



The joint programme workshop of RBB and ZDF / Das kleine Fernsehspiel

Press Information

NO EXIT

A film by Franziska Tenner

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NO EXIT is a coproduction of
filmkombinat GmbH & Co. KG
and
OSTWIND
the joint programme workshop of
RBB and ZDF / Das kleine Fernsehspiel,
funded by the **Kulturellen Filmförderung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern**

Documentary, Germany 2003
100 min, 35 mm, DTS, Colour

Brief Synopsis

Every Saturday afternoon the members of the right wing group "*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*" meet in Nico's apartment. Over tea and biscuits political indoctrination takes place or coming actions are planned, like, for example a petition for longer jail sentences for child molesters or communal singing in a home for the elderly.

To produce this documentary, Franziska Tenner followed the "*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*" for a year. In **NO EXIT** she takes us on a journey into their hearts and minds. Following three biographies in particular, she provides deep insights into the way of thinking and the actions of these young people from the German – Polish border town.

The film shows the group's everyday social involvement, its search for a family substitute and for solidarity. Their desire for love, identity and a sense of being needed releases enormous emotions. When used by far right activists these emotions turn into exclusion and hatred...

Synopsis

Every Saturday afternoon the members of the "*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*" meet in Nico's apartment for political indoctrination and for a little get-together over beer and pizza afterwards. Nico, Fischi, Bibi, Conny and André evaluate last week's events and plan actions for the week to come: communal singing in a home for the elderly, organising a petition to push through "tougher jail sentences for child molesters", or cleaning up the playground around the corner...

Nico represents the influence of the far-right NPD within the "*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*". Through Nico the far-right party tries to promote extreme nationalist views within the group. Some, like Conny for instance, would instead prefer more in depth discussions about private problems. Nico is eventually voted out as chairman. Instead Bibi, who is not "very politically minded", becomes the new chairman.

In her documentary **NO EXIT**, Franziska Tenner has observed the inner workings of the "*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*" over the course of a year. In doing so she draws our attention to the motives, deficiencies and desires of its members. We experience the group as part of Eastern German youth culture and as a political phenomenon which is repeatedly being exploited by established far-right parties such as the NPD.

The group is portrayed as a fragile hybrid, in which different political intentions, demands and ideas collide. This leads to open and concealed conflict. It becomes also clear which of the right wing currents are being accepted and which are being refused during the weekly political sessions. But most importantly, the film shows how political convictions lose importance when people give us insights into their innermost feelings. Insights into altogether unpolitical longings and conflicts. And we can, at the same time, discover the true desires and deficiencies which are the breeding ground for political indoctrination and exploitation.

Right-wing extremism today is not any more exclusively a political and ideological phenomenon but also a socio-cultural phenomenon. It represents a factual reality, deeply rooted in the everyday life of its followers. The reasons to be or to become a right-wing extremist are as manifold as age or social background of those on the far-right.

Nico (22), **Bibi** (19) and **Conny** (28) are in the centre of the documentary.

Nico

Nico is 22 years of age at the time of the documentary. He lives in Frankfurt (Oder) and works as an insurance agent. He is a member of the far -right NPD and a singer-songwriter.

There are four independent so called 'National Fellowships' in Frankfurt (Oder). One of them, the *Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)* was founded in march 2001 by Nico and some of his fellow-minded friends. Nico represents the influence of the far-right NPD within the *Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*. Through Nico the party tries to politicise the group in an extremely nationalist way. He is given a difficult time when he tries to indoctrinate the other members of the group.

His parents got divorced when Nico was two and a half years old. He stayed with his father, since his mother renounced custody. Nico is searching for love and the closeness of women. The people in the fellowship reflect his desire for solidarity, which he also tries to satisfy through his political involvement.

Conny

Conny is 28 years of age at the time of the documentary. She lives in Frankfurt (Oder) and raises her two children on her own. Her lover Denis is in prison. She visits him every month and dreams of the times after his release. She wants a man at her side again at last. The fact that she saw him in freedom for four weeks only during their 18 month long relationship is of no importance to her.

Conny's younger child goes back to a previous marriage to a Moroccan asylum seeker. She married him in order to prevent his deportation. But the relationship failed because of domestic violence and irreconcilable cultural differences. She admits that her „outlandish political views“ are very much rooted in this personal experience. Within the fellowship she is looking for social ties and friends that support and help each other. She wants to take joint action in cleaning up playgrounds or calling for “tougher sentences for child molesters”. Through the group she wants to organise care for imprisoned friends.

