

Karen in Action: Black and White – no problem?

Karen in Action: Black and White – no problem? was produced by Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation Munich, Germany. The reporter Karen Markwardt is in South Africa and reports about the history of apartheid in the country. While people’s skin color need not be a problem, it was so in South Africa. The white minority suppressed the black population for many years. While they were a minority in power, they controlled the government, the military and the police force.

Karen in Action: Black and White – no problem? was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Non-fiction category.

International experts’ opinions

The international experts had conflicting views about the program. The majority of them did not like the program and pointed out a lot of flaws in it. “I did think that the apartheid history, was really well done and explained. But when it got to the children, it seemed to lose its way slightly. It wasn’t about apartheid anymore actually. It became another program. There was no balance there” (female expert, UK).

The majority of the experts did not find the program appropriate for children in 7-11 category. “I thought the South Africa one had kids in it but it wasn’t for kids. It was more for adults. It was too scripted. It was almost like that actor had an opportunity to go to South Africa so they just went, because they had the opportunity. I didn’t think it worked for the age group” (female expert, Canada). Another expert elaborated, “I would not choose to show that program to children at that age group. I thought it was too traumatising. They just are not mature enough – beyond just being scared of the world and scared of people and seeing even what happened” (female expert, Israel). Though the program was very well received by children in some countries, experts still doubted its relevance to children in the 7-11 age group. “It was very well received by the kids. We were quite amazed at how well they took it, and they didn’t walk out of the screenings unhappy or traumatised. But, it was 10+. It wasn’t



Figure 1: *Karen in Action: Black and White – no problem?*



Figure 2: *Apartheid : a common problem in South Africa.*



Figure 3: *He suffered a lot because of apartheid.*



Figure 4: President Nelson fought against apartheid.

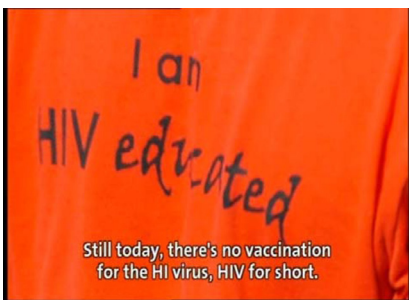


Figure 5: The program also dealt with HIV patients.



Figure 6: Project Yabonga was about educating people about AIDS.



Figure 7: Karen with an AIDS patient.

for the seven-year-olds. It was 10+” (female expert, Netherlands). Many international experts did not appreciate choosing a person like Karen as a host because of numerous reasons. One was her age. “I thought Karen was too old of a host for a series for kids. I thought she was a good host, but I thought that she wasn’t necessarily – I am not a kid so it is hard to tell – I just didn’t think that she had much kid appeal as another host might have had” (female expert, USA). Another was her style of narration. “I was very irritated by the fact that Karen was always giving her opinion back: ‘That is great,’ ‘That is fantastic.’ It was just like those kinds of flat words you use like: super, fantastic. You don’t need it. Leave the choice of what is super to the children themselves” (female expert, Germany). They also thought that she was not focussed on kids. “I think it would have worked if she had actually talked to children more. It was mostly adults that she talked to. I think maybe she felt more comfortable talking to the adults, but I was disappointed that we didn’t see more of the kids in South Africa” (female expert, Canada). Another expert elaborated, “When you have travelled to Taipei for the film festival, the children ask: ‘Are the children in South Africa unhappy? What do the kids really feel with the kids in South Africa?’ They didn’t care about what Karen said. They cared more about what the kids feel” (female expert, Taiwan). Some also did not like her style of commentary. “I also found a lot of times that the narration of what she said repeated a lot of what her interview subjects said. I found a lot of it kind of repetitious” (female expert, USA). “I know they were working towards a reasonably optimistic end. But, the interviewer was really naïve; she said to the guy at the end: ‘It is ok now’ – and he got pleased – but maybe that was deliberate. You think: ‘No, it is never going to be ok’; he was very dignified about it all” (female expert, UK). Some experts however expressed a different opinion though. “You feel that she is into the public. I didn’t feel her like an interviewer who is showing off or trying to play with the words. She was into it. She was very natural” (male expert, Qatar).

Many experts were perplexed that the program had two themes rather than one (Apartheid and HIV) and felt it would have been better had it stuck to one theme. “I was also wondering why they started with the Apartheid thing, and then they went over to the HIV problem. It didn’t need it, because both terms are so interesting; they could have made two programs out of that. I lost the red line in this program there” (female expert, Germany). Another expert suggested, “Apartheid is already a very heavy topic. I think they should have taken on a little more time to delve into that, because the whole HIV thing in South Africa is another major issue that would be good to do. It was two different themes.” (female expert, Jamaica).

Many experts hoped for a better end to the program than the one that was shown. “She said that everyone dies from HIV, but then she said, ‘But he is doing his best to look forward in life.’ There was no explanation as to how he could possibly look forward in life. There was no mention of the fact that he might or might not be able to have drugs. I take exception to programs that tackle a really difficult topic and don’t take it all the way through” (male expert, UK). However, there was some admiration for the program as well. “I still think it was a beautiful story and that it is an important issue. What disturbed me a little bit was that the start of the program – the opening-graphic – mismatched with the content, because it was ***Karen in Action***: it looked like adventure, fun-type of program coming” (female expert, Norway).

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Figure 8: Karen with children suffering from AIDS.