

# MIGRATION AND POPULATION DISPERSION IN TECPATÁN, CHIAPAS

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— Abstract—

The analysis of data provided by the censuses and population counts from 1960 until the year 2010 allows us to confirm that the municipality of Tecpatán has experienced immigration and emigration events. The first of these processes occurred during the second half of the last century which coincided with historical events such as the construction of the Netzahualcóyotl Dam, better known as Malpaso Dam, as well as the eruption of the Chichonal volcano, which provoked the settlement of new rural communities. The following population changes happened during this century, probably as part of a late adjustment due to poverty generated by weak economic conditions. This paper is about the municipality of Tecpatán before its political cleavage in 2011, which led to the settlement of Mezcalapa Municipality, and addresses the migratory processes and events associated to those, as well as the population dispersion that occurred along its territory.

**Keywords**

*Migration; population dispersion.*

The municipality of Tecpatán is located in the northwest of the Mezcalapa region, in Chiapas. It is a mountainous area, with a humid warm climate and a wide variety of flora and fauna; it has abundant streams and rivers, since a good part of its territory originally included jungle and forest areas. Until 2011, it included what is now the municipality of Mezcalapa and was adjacent to the states of Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, Tabasco and Oaxaca and the municipalities of Ostuacán, Francisco León, Copainalá, Berriozábal, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa and Cintalapa.

During the first half of the last century the Zoque language and the traditions and customs of this group were common, however during the following decades there were changes in the cultural and religious patterns, as well as in the forms of subsistence and in the visions of progress of the inhabitants. New locations also emerged, such as Raudales Malpaso, a town that over the years had more inhabitants than the municipal seat and whose residents managed to be recognized as a new municipality in 2011, thus emerging Mezcalapa.

These changes propitiated the questioning of population movements in the territory, finding that from the last half of the past century to the present, Tecpatán experienced migratory processes that included both the arrival and departure of inhabitants, which paid to the rural community and dispersion of its population. Taking into account what was written by Massey (1991: 15) who reports that: "(...) migration originates historically in the changes of the socioeconomic structure of the societies of origin and destination; that once implemented, the networks of social relations serve to support and increase the migratory flow". It is considered that in Tecpatán the immigrations and experienced migrations are the result of socioeconomic and natural events, such as the construction of the Nezahualcóyotl dam, the eruption of the Chichonal volcano and the transition towards economic practices oriented to livestock, events that have changed, in each historical moment, the socio-economic structure in the territory, this way in the present work it is tried to explain from these events the migratory processes that the municipality has experienced and how they have paid to a dispersion of its population.

## METHODOLOGY

This work is part of a larger research project titled *Financial Cultures in the Northwest of the Mezcalapa Region, Chiapas: Regional Economic Dynamics of Livestock*. The information presented was generated essentially under a quantitative approach, with the objective of identifying the migratory processes experienced in the municipality of Tecpatán, from the second half of the 20th century until before its separation in 2011, which required

consultation of statistical data from the 1960 to the 2010 census, which were used to calculate population growth rates. The calculations showed pronounced ups and downs in population numbers, so we sought to deepen the search to find events that account for population movements, for this were interviewed 25 heads of family with an average age of 52 years, of which 32% were women and the other men, as a requirement for the selection of the interviewees, they had to be from the municipality of Tecpatán. The interviews were conducted during the second half of 2016.

## RESULTS

The data analysis of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) (2017), allows knowing the behavior of population levels that have occurred in Tecpatán, Chiapas from 1960 to 2010. Table 1 shows the municipality's total population levels and its composition by gender. It shows that from 1960 to 2000 the population remained in growth, but in 2005 the level of population was reduced, for the year 2010 the population records a new growth but at a lower rate than the past decades, that is, the rate of population growth has decreased in recent years. This phenomenon is more evident when comparing the population growth rates of the municipality with the regional, state and national scales, which can be seen in table 2.

**Table 1.** Total population, male population and female population of the municipality of Tecpatán

Year	Total Population	Male Population	Female Population
1960	7,648	3,984	3,664
1970	16,983	8,769	8,214
1980	21,451	11,025	10,426
1990	34,465	17,429	17,036
1995	34,988	17,846	17,142
2000	38,383	19,166	19,217
2005	37,543	18,558	18,985
2010	41,045	20,420	20,625

Source: Own composition based on data from the VIII Population Census 1960, IX Population Census 1970. X General population and housing census 1980, XI General Population and Housing Census 1990, Population and Housing Count 1995, XII General Population and Housing Census 2000. II Population and Housing Count 2005. INEGI, Census of Population and Housing 2010.

