towns located in the disputed strip have many needs and, for them to be managed, they ask the nearest government, the municipality, to serve them. The Municipalities intend to meet the demands of their population, but fear incurring responsibilities due to the ongoing territorial conflict

The absence of a “consistent intermunicipal management model” between the Federative Entities of Yucatan, Campeche and Quintana Roo is generating inefficiency and lack of timely responses to achieve the sustainable development of this rural and tourist area of the Mexican state, which in turn is generating situations of “absence of state” or “disorderly intervention” of the same.

The colonizers of the jungle that exists in the Yucatan Peninsula were mainly peasants and indigenous people, without lands, originating from other states of the republic, especially Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Michoacan, who accessed the jungle taking advantage of the paths that were opened in the past for the extraction of precious woods , such as mahogany and cedar, as well as chewing gum.

The objective of this research work is to publicize how, when and why the process of migration and population of the study area has occurred, located in an area under judicial indeterminacy between the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo.

With this intention, a survey was conducted, in November and December 2017, with part of the population resident in the communities of the conflict area and who were of legal age. The characteristic of the populations that are the subject of study is that they are claimed as their own by both the Municipality of Othón P. Blanco, belonging to Quintana Roo, and by the Municipality of Calakmul, of the neighbouring State of Campeche.

These communities cover a total territorial area of 4 thousand 800 km<sup>2</sup> and are a total of 33.

According to data collected from the Coordination of Mayors, Delegations and Sub-Delegations of the City council of Othón P. Blanco, there are about 8,552 people living in the study area.

From the 1980s, the number of foreign inhabitants rose in the case of Campeche to a quarter of its population and in the case of Quintana Roo is a condition present in more than half of its inhabitants. This phenomenon breeds in the Municipality of Calakmul, where the percentage of inhabitants born outside Campeche is almost half, indicating that it has been a major recipient of migrants from other states of the country, especially in the decade in which it was established as a municipality through Decree No. 244, on December 31, 1996.

The reason for this immigration in the 1980s was that there were land problems in Chiapas, Veracruz and Puebla, which brought with it the massive arrival of indigenous people and peasants south of Campeche, specifically some were located near the border

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' exclusive translation. The full version of the article is available in Spanish.

with Guatemala and Belize and others on the borders with Quintana Roo. Even in the 1990s, as a result of the displacement of indigenous people from the highs of Chiapas and the Ocosingo region, they decided to settle in the south of the Municipality of Hopelchén, which further aggravated the living conditions of thousands of *zotziles*, *tzeltales*, *choles* and others, for the lack of water and productive supports.

Intercensal population growth rates indicate that the Calakmul region had growth well above the intercensal rate at both the state (either Campeche or Quintana Roo) levels, as well as national, due to an intense intra-State and interstate migration flow between the 1960s and 1980s, however, in the following decades this rate declined even below the state and national rate. In fact, this border part of Quintana Roo with Campeche has the least population growth throughout the Quintanarroense territory

A significant percentage of subjects entitled to plot were born in a municipality other than Calakmul or in another Mexican federal entity. From the field work carried out, it's inferred that the state from which the inhabitants of the region studied most come is Tabasco, followed by Chiapas, Veracruz and Oaxaca. Of the respondents, not even a quarter are native to the disputed locations. Despite this, they are satisfied with where they live and almost all (92 %) declare that they have no intention of re-migrating and remaining on their lands.

The population dynamics indicate that between counting and counting new localities have emerged, some on a permanent and others temporary basis. The reason that attracted these settlers is the endowment of land offered to occupy this "empty space", in an area as sensitive as the border with Belize and Guatemala. They were given the opportunity to work them for their own benefit, which they could not do in their home states, with greater social pressure on the land, where many had to cultivate the land, but in favour of a pattern. That is why it motivated the displacement of more than 96 % of respondents, not born in this region. Not for nothing, most of the men in the population shows are peasants and their women, housewives. This is consistent with the educational lag of these people, as the vast majority (82 %) does not exceed the level of secondary school and none of the respondents have higher education.

Beginning in the 1970s, the federal government promoted the colonization of different south-eastern tropical forest regions, including southern Campeche and Quintana Roo. The official policy at the time had a geopolitical view of occupying "empty spaces", especially in highly sensitive areas such as borders. This was the massive implementation of an anti-industrial population and agricultural policy that led to the destruction of large forest masses, without this resulting in a significant increase in agricultural area.

The border area in conflict has a multicultural composition, as it is made up of people from different states who came to inhabit this region in the hope of a better life. Over the years they have become accustomed to living this situation of indeterminacy and "double identity", which stands out during electoral processes.

The conflict between the states in which the Yucatecan Peninsula is divided has brought with it negative consequences for the inhabitants in all aspects: economic, political and social.

The towns have the main public services, but in a sparse way. You can see communities without drains, streets without sidewalks, houses built with perishable materials, with palm roofs, zinc foil or cardboard.

The real problem should not be which state these communities should belong to, but the deplorable conditions that the people who live there, without job opportunities, excluded from federal programs and imaging attention by the authorities, face every day.

The border conflict between the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo means that the inhabitants of these rural communities cannot enter social support programs, scholarships or housing improvement programmes.

Despite these deprivations, villagers say they are satisfied to live in the disputed area. Where they have their own land, where they harvest everything necessary for their subsistence, which they did not have in their places of origin, where they worked the field in favour of a patron. Here, the peasants are their own bosses and owners of their time, which gives them a peace of mind that compensates them for the absence of the satisfactories that would result from having good public services.

Finally, here it is proposed, as a measure to mitigate the consequences of the conflict, the figure of intermunicipality, which has great potential to be stimulated so that municipalities can increase and improve their capacities in their areas of competence. Through this model, projects could probably be implemented regardless of political ideologies, economic constraints or periods of government, it is only necessary to have as a priority the achievement of the well-being of the population, through the construction of processes, projects and optimization of resources, thanks to economies of scale and the efficient use of the territory.

There are already examples of how local democracy has served to build peace in scenarios of conflict, including armed conflict, through local government associations and international support and solidarity.