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Normative Orders in Everyday-Life: Being Expatriate in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic and Crisis in Frankfurt am Main

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Abstract: *In the contemporary world of a strong digital order, yesterday's political borders give the impression of being not that more important. The old world was determined through its concepts of borders, frontiers, statehood, institutions, or the membership of its citizens. The strongholds of a state are its physical borders, politics (process), polity (structures/institutions) and policy (content/normative). This article analyzes how social orders pass on to normative orders in everyday life in times of COVID-19 and crisis for expatriates in Germany's most international city Frankfurt am Main. It tries to reflect how physical borders are influencing still people and to what extent sources of borders are shaping everyday life.*

Key Words: Normative Orders, COVID-19, Pandemic, Crisis, Frankfurt

Introduction

This article has the purpose of exposing how social orders condition and changes the habits of everyday life of expatriates, who settled recently to the most international city of Germany, Frankfurt is Main. The methodology for knowing the people is based on interviews in English, French, and German. Twenty-five interviews with different newcomers to Frankfurt were done with those ones who were interested in sharing their

work, life and personal experiences. Their countries of origin have been India, France, the USA, United Kingdom, and Brazil. These interviews were conducted from December 2020 to January 2021. Interviewees' age varies from 25 years to 45 years. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the social distancing of two meters, not shaking hands and wearing a mask were the basic requirements for an interview at public places, which was respected

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without any comment by all participants. None of them was whether born, socialized, nor has any direct tie to any person, region, or city of Germany. The data for this research was gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observations conducted by the author of this article. To protect identities, only the age and the country or city of origin are given.

With the acceleration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the common known everyday life of western societies and as well as the one of the global south underwent a transformation. The common outgoing ways changed. It shifted from not being in the mood of crisis to a habit of wearing a mask, keeping enough social distances and not having access to amusements at public places. At a critical retrospective, topics of crisis, wars, and conflict zones were not taken seriously, as should be the case by many people in western societies. These habits of unconcern were put in question- eventually accelerated by the pandemic of 2020, which forced people to stay at home until there are new safety procedures for everyday public life.

A question, which was always asked, has been, who thought that the World Health Organization (WHO) and at a global scale the national ministries of health, institutes of virology, or just alcohol would turn the normative order of everyday life dramatically?

People of a certain age, who were vulnerable enough, stayed at home or were just isolated for not harming themselves and their surroundings. At the same time, it was predicted that much more couples are going to take up the decision for a newborn in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The shutdown of the greatest parts of public life slowed the inclusive known unburdened life. The opposite happened; much more exclusive rules

were ordered by governments to confine, isolate, and protect the citizen.

Frankfurt as a Historical Hub

The main question here is how Frankfurt became through the thousand-year of German history such a historical hub. Historical records reveal only when the sovereign of a settlement had officially granted so-called “town rights”, that very place was allowed to call itself a genuine town: The most important city rights were the right to establish trade markets according to their own trade customs (“market right”), to mint their own money coins (“coin right”), to levy customs duties on trade goods (“customs right”), and to fortify the city with strong walls.

The city hall (German: Rathaus) of Frankfurt at the Roemer - since the year 1405 - is another fact, with which in our contemporary times the most international city of Germany traces a long political history of administration at large: “An important building for the nation. But the Roemer was and is not only significant for the city - the town hall, which stands just a few hundred meters from the Main, was also of national historical importance for many centuries. The Roemer became the (...), and the preliminary hearings for the election of German kings and emperors were held here (Frankfurt.de, 2021).” Another crucial date is the year 1585, as the Frankfurt Stock Exchange (German: Frankfurter Wertpapierboerse) was established ([Deutsche Boerse, 2021](#)).

In the conducted interviews, everyone stated that Frankfurt was more known to them than any German city. On social interaction level, Frankfurt’s specific character is being a highly transcultural city in everyday life ([Alam, 2019](#)): The average dweller of Frankfurt interacts not only with Germans or a specific sociocultural community – given the

fact Frankfurt is the only German metropolis where Germans are by total numbers minority – but as well as with other social groups, too. In this sense, again, Frankfurt stands out as the only city of Germany and even the German-speaking world in which one will find the highest degree of transnational entrepreneurship of the migrant society ([Ebner & Woest, 2015](#)).

By today, the social and economic structure – the old renowned Free Imperial City of Frankfurt (1372-1806) and as the Free City of Frankfurt (1806-1866) of the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and the entrepreneur Henri Nestlé (1814-1890) – of Frankfurt is the greatest exception in the German speaking world, too.