**Table 2.** Ten-year growth rates, at municipal, regional, state and national levels

Year	Tecpatán	Mezcalapa Area	State	National
1970	122.1%	39.2%	29.6%	38.1%
1980	26.3%	31.8%	32.9%	38.6%
1990	60.7%	32.0%	54.0%	21.5%
2000	11.4%	18.8%	22.1%	20.0%
2010	6.9%	15.9%	22.3%	15.2%

Source: Own composition based on data from the VIII Population Census 1960, IX Population Census 1970, X General population and housing census 1980, XI General Population and Housing Census 1990, XII General Population and Housing Census 2000. INEGI, Census of Population and Housing 2010.

In 1970, the population growth of Tecpatán was totally atypical and does not correspond to any of the other scales (regional, state and national). This growth coincides with the emergence of the Raudales Malpaso town, following the construction works of the Nezahualcóyotl dam in the years from 1958 to 1966, which caused the arrival of migrants to be employed in the area and who later settled there. Information obtained in interviews reported that they came from many parts of the country, but that people were identified mainly from Puebla and Tabasco. They also report that many workers arrived with their families, some left Raudales Malpaso when their contract ended, but others decided to stay and establish their residence in the place, which caused other people to come to trade attracted by the consumption of these families. Those who decided to stay acquired land and built their houses there and also used them to work the land, mainly through livestock activity.

In 1980, the population growth rate was slightly lower than the other three scales, which is associated with the adjustments of the floating population in the Malpaso area, since the population movements included people who left, people who stayed and people who arrived attracted by the available national lands.

These lands attracted the area near Raudales Malpaso, both people from the interior of the municipality and other municipalities, this was the case of "Doña Manuela" and her children, a woman dedicated to livestock and who for these years was established in a ranch near the municipal head, on the route that leads to the town of Luis Espinosa, owned approximately 100 hectares and had

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1 Regarding the customs of those to whom they inherited to, field data obtained in interviews and mainly that made to Juárez (2016), who has been dedicated to advising and managing paperwork in the town of Tecpatán, reveals that there was a tendency to inherit goods mainly to the sons and the youngest son of the family.

9 children; several of them were looking for a way to dedicate themselves to livestock on their own, with the limitation that the generational succession would leave the property divided into very small units<sup>1</sup>, conveniently they found the opportunity to acquire cheap land in the Malpaso area and found there its livestock units<sup>2</sup>.

The interviewees also report that some people came to Malpaso to work at the Federal Electricity Commission and that they settled there, these people were characterized by having greater purchasing power derived from their periodic and constant income they received from the parastatal as salaries, the interviewees assure that this was a factor that affected a greater economic dynamism in Malpaso, which attracted merchants.

In 1990 the growth rate exceeds again the other scales, keeping correspondence only with the state, this situation agrees with what happened in 1982 when the Chichonal volcano erupted, located between the municipalities of Chapultenango and Francisco León, the latter adjacent to Tecpatán. In the area of the eruption, in addition to losing their homes and relatives, the Zoques had to face the loss of fertility of their lands. The diaspora caused by this event had Tecpatán as one of the many points of arrival, as explained by people from the area of the volcano and now living in Tecpatán.

At some point, migrants from the upper region also arrived in the territory of Tecpatán, as data from the INEGI (2016) reveal that there are currently 48 localities in the municipality where Tzotzil is spoken, 6 where Tzeltal is spoken and 2 where Chol is spoken. In total there are 56 localities which main languages are not native to the territory and exceed in quantity the 52 localities speaking Zoque. It was found that these migrants did not join the already existing localities but founded new localities.

In recent years, the population growth rates of Tecpatán have fallen to the point of being below the other scales, not even reaching half of the regional and national growth rate and being even greater the difference with the state rate. A historical event to which to attribute the pronounced decrease in the growth rate and the incursions made in the study area, as part of the field investigation, is not accurately identified. The research did not show

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2 The data on the life of "Doña Manuela" were collected in interviews with her children and grandchildren; she had seven sons and two women.

that a high and unusual mortality was aroused, as well no statistical data were found about this; however the interviews carried out show changes in economic activities, since the interviewees report that since before 1980, the inhabitants began a slow change, abandoning the cultivation of coffee to gradually adopt livestock. Nonetheless, this transition was accelerated at the end of the 1980's when the price of coffee was seriously diminished, which is related to the opinion of Solís and Aguilar (2006) who say that migration in Chiapas has been due to, among other factors, the decline in international coffee prices, a situation that was more accentuated as of 1989. For Tecpatán, migrations to other territories grew in the nineties, registering the low population growth in 2000 and this situation was accentuated in the new century.

