

Transnational mobility and conflict

Ibrahim Sirkeci*

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss transnational mobility using a perspective that emphasises conflicts at macro, mezzo and micro levels while seeking ways in which such a conflict model of migration can be developed. I outline areas involving different degrees of conflict which are better seen on a continuous scale ranging from potential and latent tensions to violent conflicts and wars. Conflict aspects contribute to the dynamic nature of transnational human movements and, at the same time, appear to be antithetical to globalisation. The tensions/conflicts at individual, household, community, and state levels are not isolated from each other but inter-connect different levels. Within this conflict conceptualisation, transnational mobility appears as a move from human insecurity to human security.

Keywords: transnational mobility; conflict; human insecurity; migration theory

Introduction

Transnationalism opened up the discussion in international migration studies by abandoning the unidirectional and static understanding of the phenomenon. In Faist's three generations typology, transnationalism corresponds to the third generation of migration theories recognising migration practices connecting both sending and receiving worlds (2000:12). This may sound quite motionless, but yet he argues "migrations are not singular journeys but tend to become integral part of migrants' lives" blurring the distinction between countries of origin and destination (2000:13). The focus here is onto the transnational geography or transnational social space where migrations occur. Thus, we may avoid a) the dullness and simplicity of pull-push models which tend to see migration as a move from A to B determined by the relative attractiveness of both ends; b) self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1959:423) of network models; c) bureaucratic definition of international migration (i.e. changing place of residence for 12 months or more); d) providing a space to abandon the separation e.g. migrants and non-migrants; e) theoretically useless migration typologies (e.g. voluntary vs.

* Senior Lecturer at European Business School London, Regent's College, London, UK. Email: sirkeci@regents.ac.uk.

forced, economic vs. political etc.) which does not help in understanding migration behaviour.

Based on these premises, the paper develops a conceptualisation based on conflict as a core dynamic force determining and shaping transnational human movements. As opposed to what Düvell (2007) proposes in a recent article, it is not the 'conflict over migration' but migration as a function of conflict what matters. After elaborating briefly on the theoretical added value of transnationalism in the next section, I will delineate the concept of human insecurity and its link to conflict. The scope of conflict and transnational movement as a cost incurred by conflicts will be the focus in section four. Finally, I will discuss the building blocks of a possible conflict model of transnational migration.

Transnationalist intervention in migration theory

Transnationalism has created a rich space for social scientists. On the one hand, it shifted the focus to the continual links across borders and proved to be useful in "decentering the gaze of the analyst from the singular nation-state" (Harney and Baldassar, 2007: 190). Many of us refer to the concept of transnationalism to describe and analyse processes and patterns connecting people, businesses and other entities in different places of the world. While this approach widens the understanding of human movement some would still argue that such "macro-scalar associations do have their interpretive limits, obscuring and eliding different scales, networks and manifestations of connections, which, as a result, diminish its clarity as a conceptual tool" (Harney and Baldassar, 2007:190).

A burgeoning literature provides a wealth of applications of the transnationalism concept for understanding international migration (Basch et al. 1994; Ferguson, 1999; Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Kivisto, 2001; Levitt et al. 2003; Smith, 2001; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Vertovec, 1999). Transnational literature helps us to move away from linear migration models to circular, fluctuating and dynamic ties built by human movements across borders making conceptualisations of multiple 'heres' and 'theres' possible as opposed to origin and destination. While emphasising the process and movement, transnationalism also decentralises the nation and refer to trans-local belongings and identities (Werbner, 1999; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003), which is argued to be the main form of migrant belonging in the future (Castles, 2002:1158).

However, the gap in the literature is evident regarding the conflict element of transnational mobility. For example, Koser (2007) underlines the absence of asylum-seekers and refugees in transnationalism studies. He argues that this is because these groups offer very limited potential for the development of transnational identities and activities in this regard as they are thought to maintain very few links to the origin (Koser, 2007:237). However, for me, refugees and asylum seekers are the prime examples for development of a conflict-oriented model of transnational migration because these two groups exemplify few of the various conflict situations. For instance, asylum seekers and refugees (perhaps all displaced populations) are often the main target of restrictive admission policies of states as well as being subject to a variety of threats paving way to strong human insecurity perceptions. The basis of this conflict also lies in the fact that transnational movement of these groups along with undocumented migrants undermines the power of nation states, “challenging the ability of states to control their borders, their identities and their residents” (Koser, 2007: 242).

Human insecurity

According to Bilgin, the concept of human security recognises that the security of individuals and communities do not necessarily match that of the state (2003:213). Thus, the security of migrants and non-migrants often differs from the security of states, at origin, in transit or in destination. A clear formulation of the concept of human security appeared in the United Nations Development Program’ 1994 Human Development Report, where the emphasis shifted towards ‘people’s security’¹ (UNDP, 1994 in Bilgin, 2003:214). Amartya Sen, a pioneer in conceptualizing human security, linked human security to threats to “the survival, daily life, and dignity of human beings and to strengthening the efforts to confront these threats” (2000:1).

