

logo! – define, differentiate and contextualise

A CONVERSATION WITH MARKUS MÖRCHEN*

Is racism an issue for the children's news programme logo!?

Mörchen: Recently, we have encountered this issue a lot. Many of the socio-political debates in Germany are very strongly defined by this issue. The coverage of the events in the Eastern German city of Chemnitz, for example, where on 26 August 2018 a German-Cuban citizen was killed in as yet unexplained circumstances after a dispute at a city festival. The evidence to date suggests the suspects come from Syria and Iraq. Afterwards, there were demonstrations and marches by right-wing extremist groups and xenophobic riots which attracted large media interest and international attention. All of this happened at a time when the German public found itself in the midst of an enormous and heated debate over asylum and immigration. But of course, we also come across the issue in the world of children, in the school environment, for example, particularly with respect to refugees who have moved here. That is why, over the past few years, we have repeatedly addressed the issue of racism in our programme.

When, for example, you reported on the events in Chemnitz (August/September 2018), what were you paying attention to? What was important to you?

Mörchen: It was important to us to highlight different aspects, because there are of course always causes, reasons, effects. In many cases it is very difficult to get things in focus in this respect, for instance, if a particular deed was preceded by another

deed for which there is no contextual information. In such a case, we can't say precisely how it happened, for, as in the case of Chemnitz, for example, there is still in principle neither clarity nor proof regarding what exactly happened.¹ That is why it is not as easy to focus on this as it is to focus on the consequences, such as demonstrations taking place and groups converging in Chemnitz, etc.

We tried to explain the opinions of the various groups, which to some extent had been very quickly pigeon-holed in one or the other direction: Who are these people who are demonstrating and who are being accused of particular things? We tried to format the whole thing, as far as is possible within the framework of a children's television programme. In addition, it was important to us to be on site and to form our own impression. That is why we sent a reporter to Chemnitz; we connected with her live within the programme, and she described for us her own impressions of the city, the demonstrations and the concert against xenophobia². And we of course also used experts to try to get a superordinate view of the whole thing.

What did your coverage look like in concrete terms?

Mörchen: We tried to make clear why people were demonstrating in Chemnitz. So, we spoke to people in the city and asked them whether they could understand the demonstrators and whether they themselves had any concerns. Some of the people we spoke to said they were sometimes afraid of

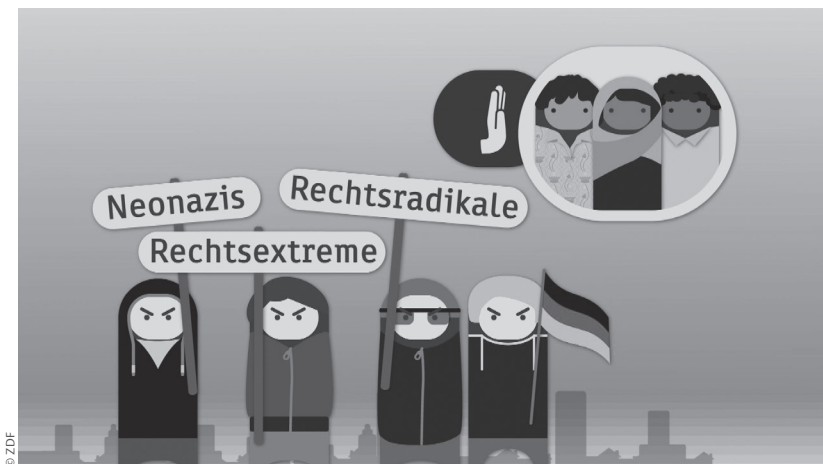
too many foreigners. We included this in the programme too, because we realised that many people in Chemnitz were concerned regarding the issue and considered arguments from different standpoints.

This also takes the discussion into the area of right-wing radicalism. How did you deal with that?