The interviewees mention that many migrate, some leave alone (no children, no sentimental partners), others leave with their families (couples and children), but they assure that both men and women leave in the same proportion. Marina (2016) narrated that he has a son living in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and two in the United States, and that they send resources with which he has bought land and cattle that he manages. He assures that the salaries in Tecpatán are low, reason for which his children migrated, and for which he also worked in the United States for some time.

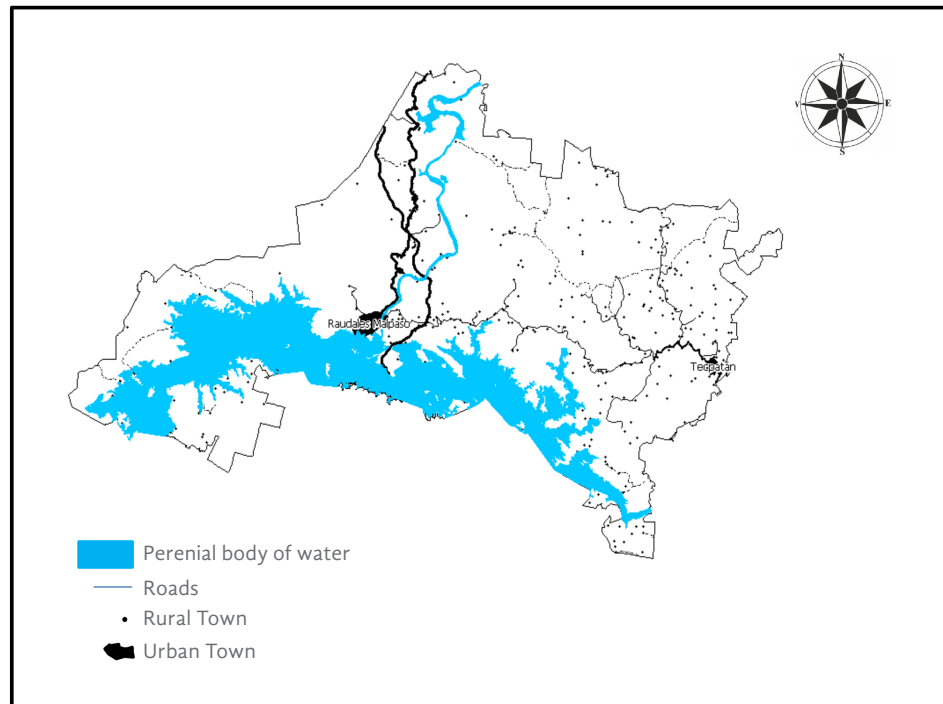
Other people who also gave an account of these migrations, assure that many people from Tecpatán have gone to other municipalities in Chiapas, to other states and abroad, at different historical moments. They say that 4, 5 or 6 decades ago they migrated in lesser proportion and to national destinations, some in search of better jobs and others for reasons of academic preparation, but in the last decades migration has increased and has been added as a destination the territory of the United States.

In Table 1 we can also see the proportion between genders, until 1995 the number of men was greater and as of the year 2000 women outnumber them in quantity. However, this disparity is reduced, showing a parallelism, which implies that the atypical rates of population growth have been proportionally in both men and women, this confirms the data obtained in the field, in the sense that both immigrations and emigrations have been made as a family or, in the case of single people, both men and women have done it.

The immigration processes that have arisen in Tecpatán have configured a distribution of the population in such a way that it is reflected in the high dispersion of localities; what can be seen in figure 1, it highlights two urban locations, Tecpatán and Raudales Malpaso as well as a large number of rural

locations. You can also see the roads and bodies of water that connect these locations; the lines that represent the roads differ in their thickness, in such a way that the thickest ones correspond to toll roads and the thinnest ones correspond to dirt roads. Note that the roads are not sufficient to communicate all the localities of the municipality.