Abraham Maslow’s five stage hierarchy of needs model, often depicted in a pyramid showing needs or motivational drives in order of importance, places security and safety on the second level following the basic needs such as air, food, shelter, and sex (1943).

¹ Aradau (2008) criticises those claiming a switch from state to individual security pointing out that primary role of the state according to “the fiction of social contract” is ensuring individual security. Perhaps one could elaborate on this and say the exclusion of others in the social contract fiction and inclusivity of all vulnerable people in today’s human security concept may mark the line between.

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He argued such lower level needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be attended. This prioritisation can be debatable but the importance of such needs is not. Hence, one would need the security of a home and family, community, neighbourhood and country -also recognising the fact that satisfaction is relative and personal.

Formulations of human security often emphasize the welfare of ordinary people (Paris, 2001). Thomas argues "that material sufficiency lies at the core of human security" and "the problems of poverty and deepening inequality are central concerns" (2001:159). In their elaboration of the Index of Human Insecurity, Lonergan et al. underline that "human security has been endangered not only by military threats, but also of resource scarcity, rapid population growth, human rights abuses, and outbreaks of infectious diseases, environmental degradation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity" (2000: 1; also see Homer-Dixon, 1994).

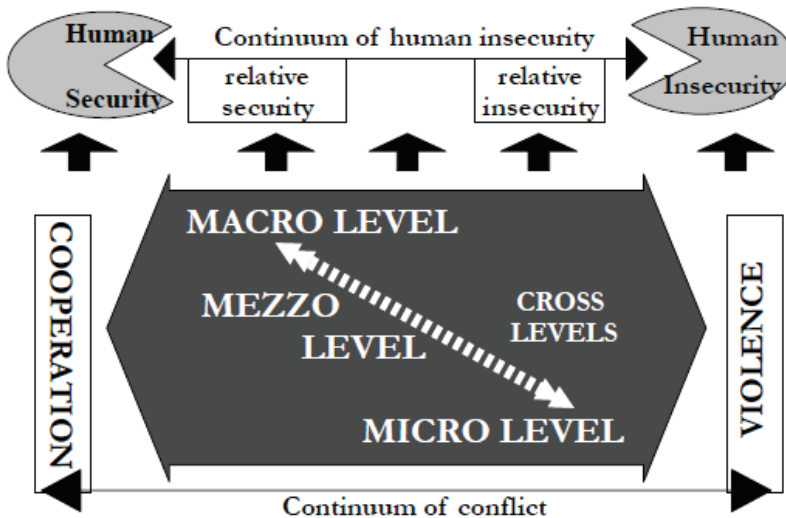
Human insecurity can be seen as a concept defining various situations where conflicts lead to perception of deprivation of some kind, among certain people, in a given context. It can be civil strife for Sudanese minorities or environmental hazards for Indonesian islanders. It is perceived subjectively by individuals (and/or households, communities and so on). Thereby human insecurity is relative, subjective and may arise from civil conflicts, wars, latent tensions, environmental catastrophes, etc.

Perception of human insecurity can be based on material or non-material environments. For example, members of a minority group may feel insecure because they are not allowed to practice their own cultural traditions and develop their mother language. The non-material environment of human insecurity can also be pinned down in another context by mere feeling of oppression (or resentment) by minorities. Yet, there are examples of the material environment of human insecurity triggered by not only political and ethno-political conflicts (e.g. ethnocentric governance) but also by lack of economic opportunities (e.g. high unemployment, low GDP), high risk of natural environmental disasters (e.g. tsunami, drought) or man-made ones (e.g. building dams). We need to bear in mind that one or more of these may affect any given population at any given time, and that material and non-material underpinnings interact with each other. This interaction may increase or decrease the feeling/perception of human insecurity. Confrontation between different groups is also likely: those who are advantaged by (or in) the situation against those who are disadvantaged.

Thus, I argue that main motive in international migration can be formulated as seeking (human) security; or avoiding (perceived) human insecurity as the root cause. Thereby we override the existing typologies (e.g. labour, family, asylum, irregular migrations etc.) which have been so far unhelpful in the endeavour of conceptualising the phenomenon. These categories are often reflections of legislation that do not provide clues to help understand migration behaviour. The threats to human security appearing in many forms may channel populations towards the exit option (i.e. emigration).

Human security and insecurity should be constructed on a continuous scale where flows are expected to occur from insecurity end towards security end (Figure 1). In a sense, we can see human insecurity aligned with push factors whereas human security with pull factors referring to the so-called push-pull models of international migration (van der Erf and Heering, 1995).