Bibi

At the time of the documentary Bibi is 19 years of age and has a child which is raised by the child's mother. Bibi is openly skinhead and sees himself as a free nationalist with anarchist tendencies. While the documentary is made Bibi is elected chairman of the „*Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)*“. He is involved in a political vigil and in a petition for “tougher sentences for child molesters”.

Bibi dreams, like most in the fellowship, of a house with a garden and a German shepherd. In spring 2001 he brutally beat up an other 19 year-old in the street at night for no apparent reason. A lawsuit for serious bodily harm is pending. In January 2002 he is sentenced to 16 months in jail. In regard to his offence Bibi is lacking any sense of guilt.



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Production Notes

Franziska Tenner began research in Frankfurt (Oder) in June 2001. The shooting of **NO EXIT** started in mid-October 2001, the last day of the election campaign of the far-right NPD in Berlin. That same day the team accompanied Nico on his way back to Frankfurt (Oder) and conducted the first interview in the train. The next day the team and the fellowship met for the first time at one of the Saturday afternoon schooling sessions.

The film is part of the OSTWIND series, a joint initiative of RBB and ZDF/*Das kleine Fernsehspiel*. The film was shot between October 2001 and October 2002 on various locations in Frankfurt (Oder). In all there were 31 days of shooting, of which 12 were on consecutive days. During this period the long interviews were made. Before and after this time a variety of fraternity meetings, actions, parties and court hearings were shot. Most of the time the team stayed in Frankfurt (Oder) for two to five days.

Shooting took in all more than a year. The film was cut in August and between October and November 2002. This part of the working process covered about eight weeks.

Biography

Franziska Tenner (Director and Scriptwriter)

Director Franziska Tenner was born in 1972 in Thuringia. From 1988 to 1990 she worked as assistant director in the city theatres of Frankfurt (Oder), Görlitz and Zwickau. From 1990 to 1994 she worked as editor with the Mefisto Video GmbH Berlin, focussing thematically on right-wing extremism. Her first book, „*Ehre, Blut und Mutterland – getarnt unter Nazifrauen*“, (Glory, Blood and Motherland – in disguise among nazi-women), was published in 1994 by Aufbau Verlag Berlin. Since 1994 Franziska Tenner studies film and screen direction at the HFF “Konrad Wolf” in Potsdam-Babelsberg. She directed various short films like “*November*”, „*Nicole - Einsam bist Du trotzdem*“ and „*Charuzi Navi*“.

Filmography

NOVEMBER

(16mm, 28min., documentary, HFF)

NICOLE – EINSAM BIST DU TROTZDEM

30 – min. documentary within the 90 - minute overall project „*Zwischenwelten*“, in participation with various other female students.

Supervision: Cookie Ziesche (RBB)
Angelika Mieth (HFF)

CHARUZY NAVI

(16mm, 30min., feature film, HFF)

NO EXIT

100 min. long-term documentary

2003, 35 mm, Colour, DTS

filmkombinat GmbH & Co. KG in coproduction with OSTWIND, the joint programme workshop of RBB and ZDF / *Das kleine Fernsehspiel*. Funded by the *Kulturelle Filmförderung MV*

Director Franziska Tenner about her work on NO EXIT

When I started research in Frankfurt (Oder), I wasn't aware of the dimensions the whole thing could take. I accompanied the "comrades" in their daily routine, their actions and their meetings. I knew nothing about the Free Fraternities, the Free Nationalists, apart from the fact that they existed. I became aware that approaching them directly was the only way to find out about those things that interested me. This was later confirmed in discussions with social workers, policemen, scientists, parents and others. Like myself in the beginning, they knew nothing. There was no film yet about the relatively new form of organisation, called Free Fraternities. I wanted to know what young people were looking for in these relatively small political groups.

At the first meeting they were all still very shy. Nobody dared say anything. Apart from Nico who was lecturing along the lines of his NPD schooling programme without taking notice of anything around him. That was the beginning.

At first there was fascination, feelings of alarm, total lack of understanding, also disgust. Everything was so transparent in their meaningless, obvious phrases and naive self-images. I asked myself whether I was just like them when I was their age, still living in Frankfurt myself. We were raised in the same world, we share the same historical background, made the same social experiences.

I gained their confidence which, in retrospect, was never fully unreserved. I then developed strategies to heighten the tension within our meetings. To make them forget that I am an alien element to them, trying to force them to self-reflect. At some point they started by themselves to reflect thoughts they felt we were interested in. They knew we had specific questions on our minds and tried to raise them by themselves. At the same time they realised that my questions exposed them and that I was able to see their loneliness. Their attempt to defuse my observations by raising certain subjects on their own initiative had, at the same time, an aspect of surrender and of beating somebody at his own game.

