

The case of Turks and Kurds in Germany: migration and conflict

Ibrahim Sirkeci, PhD, Reader in Demography
Department of Marketing, Strategy and Law
Faculty of Business and Management
Regent's College London

Transnational migration as a function of conflict?

Over years I have studied international migration to come up with a model of understanding migration in relation to conflict.

Dahrendorf (1959) defines conflict in a broader sense; so not only violent actions and events but any disagreement including latent tensions constitute a conflict situation.

Areas of conflict

Socio-economic: lack of jobs, poor infrastructure

Political: lack of representation and recognition; discrimination; migration restrictions

Ethnic or religious conflicts/clashes/wars

Family feud/blood feud

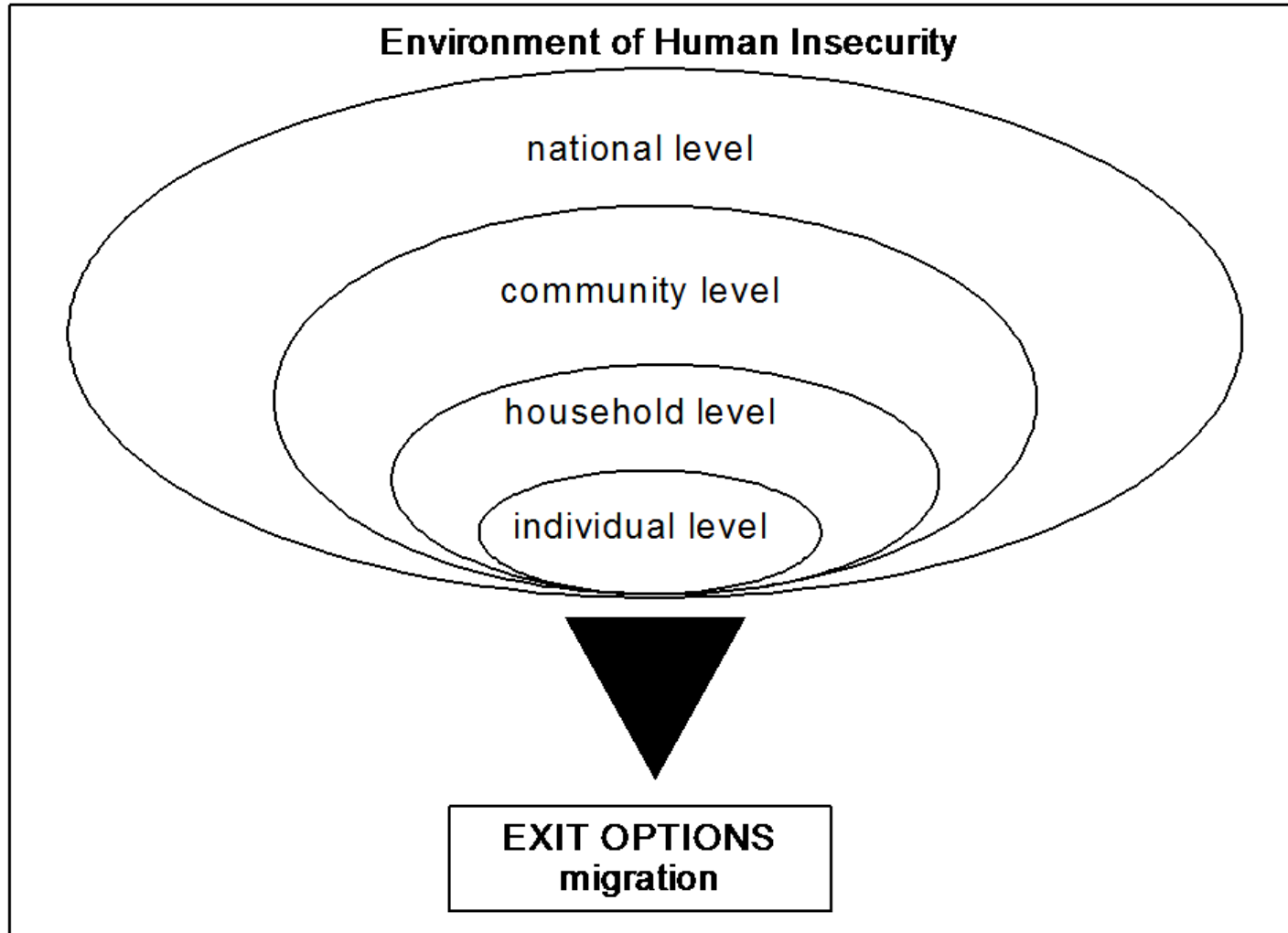
Individual liberties and freedoms

Levels of conflict

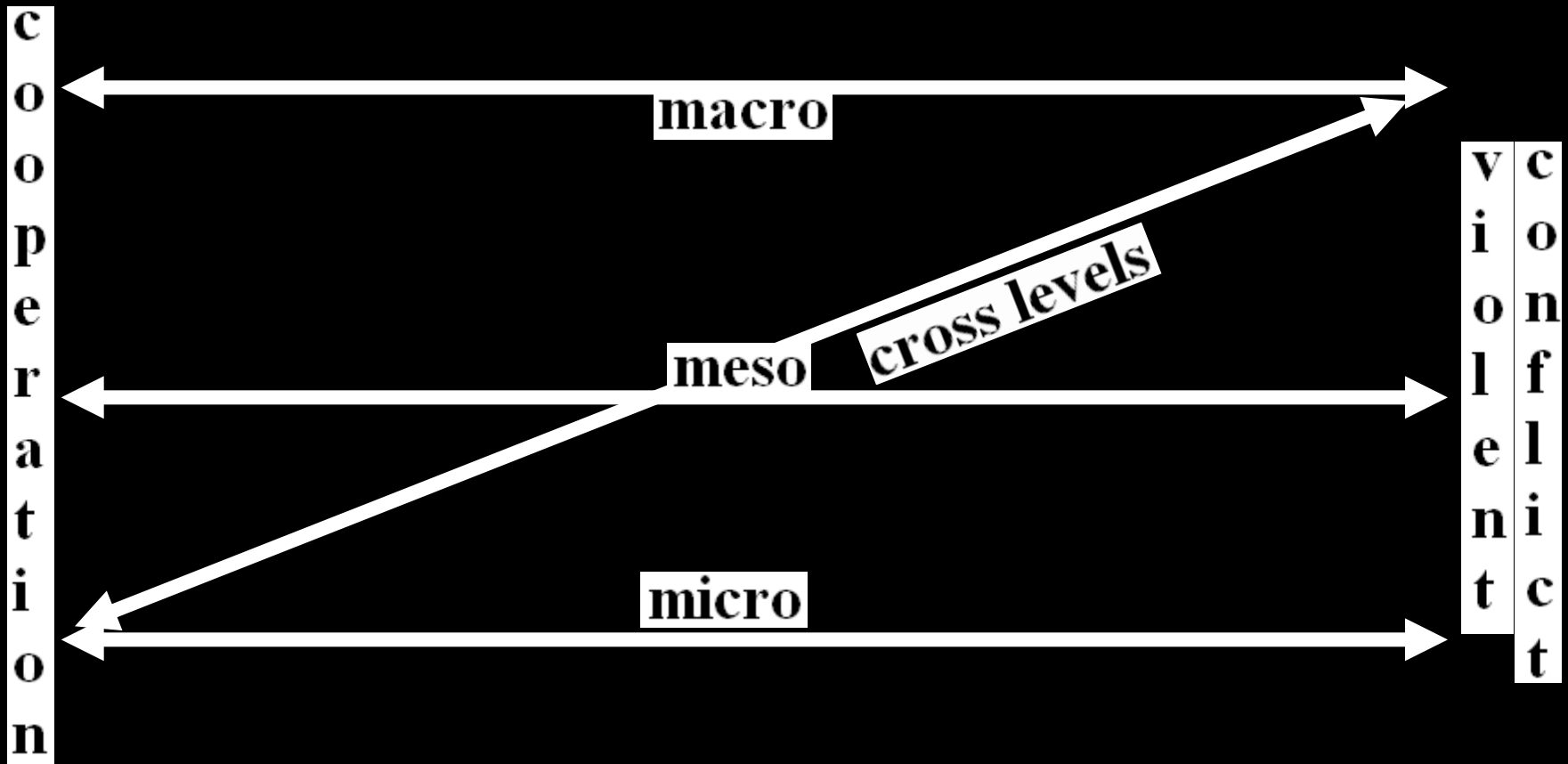
I have looked at different levels of relations where conflict may occur: state level, community level, household level and individual level.

- States vs states**
- Individuals/households/communities vs states**
- Individuals/households vs individuals/households**

Four levels of conflict



Conflict scale



Perception of conflict

The conflict is possible to measure partly quantitatively but largely qualitatively as it is down to the individual's perception.

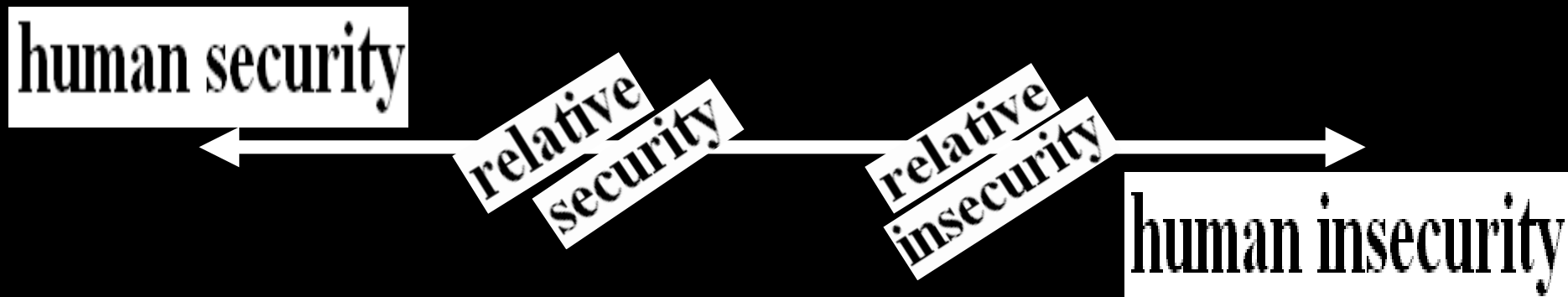
This is why we don't have many more millions emigrating from areas where intense conflicts exist. Some perceives it unbearable and leave while others stay put.