Figure 1: Environment of Human Insecurity and Conflict



Conflict

In developing an understanding of international migration revolving around the concept of conflict, I have adopted the definition by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). His definition of conflict does not necessarily equate to violence. It embraces a range of conflict situations from latent tensions to violent conflicts, which does not necessarily to be ethnic or religious oriented. According to him, conflict is not only about manifest clashes (e.g. revolts, wars, armed

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conflict) but also contests, competitions, disputes, and tensions (Dahrendorf, 1959). These may be explicit (overt) or latent (covert) (Parsons, 1954:329). It covers all relations that involve incompatible differences in objectives (Dahrendorf, 1959:135). Thus, I conceptualise conflict on a continuum: from cooperation, where differences are cleared to violent conflicts where consensus is either not possible or not preferred (Figure 1). Applied to the international migration, for instance, bilateral labour migration agreements between countries can be seen as examples of cooperation while refugee crises seen in war zones would fall towards the other end of the continuum.

Therefore, we can identify conflict situations at various levels and stages of international migration process. Accordingly, transnational space is such a *conflict-space characterised by conflict-potentials*. According to Rummell (1976) it is a space within which conflict can occur, although at any moment there may be no ongoing conflict. The transnational space is constantly transformed by conflicts and migrations. There the dynamic nature of conflict and migration influences the structures, actors and processes. In due course, different channels of migration become available while some others disappear. Thus we see changing admission rules, visa policies, border control policies as well as new migration routes, migration mechanisms and new migration types while these movements may also change the conflicts they are originated from or linked to.

Conflict is important within the international migration context as it leads to the perception of human insecurity. However, this perception does not always lead to migration, which is just one of the strategic options available to those subject to an *environment of human-insecurity (EOI)*² (Sirkeci, 2006). Emphasising the shift towards human security, I revise this concept to call it an “environment of *human insecurity*” (EOHI) (Sirkeci, 2007). It is characterised by *material* (e.g. armed conflict, deprivation, lack of employment, poor infrastructure) and *non-material* (e.g. discrimination, oppression, human rights violations, fear of persecution, language barriers) insecurities (Sirkeci, 2006, 2005a) and often induced by conflict.

² The ‘environment of insecurity’ (EOI) concept was applied to the Kurdish rivalry in Turkey (Icduygu et al. 1999). I have expanded it to analyse the Turkish Kurdish emigration from Turkey to Germany (Sirkeci, 2003, 2006). EOI as a background contexts was later used to explain Iraqi and Turkmen migration (Sirkeci, 2005a, 2005b), Lebanese migration (Hourani & Sensenig-Dabbous, 2007), and Alevi migration (Zirh and Erdemir, 2008).

People exposed to the EOHl have two options: a) status quo and b) exit. The status quo option primarily refers to those who stay and align with the dominant ethnic group, and/or the government forces; whilst the exit option may involve joining the rebels, or leaving the conflict zone, which is where migration occurs (Sirkeci, 2006). There can also be mixed strategies locating and moving individuals, families and groups along the lines set in the insecurity continuum in Figure 1.

Sources, levels and streams of conflict and transnational migration

In 'transnational migration space', there are conflicts among individuals, ethnic or religious groups, social classes, countries, supranational agencies, and so on. Transnational migration may incur as a cost of such conflicts. The conflict continuums illustrated in Figure 1 are also reflective of various (economic, political, cultural) indicators commonly used in migration literature because all these environmental influences shape the perception of human insecurity. Thus, people may not respond to the conflict stimulus in the same way in different contexts; which can explain some of the non-migration. It is important to admit the complexity of making migration decision. Therefore, the continuums in Figure 1 should be read carefully bearing in mind the contextual influences.

One obvious source to promote migration is violent and armed conflicts. In a rare study Naude (2008) showed that an additional year of conflict will raise the net migration 1.35 per thousand while an additional natural disaster will increase it further 0.6 per thousand in Sub-Saharan Africa underlining the key role of conflict (p.17). There are also other studies pointing at similar causality between migration and conflict in Africa and Middle East (Hatton and Williamson, 2002, Sirkeci, 2006, 2005a and 2005b, Stansfield, 2004, Lubkemann, 2005, Hourani & Sensenig-Dabbous, 2007). Forced migration studies, in general, can also be inspected for such cases.

Another source of conflict revolves around gender security. Gender inequalities and traditional gender roles as well as unwanted female children are areas with conflict potential. One related area is the homosexuality and attitudes towards it in some origin countries (e.g. Iran) and asylum seeking gays escaping from such places (Spring, 2008; Manalansan, 2006). These conflicts can be expressed at cross levels (i.e. individual versus state) and/or mezzo (e.g. households) or individual levels.

