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For more information on the research project, please visit bit.ly/transit-migration-in-the-americas

DR. NOELLE BRIGDEN

Noelle Brigden, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Marquette University.

DR. KATRINA BURGESS

Katrina Burgess, PhD, is Associate Professor of Political Economy at The Fletcher School.

DR. KAREN JACOBSEN

Karen Jacobsen, PhD, is Henry J. Leir Professor of Global Migration at The Fletcher School and the Friedman School of Nutrition, and directs the Refugees and Forced Migration Program at the Feinstein International Center.

Journeys Interrupted: Human and Policy Challenges of Assisting Migrants in Monterrey

Final Report and Proposal for Integrated Solutions: The Need for Multilevel Dialogue across Transit Cities in the Migration Corridor

This report presents reflections from the second in a series of ‘Journeys Interrupted’ workshops designed to bridge the gap between academics and policymakers on the issue of transit migration and deportation in the Americas. The project is based at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University) and focuses on cities in Mexico that are grappling with intersecting flows of internally displaced people, migrants from third countries, and Mexicans deported from the United States. We held a workshop in Monterrey in May 2018 that built on the success of a similar one in Tijuana in May 2017. Both workshops focused at the local level and sought to promote dialogue among practitioners, establish new communication networks, and generate creative ideas for urban governance related to migration. The events brought together practitioners from the Mexican and U.S. governments (local, state, and federal), international organizations, civil society groups, and academics from both sides of the border to share perspectives and generate proposals for improving the lives of migrants and the local communities that host them.

The workshops consisted of moderated roundtable discussion sessions among people with shared interests who might not otherwise find themselves in the same circles. The workshops addressed a need for multilevel dialogue about the ‘permanent transience’ that characterizes migrants, refugees, and deportees caught indefinitely between their sending countries and intended destinations. Transit cities (i.e. urban areas through which migrants pass on their journeys elsewhere) around the world are becoming de facto destinations for people denied entry to or deported from their desired destination countries. In Mexico, these populations include Central American migrants and refugees, non-regional migrants and refugees (notably a recent influx of both Haitians and Venezuelans), and Mexican nationals deported from

the United States. Policy responses tend to occur in silos, failing to recognize how migrant and local communities interact across issue areas and within a transit corridor (i.e. an established long-distance migration route), and thereby missing opportunities to identify shared interests and coordinate civil society and governmental efforts.

To facilitate new communication between otherwise unfamiliar stakeholders, the workshops broke with traditional approaches to migrant issues, which are generally organized by themes or sectors: health, education, housing, food security, documentation, employment and labor markets, etc. Instead, the Monterrey workshop organized group discussions temporally, focusing each of the three roundtables on a phase of the migration process: 1) immediate humanitarian assistance; 2) integration and access to services in the short and medium term; and 3) the development and sustainability of legitimate governance in the long term. In order to move past identifying the difficulties for service provision (which are well known) and promote discussion of innovative responses, the first two roundtable discussions started with a handout that identified past programs or policies, asking participants to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of these responses.

This workshop structure naturally led participants to think in terms of integrated solutions to multidimensional problems faced by a diverse population. Ultimately, both workshops arrived at several recommendations and conclusions. The findings from the event in Tijuana have been disseminated to participants in a report, as well as a companion policy brief to this one. An academic paper providing a detailed comparative analysis of the discussions in the two cities was presented at an international academic conference in July 2018.

The Monterrey Workshop: Exploring Permanent Transience in a New Border City

In Monterrey, the workshop highlighted four interrelated issues that add new understanding and further refinement to the results of the previous event in Tijuana. These issues help us derive broader insights into the global issue of legitimate governance under conditions of permanent transience:

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1. The Emergence of ‘New Border Cities’;
2. The Importance of an Integrated Civil Society;
3. The Continued Relevance of *Place* within a Transnational Migration Corridor;
4. Low Levels of Government Accountability.

However, these issues also speak to the specific context of Monterrey, indicating a particular path forward for urban governance in that locale. Therefore, this report, which will be disseminated to participants in both Spanish and English, provides a focal point around which stakeholders can coordinate their interventions, as well as an advocacy tool to confront the larger social and political context of permanent transience.

The Emergence of ‘New Border Cities’: Urban Challenges and Opportunities along the Transnational Corridor

While Tijuana has long served as a major depot in a migration corridor that links the United States with Mexico and beyond, Monterrey has only recently become prominent as a platform or stopping place for northbound migratory flows. Tijuana is located at the U.S. border and has been incorporated into a bi-national urban zone with San Diego to the north for decades. Monterrey, in contrast, is located farther away from the border and has only recently served as a safe place for migrants to regroup away from the notorious criminal violence that has come to plague the border region. Furthermore, mass deportation has become an integral part of the global migratory

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system, and Monterrey is the recipient of increasing numbers of deportees and returnees from the US. These two trends and their associated social, economic, and political practices mean the borders of the Global North are “thickening”, and they have tied Monterrey to the border despite its geographical distance. In this context, we can think of Monterrey as a *new border city*.