Mörchen: We tried to differentiate between the concepts and groupings, such as right-wing nationalist, right-wing radical, neo-nationalist, which were appearing in the media, and we tried to contextualise these. Admittedly, this is not easy, especially with these concepts. But I think it is important to explain who the people are who were tagging along with the demonstrations. Of course, we couldn't say precisely how many people were tagging along with which groups.

As part of your coverage of the events in Chemnitz, you also produced an explanatory piece on right-wing radicalism, right-wing extremism and neo-Nazis (Ill. 1). What was important to you here?

Mörchen: In principle, when it comes to these concepts, irrespective of the ideology, we have to make clear to children that those who follow these ideologies believe there are people who are of less value because of their origin, their so-called "race", and that they are willing to inflict violence and harm upon them. They hold very radical views, and they also propagate these further. Because, however, there is an improbable range of variants within



Ill. 1: A logo! explanatory piece as part of the coverage of the events in the Eastern German town of Chemnitz explains the different opinions of “neo-Nazis”, “right-wing extremists” and “right-wing radicals”

these groups – racists, right-wing radicals or even neo-Nazis –, we find there are limitations to how far we can clearly explain each of the different variants to children. We try to make the different concepts comprehensible as far as possible.

What is your general approach to explanatory pieces?

Mörchen: In principle, we try first of all to find a conventionally accepted terminology or a concrete explanation which then must also be actually correct and comprehensible to the target group. If we cannot find this, we do not take it any further. In the next step, we cover ourselves by asking experts from the respective specialist area (for example, specialists in Islamism) whether our representation is acceptable – always assuming, of course, that we will have to leave out particular aspects. It is about acquiring a basic idea of what each variant actually is, e.g. an extremist or an Islamist. In principle, reassurance is our approach to all complex theories.

When you look back over the past 2 decades, what would you say is more relevant or more important to children and adolescents nowadays than it used to be?

Mörchen: Racism, in its various forms, has always existed – or at least for many centuries. And for thirty years we have been highlighting the terrible forms racism, extremism, etc. can take. We are still doing that today; it is part of our responsibility as an educational medium. On almost every anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass or something similar, we highlight these issues by talking to people who have experienced such things, or we explain the consequences and varieties of racism. Events such as we have seen in some towns in Germany most recently have also taken place in Germany over the past few decades. What is new here is the fact that the camps are much more divided than they were previously, and that there is much more willingness to network and radicalise. This is why it has now, once again, become more important to warn people about the dangers of racism, xenophobia and extremism, and to show them all the possible things that can happen. But we also have to handle this very sensitively. This is firstly a duty for us as journalists. We must not ignore the opinion of those who are perhaps merely tagging along, or are silently taking it all in. This means we have to listen to all the opinions and ask why this fear of foreigners, or of too many

foreigners, actually exists in our country. We have to differentiate clearly here, and not lump everyone together in the same group. This is a duty which is much more pronounced for us in the media today than perhaps it was a few years ago.

What is the age of the child you have in mind when you are conceiving an explanatory piece?

Mörchen: When we focus on such issues, we are of course addressing our upper target group, and our programme is also primarily conceived for this group. Of course, it is also important for a 7-year-old to have a basic knowledge of such things, but we cannot expect that a 7- or 8-year-old will fully understand every explanatory piece – which is of course very complex. This is why we have a 10- or 11-year-old child in mind, and we try to explain the issues to them. With children of this age, we can assume that they have already, at some point, encountered particular issues at school or elsewhere. If we can contextualise particular concepts for these children in a way they understand, and if, at the same time, we manage to get younger children interested in such issues, then we are doing a lot right. ■

NOTES

¹ The trial began in Dresden on Monday, March 18th 2019, the hearings have been scheduled until October 29th 2019. A second suspect is still on the run.
² On September 3rd 2018, several famous German bands headed to Chemnitz for a free open air concert, taking a stand against racism, violence and xenophobia (#wirsindmehr).

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