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German theologian: Pippi Longstocking is racist

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9 November 2011

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A German theologian has sparked controversy by calling Sweden's beloved Pippi Longstocking children's books racist and demanding additions to prompt parents to skip over or explain certain passages.

Dr. Eske Wollrad from the the Federal Association of Evangelical Women in Germany first made her comments as a speaker at a state conference on anti-discrimination in Leipzig last weekend, stirring debate in the German media.

"It is not that the figure of Pippi Longstocking is racist, but that all three in the trilogy of books have colonial racist stereotypes," Wollrad told The Local on Tuesday.

The publishers had already changed the original phrase used for her father as king of a South Seas island from Negro King to South Seas King, noted Wollrad, who is advisor for equality and social responsibility at the Protestant women's group.

But other passages in the much-loved books were also problematic, she said.

"The black children throw themselves into the sand in front of the white children in the book," she said. "When reading the book to my nephew, who is black, I simply left that passage out."

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She said there were many such sensitive areas in the books, which were written by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren in the 1940s.

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...here, and not make children see that any characters similar to them in pre-school books.

“It simply isn’t helpful if we want to help our children find their place in a multicultural society,” she said.

“A third of children under the age of five in Germany are from a migration background,” she said. “Publishers seem to think it is only white, middle-class women buying these books. We as consumers have to show that this is not good enough.”

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