In fact, Monterrey has a long history of social and economic integration with the United States. Its diaspora reaches far, and its business ties run deep. As a center of transnational commerce and investment, Monterrey is deeply implicated in the neoliberal economic restructuring and the security practices and processes that have unfolded at the US-Mexico border. Cross-border criminal networks connect an underground economy that spans both countries, and changes in policing of the border habitually restructure the safety and security of the residents of the city.

Participants at the workshop enthusiastically received the idea that policy makers in Monterrey should reorient its urban development focus by acknowledging and building on its deep connections with the border. The concept of the *new border city* found traction during roundtable discussions as a useful analytical lens and a focal point for policy development. The commonalities between Tijuana and Monterrey also highlight the need for cross-regional communication between cities. In particular, Monterrey as a new border city can learn and benefit from experiences of traditional border cities, such as Tijuana.

The concept of the ‘new border city’ facilitates communication and collaboration across cities, as well

as between diverse actors within them. However, the underlying socio-economic and political landscape of each city must be taken into account when devising a social movement strategy and urban response to permanent transience. In particular, as we next discuss, significant sectors, such as the business elite, must be incorporated into an urban response strategy.

Integrating Urban Society: Incorporating the Business Elite Into the Migration Discussion

In Monterrey, the political dominance of an elite business class with longstanding ties to transnational commerce presents both challenges and opportunities for organizing around migration. Successful social movements and political advocacy in Monterrey can be described as corporatist, whereby they are tightly allied with (or coopted by) business interests with links to government. Without the involvement of such important powerbrokers, local government officials are unlikely to move with speed and determination. Thus, business elite collaboration is a prerequisite for effective urban response to migration.

The business elite is a natural partner for immigrant advocates in Monterrey. The local economy benefits from immigrant labor, and the return of ‘dreamers’ as a newly skilled and well-educated labor force presents an opportunity for local commerce and economic growth. Furthermore, all sectors share an interest in developing and maintaining legitimate governance of the urban environment, which requires management and successful resettlement of incoming population flows.

However, local immigrant advocates have much work to do in convincing the business elite that they too are stakeholders in the issue of ‘permanent transience.’ Progressive social movements (such as those that focus on women’s rights, LGBTI rights, and environmental issues) and the neoliberal business elite generally have a contentious relationship in Monterrey. However, civil society and entrepreneurs have been known to collaborate around particular issues where their perceived interests converge, such as urban renewal in some at-risk neighborhoods. Tellingly, despite the central role the business class plays

Figure 1.1: New vs. Old Border Cities: Relationships to Borders and Migration

	Old Border City	New Border City
Relationship with Border	Physical proximity	Socio-economic proximity
Type of Space	From international gateway (transit space) to gridlock (sticking space)	From internal magnet (domestic destination) to stepping stone (regrouping space/transnational migration)
Impact of U.S. Immigration Policy	Immediate due to availability of local point of entry	More delayed due to physical distance
Dominant Migrant Strategies	Asylum-seeking (literally for those requesting US asylum; figuratively for deported Mexicans)	Opportunity-seeking (more economic resources and fewer security risks than in nearby border towns)

in Monterrey politics, and despite having received multiple invitations, no entrepreneur or commerce representative agreed to attend the workshop in Monterrey. Therefore, the workshop highlighted the need to make a compelling argument to the commercial sector regarding their stakes in the urban governance of migration.

The Continued Relevance of Place: The Need to Recognize the Distinct Motives of Populations Drawn to Each Urban Environment

Just as the socio-economic and political landscape generates opportunities and challenges for organizing responses to migration, so does the city's physical landscape. Even while borders "thicken", geographic distance, or *place*, still matters for urban governance. For example, its position at the border means Tijuana receives more people planning to seek asylum at a U.S. port of entry, and thus there is a large presence and visibility of Haitians and other non-Spanish speaking populations, as well as Central American asylum seekers. By contrast, Monterrey's vibrant economy and labor demand position it to receive more migrants seeking employment to fund their onward journeys or already wishing to settle in Mexico. Increasingly, Monterrey is not only home to Central Americans and deported Mexicans seeking work, but also Venezuelans.

These different populations reflect the fact that Tijuana is a gateway turned into a *gridlock* city. In other words, it is a port of entry to the United States that has become impassable for many refugees and migrants. Failed U.S. asylum-seekers often become stuck there. Meanwhile, Monterrey is a *stepping stone* border city that pulls migrants and refugees with economic opportunity and relative security, in comparison to the old border towns along the U.S-Mexico frontier. It is an urban area where these migrants and refugees rebound from the border after failed crossings. Given the different migration motivations of the new arrivals to each city, the needs of their migrant and refugee populations often differ.