Producer Jens Körner about working on NO EXIT

It all started with the ORB, (In Mai 2003 the station merged with the SFB Berlin to form the RBB – ed.), asking director Franziska Tenner to produce a documentary about young people on the extreme right as part of the OSTWIND series. We were tempted by this difficult theme, which today is unfortunately part of our social reality, and started research in the Frankfurt area.

We saw nationalist singer-songwriters, rural youth clubs – firmly in the grip of the extreme-right – talked to 12 to 14 year-olds playing with a pistol every day after school in the Dresdner Platz in Frankfurt (Oder). They partly used an internal code language to make nationalist jokes. We met youngsters who serve as activists for the extreme-right at their schools.

On the other hand we heard the theoretical explanations of the „*Bündnis gegen Rechts*“, (Alliance against the far-right), or sociological reports on subjects like “What is a Free Fraternity”?

In addition, there were the hard figures: more than 50% of those not choosing higher education don't find a job and 2000 Euro a month to pay a social worker to look after the youth clubs in a sensible way are simply not in the budget.

It became clear pretty quickly that all sides involved knew very little about each other and it became obvious, above all, that prejudice and convenient skinhead clichés are of little help if one doesn't want to simply ignore the problem.

I want to thank, above all, the team for its staying power, as well as the commissioning editor, Cooky Ziesche, the stations RBB (formerly ORB) and ZDF. Many thanks also to the “Kulturelle Filmförderung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern” for having the courage to fund this controversial film.

Interview with director Franziska Tenner

„How did you come across the Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)“?

From the age of 15 to 20 I lived in Frankfurt (Oder) myself. I got my qualification and later worked in the local Kleisttheater. Those were beautiful years of my life.

When it was the question of shooting a film about youth on the extreme-right in the East, I made a conscious decision to go to Frankfurt precisely because I used to like this town very much.

I investigated right-wing officials, clubs and meeting places. Once I sat down at a bus stop in the middle of Frankfurt and watched the young people passing by. I waited – at some point I was approached by some 16 year old boys who, earlier on, shot pigeons with a small calibre pistol. We just talked. It is much simpler than you always imagine. I was also allowed to take their photographs and got their phone numbers.

I knew that there was a relatively high ranking NPD/JN official living in Frankfurt. Jörg Hähnel, also a singer-songwriter. And since my pigeon-shooting youngsters gave me his address straightaway, I simply went around and rang his doorbell.

But Hähnel didn't live in this old flat any more. Instead Nico, the chairman of the *Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)* now stayed there. Right from the beginning he started telling me of his fraternity which met every Saturday afternoon at four in the apartment for political training. We arranged for me to come to the next meeting to get to know the others. Then I left.

I think that everybody in the fraternity was nervous when the question came up whether I was allowed to make a film with and about them. They suddenly felt important and, at the same time, were frightened.

Neither did I know what to expect. Nobody could tell me. I had to find out by myself.

„Which experiences and discoveries were you able to make during this period?“

This form of organisation, this kind of fraternity, is relatively new in today's society. Its purpose remains a very old one: Everybody wants to be recognised and strives for love and happiness. This very human desire is, even today, a perfect background for political exploitation.

The Free Fraternity into which we were granted an insight is not the only form of fraternity structure in existence. Undoubtedly there might be more militant, more political and more professional groups of this kind around. But the satisfaction of a whole different kind of needs, far beyond political orientation, is, in our opinion, especially evident in this particular group.

It was also characteristic for our fraternity and its context that criminal offences committed – including serious bodily harm and manslaughter – were often politically justified by the offenders after having been committed. It was only in retrospect that the inner and outer justification was given a right-wing tinge. Thus a critical discussion concerning the offence was avoided.

In addition, the young people had the feeling – a feeling that might even be justified to an extent – that they get a lot more attention and recognition being right-wing extremists rather than common criminals. I was shocked by the excessiveness of these adolescents. Their morals had nothing in common with my own.

All members of the fraternity were beaten during their childhood. This is what they grew up with and this is what they still consider normality. "That's what you get for not listening! That will teach you a lesson!".

I realised that my protagonists were raised in a world in which language is hardly of any value.

Neither do they know what confidence is. Everything happens on a very pally level that allows for distance at any given moment. In this way the others never feel obliged to do anything. They are actually always all alone because they have no idea of how to deal with others in an intimate way.

But they react instantly when somebody approaches them in such a way. When somebody shows an interest in their daily routine, their childhood, their relationship problems, their dreams, hopes and disappointments. Then they suddenly start to think and talk about themselves and even admit that they might have gotten themselves into a big mess. They are then even able to say that they give a damn about right- or left-wing politics.