**Figure 1.** The map shows urban and rural towns; roads and perennial bodies of Tecpatán. Year 2010

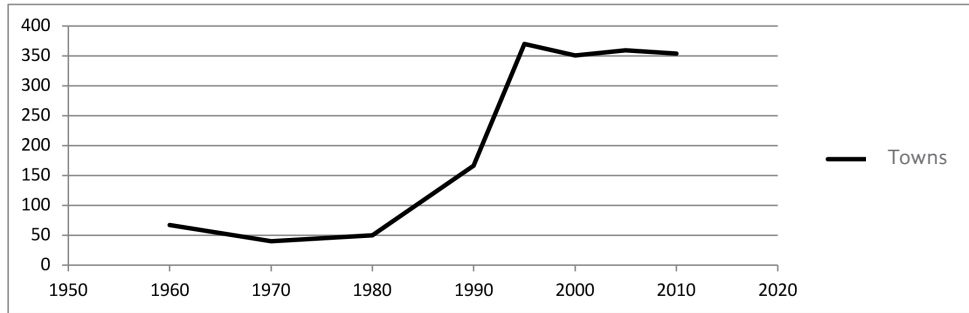


Source: Own elaboration based on the ENJ2010.

As explained above, the highest population increase was recorded in 1970, but observing Figure 2, it can be seen that the number of localities decreased in relation to 1960, and that Malpaso dam, although it acted as a magnet for migrants, it also generated the flood and disappearance of many localities. When construction work on the dam finished, employment levels dropped and part of the population migrated from Raudales Malpaso to the interior of the municipality looking for land to work, which justifies the increase in localities registered from 1970 to 1980.

**Figure 2.** Number of locations in Tecpatán from 1960 to 2010





Source: VIII Population Census 1960, IX Population Census 1970. X General population and housing census 1980, XI General Population and Housing Census 1990, Population and Housing Count 1995, XII General Population and Housing Census 2000. II Population and Housing Count 2005. INEGI, Census of Population and Housing 2010.

From 1980 to 1990 and then from 1990 to 1995 the growth of the number of localities is high since in 15 years the municipality went from 50 to 370. According to the population and housing census of 1980, in that year the Municipality of Tecpatán counted with two localities that concentrated the largest population, one had 2,353 inhabitants and the other 5,526, it is presumed that the first corresponds to the municipal seat (Tecpatán) and the second to Raudales Malpaso, therefore this data reveals that all new localities that were registered in the censuses between 1980 and 1995 had less than 2,500 inhabitants, that is, they had the category of rural, which implies a high dispersed population.

Although during the construction of the Malpaso dam there were not many who migrated to the area from the same municipality, after filling the glass of water and over the years, the inhabitants of the new generations sought other lands to exploit, the dam facilitated the communication by water arising several wharves and new roads were opened by dirt roads to communicate the new localities. The national lands attracted people from the same municipality and from other places that looked for spaces to live and work the land, thus, these lands were managed to acquire them legally. In this way, the population movements that started in other parts of the state and that chose Tecpatán as a point of arrival, the incursion of new spaces to exploit the land and the geographical points that began to act as jetties on the margins of the dam, were the main reasons for the emergence of a large number of localities that currently give the population of Tecpatán the characteristic of dispersed.

## CONCLUSIONS

As has been seen, the municipality of Tecpatán has experienced population movements in the forms of immigration and emigration. These processes match, in the case of immigration, with two specific events: the construction of the Malpaso dam and the eruption of the Chichonal volcano. On the other hand, the emigrations coincide with changes in the economic conditions derived from the abandonment of the practices of the cultivation of coffee for livestock.

In this way it is observed how the migratory processes have been linked to the intentionality of those involved in seeking subsistence and improving the living conditions for their families, this is a characteristic that prevails in most migrations. However, the case of Tecpatán acquires particularity due to the high population growth registered in the last mid-century, which implied modifications, emergence and disappearance of cultural patterns that are reflected in the reconfiguration of socioeconomic interactions in the territory, something that raises the need to deepen through specific studies oriented to the municipality. On the other hand, the emigrations point out that the economic conditions that attracted people during the last century have disappeared, so now there are many who seek opportunities for progress in other territories.

The processes of immigration and emigration addressed, acquire special relevance to understand the reality that now experiences the territory, characterized by the high rurality and dispersion of its population, which presents challenges for political actors and public policies to be able to equip conditions that pay to the improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants.

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