Low Levels of Government Accountability:

The Need to 'Go Beyond' Transparency

At both our workshops, Mexican government officials framed migrants' lack of information about existing government programs as a major impediment to legitimate governance. While most participants agreed that greater access to information and government transparency would be beneficial, several civil society participants took issue with the idea that migrants were misinformed; they argued that migrants avoid government programs and fail to report crimes because of fear of abuse by officials themselves. Well-informed migrants correctly understand that a gap between the law and practice

renders them vulnerable during any interaction with government. Transparency and education may be first steps toward legitimate governance of permanent transience, but such steps must be followed by the enforcement of protections of immigrant rights and measures to ensure the accountability of government officials to those rights.

In both Tijuana and Monterrey, a pervasive distrust of all levels of Mexican government was evident among civil society participants in workshop discussions. In Tijuana, government officials responded defensively, demonstrating a reciprocal lack of trust. During roundtable discussions in Monterrey, government officials responded dismissively, as opposed to defensively, often with minimal participation in discussion. Thus, an important finding from the first report *Journeys Interrupted: Human and Policy Challenges of Assisting Migrants in Tijuana* resonates in Monterrey, and is worth quoting here:

In this context, credible policy making demands a participatory framework within which civil society can propose solutions and hold government accountable for its commitments to those solutions. A complex ecosystem of civil society actors crosses municipal, state, and national lines to offer a myriad of entwined services to migrants, refugees, deportees, and locals.

While the workshop in Tijuana emphasized stability and transparency as the foundation for a repaired relationship between state and society, the Monterrey workshop drove home the point that stable, transparent policies are not enough. Indeed, tensions arose between civil society and government during the preliminary session, with several activists forcefully accusing a locally-based national migration official of abuse and inaction. Conflict and hostility between civil society actors and government officials erupted at key moments during workshops in both Tijuana and Monterrey. Monterrey activists later expressed frustration with their inability to influence officials. They pointed to the fact that, beyond transparency, local government must be held accountable when officials violate their own policies.

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Immigrant advocates must have institutional, legal and political instruments to exert influence. A fragmented civil society without the support of power-brokers, such as the business elite, is unlikely to effectively wield such instruments. Only an integrated and relatively powerful civil society can punish officials for their failure to respond to local needs and their frequent transgressions of the law. Beyond transparency and stability, Monterrey must develop a relationship of state-society accountability, beginning with the construction of more durable alliances within civil society itself.

Conclusions and Achievements: Answering a Need for a Comprehensive Response to 'Permanent Transience'

In summary, the workshop promoted communication between key stakeholders around the issue of 'permanent transience' in Monterrey. The participants identified shared challenges and potential solutions, and highlighted the importance of continued coordination among stakeholders for coping with a larger political context of immigration restriction and xenophobia.

Finally, the comprehensive response developed at the Monterrey workshop expands the application and depth of the integrated solutions proposed in Tijuana. Given the shared challenges of legitimate governance and permanent transience confronting both cities, the response must be comprehensive in a geographic sense, as well as a thematic sense. Taken together, the two workshops link urban environments along the corridor in a larger dialogue about the challenges and opportunities that these conditions present.

Next Steps:

The long term impact of the workshop depends on continued action by the workshop organizing committee. The goal is to facilitate communication and coordination across a broader geographical area, and to deepen our understanding of urban integration, human mobility, and legitimacy of governance in diverse settings. The five next steps include:

1 Goal: To provide a focal point for future coordination among stakeholders, including between geographically distant stakeholders in different cities.

Actions: Dissemination of both workshop reports to participants in Tijuana and Monterrey.

2 Goal: To provide a means for communication among stakeholders, including among geographically distant stakeholders in different cities.

Actions: Dissemination of an expanded workshop directory that includes names and contact information of participants in both Tijuana and Monterrey; exploration of options for social media spaces.

3 Goal: To develop concrete proposals and influence the national policy making process at a potentially historic juncture in Mexican politics following the July 2018 elections.

Actions: Identification of key policymakers in the new administration and organization of a series of briefings in Mexico City following the inauguration of Mexico's new president in December 2018 to share findings and recommendations.

4 Goal: To inform academic and policy debates at a global level, thereby deepening our understanding of urban integration, human mobility, and legitimacy of governance in diverse settings.

Actions: Presentation of the comparative analysis and findings at an international academic conference in Thessaloniki, Greece in July 2018, and ultimately the publication of those findings in a peer reviewed journal; continued dialogue with Fletcher School research teams who have conducted fieldwork and analysis in Greece; and ultimately the publication of comparative work with global perspective in an academic venue.

5 Goal: To influence the international policy making process.

Actions: Contribution to the discussion of the UN's Global Compact on Migration through participation in the meetings in Morocco in December 2018.