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Koser's (2007:243-50) three case studies on refugees, asylum seekers and smuggling provide evidence to the conflicts arising between immigrants and host societies. The tensions between immigrants and the locals or natives are real. For example, he refers to tensions between Bosnians and Eritreans in the UK and the government as well as tensions with their respective host countries. These tensions involving refugees, asylum seekers, and smuggling (i.e. conflicts) have an impact upon states. Attempts to build - inevitably- 'transnational governance' regarding international migration should be seen as a result of the conflicts between various actors including states, individuals and groups. At a similar level, asylum-seekers, rejected refugees, and those undocumented who are likely to be forced into the cheap labour experience another source of conflict in the 'destination'.

A further source of conflict and insecurity is environmental disasters. Many people are displaced within their countries while some cross borders because they "can no longer gain a secure livelihood" in their homeland due to environmental problems (Myers, 1993:752 cited in Renaud et al. 2007). This may cause conflict between communities and individuals over scarce resources such as water; once these sufferers cross an international border, it may also lead to conflict between states. Border crossing is a crucial issue as borders are increasingly militarised and tightened - often at the expense of human lives (for examples, see Yaghmaian, 2005, Cornelius, 2001, Esbach et al. 1999), and despite the fact that migration control is a myth (Cornelius et al. 1994 and 2004).

Factors such as lack of job opportunities, socio-economic deprivation, and wage differentials can be conceptualised as sources of conflict, albeit non-violent one. Similarly, dual labour markets and ethnic discrimination in destination countries would also reflect a conflict between immigrant labourers and natives.

In Figure 1, three levels of conflict are defined: *macro* (e.g. conflicting policy preferences in sending, receiving and transit countries), *mezzo* (e.g. tensions among migrant and non-migrant households and communities; also regarding gender roles within households), *micro* (e.g. conflicts between individuals; non-migrants versus migrants), and *across* levels (e.g. conflict between regulating agencies -border patrols, visa officers, etc.- and migrating individuals).

At macro level, conflicts appear between the sending and receiving countries because they often have incompatible interests

(e.g. need for IT professionals in Germany versus high unemployment in Turkey).

Across level conflict occur when actors at different levels have incompatible interests. For example, at the country of origin, certain interests of minority members may diverge from national interests, which can be expressed in various forms of forced migration. The continuous conflict between the regulating and migrating human agency forces changes in migration regulations (e.g. tightening admission rules) and in response to these changes, migrating human agency changes his or her strategies, mechanisms, routes, and pathways of international migration. For example, we can consider discrimination against or suppression of minorities in across level conflicts (e.g. Berbers vs. Morocco, Kurds vs. Iraq).

International migration's influence on gender roles within families left behind are to look for mezzo level and micro level conflicts. For example, when husbands move abroad as "guest workers" or else, women often take control of households left behind as lengthy absences of men are inevitable. These can cause tensions within the household and may even lead to violent conflicts (i.e. domestic violence); also upon the return of immigrant men who often want to be household head again.

Concluding remarks: Towards a conflict-based understanding

Based on the continuums of (human) security and of conflict, the main assumptions of such a model would be as follows:

1. Migration is initiated by conflict situations where incompatible interests are expressed by the parties involved.
2. The level and intensity of conflict and potential and actual perceived damages or hurt determine the pace and type of migration.
3. Admission rules are closely affected by the repercussions of conflict situations but often chase the movement. Thus, it is also source of conflict influencing migration.
4. Conflict creates an insecurity perception which shapes the migration process as a whole.
5. This human insecurity perception may weaken or strengthen throughout the migration process; sometimes leading to onward migration or return migration or re-migration.
6. The environment of human insecurity may arise from conflicts over material or non-material sources.
7. Macro (state, nation; e.g. countries limiting foreign labour versus those with excess labour), mezzo (household, community;

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e.g. empowered wife left behind versus returnee husband over heading the household), and micro (individual; e.g. achieving better careers, working in a secure environment, lack of jobs) levels can be identified as levels of conflict where cross level tensions are also possible (e.g. border crossing migrants versus border patrols or passport control officers; ethnic minority members versus oppressing government forces).

These premises of course are not denying the contributions of network theory, economic theories, and cultural theories regarding their explanations on the causes, direction and composition of transnational migration but rather reorganises them with the lenses of conflict.

A conflict-oriented conceptualisation of international migration can help us to better understand process and acknowledge its dynamic nature. Typologies of international migration may follow once this conflict model is established as different conflicts, or different aspects of different conflicts may determine different migration patterns which are responsive to regulations within a broader environmental context. Defining the conflict on a continuum, on the other hand, help us to accommodate the overlaps between different migration categories, which have been used so far in the literature and policy making. This model is informed by past scholarship on international migration but attempts to go beyond it by borrowing from the concepts of human security and environment of human insecurity. In short, the approach proposed here argues that migration is a search for (human) security.

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