The former urban planning leading figure of Frankfurt Albert Speer Junior (1934-2017) evaluated the city: “First of all, Frankfurt benefits from its unparalleled centrality in Europe. Everything converges here - from rail, highways and logistics to the airport hub. Even the Internet data streams converge in Frankfurt. This creates jobs in Frankfurt and the entire Rhine-Main region.” ([Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2013](#))

In the postwar time, Frankfurt was the major German city of the so-called “economic miracle”, which is known under the German notion of the “Wirtschaftswunder” ([Bendix, 2002](#)). Especially from 1945 to 1956, it prospered. As of 1948, when the “Credit Institute for Reconstruction” (KfW) was founded in Frankfurt, important and decisive impulses throughout Germany came from the city on the River Main (KfW, 2018). The KfW is since then in a mood of evolvement, being the world’s largest national development bank: “KfW’s career is closely linked to the economic development of the Federal Republic of

Germany. Since its foundation in 1948, KfW has been supporting change and driving forward-looking ideas as part of its statutory mandate: in Germany, in Europe and in the world. To this end, it has granted around EUR 1.7 trillion in loans over seven decades. (KfW, 2021)”

To be or not to be in Frankfurt

In this part of the article, it is necessary to reflect the major viewpoints of the interviewees. The researcher considers it significant to represent the standpoints of some of the interviewees to reflect the cross-section and average. These accounts form a representative selection. It is worthy of being noticed that in an international ranking for expatriates worldwide, Frankfurt was in the COVID-19 pandemic year of 2020, the second popular big German town after Duesseldorf and before Hamburg ([Travelbook, 2020](#)).

A 32 US-American citizen stated: “As I was in my hometown in Chicago, watching the daily news, I always saw Frankfurt as an equal city to us. The reason for that impression I had about Frankfurt- was as someone who does not know Europe with its many diverse countries - the skyline, being the city of finance in Germany, having a strong stock exchange, and the European Central Bank. But, as I settled here in early 2018, I came across what else belongs to the hyperdiverse identity and history of the city. I mean, Frankfurt as a city has more history than my country, which I only learnt through Wikipedia to improve my German knowledge. Coming from Silicon Valley as an engineer, I feel here at the utmost place I want to be.” (personal interview, Dec 05, 2020)

Indeed, it is really fascinating how newcomers from wide distances are influenced by the pure image. In that sense, Frankfurt

offers everyone the image of being not only the most international city of Germany but as well as the only hub in its midst. To dig more about reasons, perceptions, and experiences, a 38 years old Indian family father explained: “As you might know as an Indian in the IT-sector it is not easy to come to Europe. In spite of, my destiny was London or Frankfurt. Fortunately, my little daughter, wife and I could settle over to this vibrant, clean, and so much international city. London committed through Brexit to my taste suicide.” (personal interview, Dec 04, 2020)

In the neighboring country of France, people face similar challenges, as explained by the youngest interviewee: “Being a Frenchman is not bad as I feel it. In the summer of 2020, I could make it to migrate to Frankfurt from my hometown of Lyon in France. However, my migration has not that long-distance in comparison with other expatriates in my company. But, what I have observed since then is this unbelievable rapid pace in my daily life in Frankfurt with which I sometimes have my difficulties. I do not complain. Among my friends back in France, I was the only one who could find a very well paid job at a famous international operating bank.” (personal interview, Dec 16, 2020)

The exit of the European Union caused a huge migration wave from the British island. In this sense, a 41-year-old Londoner shares his views: “Brexit. I was against it. My wife was in favor of it. In the end, as Brexit was a hard historic decision, I was more than sad. As a result, I took the decision to leave for Frankfurt. My wife will stay in London, but I settled over in summer 2020. I do spend my everyday life here, and she here. That is a bit unlively. At least, I could rescue myself to gain a new position as a commercial lawyer in our

office in Frankfurt.” (personal interview, Jan 09, 2021)

Frankfurt attracts people from Brazil like the 45 years old man: “In times of crisis, populism, right-wing politicians in my country and in the USA, so I was fed up with this daily news. Our security situation is getting worse in Brazil. What to do? I searched for a job opportunity in Portugal or Spain. Then, a friend told me about France and Germany. Through a lucky accident, I could find in my field of occupation a nice job in a pharmacy. Frankfurt captured my heart; when you feel safe, there is no air pollution, and the daily state security is provided.” (personal interview, Jan 23, 2021)

Being highly qualified like these interviewed men and women showcases not only a unique characteristic. What was obvious were their notions of understanding with political borders and the new orders, which are not oftentimes in their favor. These men and women stem from the middle or even upper classes of their native societies of origin. Their overall efforts are based on a university degree for being not only national but more international, too.

Due to the fact that political borders and the nation-state were their only hindrance in a negative sense, the interviewer tries to explore more about it. Their expert connection and subject-specific connectivity were both beyond borders, while disconnectedness indicated its surface at the frontier line of a state.

The interviewees, by and large, agreed their hard work should provide them more freedom, safety, security, or wealth. The nation-state was seen by the interviewees as an entity, which will close in the current century

of importance compared to the previous one ([Gabriel, 2021](#)).

Borders in the Head

In one's head, the known world without any interruption – if it all war, natural disaster, poverty – began to crumble. People in western societies who knew decades of high welfare, occupational health, safety, and peace were connected to people of the global south. This binary view is a matter of fact talking about the wealthy colonial north and the exploited opposite south.