When asked about their dreams, they all responded along very similar lines: family, job, a little house, a dog...

“You followed the protagonists over the course of a year – did your image of the „right-wing“ change through your work?“

During the first half of the nineties I worked for television. Even back then my focus was on right-wing extremism. In 1994 I wrote a book for the *Aufbauverlag* about women on the far-right of the political spectrum. This is the background of my approach to this film.

Even back then I followed up individual extremists. In the past the structure of the scene was different however. There were the big parties like the DA, the NA, the FAP or the *Wikingjugend*. At that time mass demonstrations were the principal means of political involvement.

Then came the bans and arrests of the mid-nineties. The scene seemed paralysed. The question for me and other experts was how the far-right would reorganise itself. The fact that they would regroup was beyond doubt.

Then the *Freien Nationalen* (Free Nationalists) evolved, which organised themselves as the *Freien Kameradschaften* (Free Fellowships). They often met in seemingly private surroundings to plan their political activities and hold political training sessions.

In addition, music gained tremendous importance within the scene. Pioneered by, amongst others, Frank Rennie, who can also be experienced on film. The political right took up the seventies tradition of the left-wing singer-songwriter. Songs with political lyrics, accompanied by guitar. Imagine this: Rennie compares himself to Victor Jara and Hannes Wader! They also covered songs by Westernhagen or Kunze. They completely change the interpretation of left-wing songs, sometimes without even changing the lyrics. I heard *Freiheit* by Westernhagen sung by the "Landser". Discovering how well this song works for their ends left me speechless. They have absolutely no problem to see themselves in connection with these left-wing traditions, because they see themselves, like past left-wing artists, as political revolutionaries.

As far as these things are concerned I made completely new experiences within the extremist scene, that were not only characterised by new forms of organisation, but also by the use of wholly different strategies.

And I certainly came a lot closer to those youngsters of the *Freie Kameradschaft Frankfurt (Oder)* than I ever been to the extremists in the past. That was partly due to the long period of time I spend with them. There was something else however I completely changed in my approach. I stopped having political discussions with them - at least I had a lot less than I used to. On the one hand I already knew all the arguments which had not changed since the beginning of the nineties: "The English declared war on Germany, the Jews boycotted the Germans, Hitler wanted a unified Europe as much as the EU wants it today" - blabla

But in addition I am now completely convinced that these young people know very well, that the things they are saying are wrong. Every human being believes in the kind of god he wants to believe in. And they want to believe in all of this, because there is something to be gained in doing so. It is impossible to change their minds during discussions.

The following realisation describes my newly-gained view of the right-wing: Young people are not recognised in present day society. They are perceived mostly as an irritating fringe group which is neither needed nor integrated in any way. They are completely unnecessary, it seems, and anyway they are just causing trouble. Young people realise this very well. In Frankfurt more than 50 per cent of all highschool graduates don't find a job.

Young people do get public attention when they are extremely right-wing. All this is very tempting to them, since it is a way of reaching their goal of recognition.

This understanding was completely new to me. The motivation to be or to become right-wing is today for these young people first of all a private and personal decision, not a political one.

As a result, they are much harder to convince, it is a lot more difficult to find one's position while arguing with them. When one imagines the kind of personal reasons that make these young people join the fraternities, it suddenly becomes something human and understandable, and one starts to feel sorry for them.

The question obviously remains of how to cope with this phenomenon. It is in this point that society turns out to be increasingly incapable of taking action.

From that point of view the dilemma of young people in general, and the ones on the political right in particular, is much more all-embracing than I thought.

One's perspective inevitably changes when one expects a monster and then discovers that it is made up of little worm. I wanted to convey this experience in the film even though I was aware that not everybody would be prepared to get involved in it.

„How did the group react to the film?“

We saw it together – even Bibi was able to see it in prison. I was quite nervous. But it was not their anger or disappointment I was nervous about. It was rather the knowledge that the film describes the very deep insight I had into their souls.

How would they cope with the description of their own desires and dreams, their dilettantism and the hopelessness that surrounds them? I knew that the film would hurt them.

And this is exactly what happened. Everybody was very moved. They didn't even know some of the details revealed about individual group members. Obviously this was not how they saw themselves, but they were not able to say that the film was a fake either. They probably realised this and didn't even try to start a discussion. Nico had already hoped that through the film he could distinguish himself within the scene. After the film he asked me why I didn't include some of his political statements. I replied that they weren't something I was interested in.

„What are your wishes concerning the film?“

I would like to see some degree of openness, the courage to get involved with these people. I would like to remind the viewer that everybody, including me, has a responsibility for other people, and of the importance to take an interest in one-another, to keep the dialogue going across all barriers.