Environment of Human Insecurity

Perception of conflict is key element in environment of insecurity which can be characterised of various conflicts at various levels. It may serve as a facilitating factor for internal or transnational migration.

However, it is not a one way street. Changes in the destination and/or in the origin would influence migration decisions

EOHI scale



Dynamic nature of conflict

**Conflicts exist in the areas of origin and in
the areas of destination**

**Transit routes and the migration process
itself are not free from conflicts**

**Thus conflict in destination (i.e.
racism/xenophobia) play a role in return
or onward migration decisions**

Migration of Conflicts

Turkey's Kurdish question is not unique.

The conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state has a long history.

It is similar to the Kurds and other minorities in Iraq and I am sure similarities can be found in Berberi case in North African countries and elsewhere.

Kurds vs Turks?

I chose to say Kurds vs Turkish state as for many there is no problem between Kurdish and Turkish individuals or communities.

During the last three decades this conflict claimed over 40 thousand lives as while millions of people displaced.

I argue most Kurdish emigration from Turkey is linked to the conflict in Turkey

From guest workers to illegals

**When there is conflict, those opting for exit
utilise any possible avenue; so typologies of
economic or political migrants does not apply.**

Kurdish fled Turkey;

- **as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s**
- **as family migrants and political refugees in the 1980s**
- **as asylum seekers in the 1990s**
- **as illegal/undocumented migrants in the 2000s**

“Nights of Kurdish violence plague Turks in Germany”

Associated Press headline, July 28 2005

- **Kurdish militants firebombed:**
 - **A Turkish travel agency in Giessen**
 - **A mosque in Oldenburg**
 - **A restaurant in Hannover**
 - **A sports club in Bremen**
- **Battled with police in Frankfurt**
- **More than 140 Turkish business were attacked in 2005 in Germany**

However, is it always that much violence?

Settling old scores?

Sirin: “My Turkish friends here were always joking about my Kurdishness and Alevism. ... In later years I stopped seeing them. Now most of my friends are Kurdish.”

(Sirkeci, 2006:200)

Silan: “ When we were children, Turks were making fun of our Turkish pronunciation... One day my mother said to our Turkish neighbour ‘let our son get married to your daughter’. She replied: ‘I would give her to a dog not to Kurd’.

(Sirkeci, 2006: 201)

Police and the Turks against the Kurds

Sevgi: “In every country we are oppressed... In Turkey police and grey wolves are together; here the German police cooperate with them. I have never seen a grey wolf beaten or arrested by German police.”

(Sirkeci, 2006:255)

What is Turkish or Kurdish?

In perceptions the divide is pretty clear however, in narratives when talking about events and opinions without a clear political focus things change a little.

For example, for most Kurds working for or doing business with the Turks is fine. In fact they often prefer Turkish partners to others.

Also if they arrive undocumented most opportunities and shelter was available within the larger Turkey-bound immigrant community.

Relative, dynamic and relational identities shaped by and through conflict

In the perceptions of Diaspora Kurds, Kurdish national identity is formulated and shaped as against the Turkish counterpart. We – Us; Good – Evil

Table 7.1 Common signifiers of “we” and “they” of the Kurds

We/us	They/them
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Kurds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Turks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Kurds from same provinces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Kurds from different provinces</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Kurds from Turkey</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Kurds from Iraq, Iran, Syria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>All the Kurds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Kurds</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Turks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Germans and others</i>

(Sirkeci 2006:228)

Perceptions

Table 7.2 Turkish words referring to homeland and their affiliations

<u>Homeland:</u>	
<p>Vatan / Anavatan</p> <p><i>(Refers to the whole of Turkey; right wing; rarely used by the Kurds to refer to Kurdistan)</i></p>	<p>Türkiye</p> <p><i>(Neutral)</i></p>
<p>Ora / bizim oralar</p> <p><i>(A geographical description, used by everybody)</i></p> <p>Memleket</p> <p><i>(Used to refer hometowns and surrounding areas; generally used by everybody; rarely refers to Turkey as a whole)</i></p>	<p>Ülke</p> <p><i>(Political word specifically used to call a claimed territory, Turkish Kurdistan; used by Kurdish nationalists)</i></p> <p>(North or Turkish) Kürdistan</p> <p><i>(Used by Kurdish nationalists)</i></p>

(Sirkeci 2006:253)

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