This veil of ignorance to one's old reckless known everyday-life to arid deserted regions, zones of armed conflicts or just authoritarian dictatorships mutated in rapid time from the unknown to the known: For example, if a native man or female from Frankfurt am Main never could understand his or her neighbor, while the latter being from Tehran and always yearning for the notion of “homeland”, its beauty, as well ([Alam, 2017](#)). So, today it is possible to have a quick view on the internet to know what influences of man and by nature will reach the next day from West Asia to Western Europe.

Maybe the native man or female has a deep understanding of West Asia, its history, civilizations, religions, practised cultures, but he or she was never ever so much connected to his neighbor in times of COVID-19 pandemic in liaison with the economic crisis. This is a noticeable lesson one will be taught by the invisible virus, or let us say, the magnitude of nature.

However, here is the question: How long yesterday's borders will stay in the heads of people, for instance, being from the most well-known international city Frankfurt am Main of Germany? In the common media outlets, it

is all about being connected, but through the offered digital devices of one's own choice: One has always been well informed, then formed, and lastly being to a great extent confirmed. The status of a person is always bound to his class, the accumulated wealth, and as well as education.

These pointed out descriptions shows us the concern in which conditions a common citizen is socialized, for which the upcoming generations are championed. Maybe in a democratic nation-state, in a very influential region and city offering necessary resources, the socioeconomic divisions are small. Borders may in this set of habitat have a minor influence. But, what if a citizen counts less, and in addition, he or she is always dependent on social aid for even the daily basic staple?

Orders in Front

The connectedness is moderated in democracies like Germany, especially in its bigger towns like Frankfurt am Main, through strong institutions, civil society, and the international connection to the outside world. One of the three major winners of the Brexit deal is definitely Frankfurt due to the announced future cash flow of 675 Billion Euros coming here ([Frühaufl, 2020](#)). In rural areas in Germany, especially there, the situation is much more devastating, likewise in Berlin and in many other cities and regions in eastern Germany ([Alam, 2019](#)).

With the passage of time, as the COVID-19 virus was discovered, planet earth, with the climate change, pushed the borders in the head to orders in front for a community of fate. A virus too small to see to us human beings was or will for a long unknown time determine the normative order of everyday life on a global scale when it comes to travelling, conferences,

or just holidays. All in all, this COVID-19 virus is after, behind, in front or maybe still in one's body.

The same goes for the discourse of fugitive migration from the global south. It is proven people who migrate bring abundant new elements of cultures with them. These migrants, when leaving their native countries and the nativity they use to know while practising, will be the most challenging part of their life. To follow orders of another culture by language might not be difficult, but it is also not easy to stay behind the borderlines of a nation-state, which offers its citizen nothing than taking pride in the nation one is born into: that was more an act by nature than the own will.

Being, for example, a German citizen will be the norm of the self-image of its existence in the unity of time and space: One has a passport and identity card with which in its emic sense as a citizen one is valued. By emic agencies, one can travel to remote areas of the world. The opposite is the case when one is forced to migrate from an authoritarian nation-state to democracy to abandoning the socioeconomic life of itself. The sociopolitical entity is much more important if, again, one is searching for accommodation.

Sources of Borders

It is always a transdisciplinary question of what a nation, nation-state and nativity mean at all. After tackling this question, one should ask itself what does it mean to re-experience the mores and values of its ancestors. Maybe among the many possible answers, one will find disciplines of education, political science, religion, culture, psychology, geography, language or economy to approach the "problematic". Today's shortcomings in the

accelerated daily life of western societies and countries with a strong performance of western socioeconomic culture are of complex nature if we take a look at the dynamics of continental Europe: "All in all, we anticipate a Brexit-related boost to the employment of around 3,500 jobs by the end of 2021 ([Traud, 2019](#))."

It is of importance to have a conscience about the reality of the scarcity of resources, with which many people in the global south in their everyday life has to struggle ([Richter, 2018](#)). To be close to reality for developing an idea of how other people are encircled by frontier lines facing labor scarcity, it is inevitable to have a deep mind of languages for pursuing the daily news outlets, which leads one to a proper description. To describe is a very suitable benchmark for analysis.

These measures have continuity when one is interested in tracking this pathway. Otherwise, if counteracting, one is following takes about uncritical traditions, which has more to do with sources of repetition and emulation. However, there are local artists in Frankfurt who do show their resilience through theatre: "We are in a huge experiment of global scope, the outcome of which is uncertain. The familiar order in which we moved, in which we knew how to express ourselves, no longer exists. A new order is not in sight. Society resembles a solar system out of orbit, in which millions of suns revolve around themselves. Words change their original meaning as society changes. The theatre, as we have known it for more than 2000 years, no longer exists. ([Tsouvelis, 2021](#))."

Conclusion

This article concluded how social orders pass on to normative orders in everyday life in times of

COVID-19 and crisis for expatriates in Germany's most international city Frankfurt am Main. It also tries to reflect how physical borders are influencing still people and to what extent sources of borders are shaping everyday life.

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