

KATE CONNOLLY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Rosie Goldsmith

My name's Rosie Goldsmith and it's my pleasure to introduce you to the Goethe Institut's latest pair of DOPPELGÄNGER. It's a great way to find out about the lives and work of Germans and Britons today....

Each time we interview 2 people from the same profession in each country – someone in the UK who's worked in Germany, and a German who's worked in the same job in Britain.

Our Doppelgänger in this edition are: JOURNALISTS

Today I'm in Berlin to meet the British journalist Kate Connolly. Kate is the Berlin correspondent for The Guardian and Observer newspapers. She's been a foreign correspondent since 1996, including many years for The Daily Telegraph, covering stories from Basra to Belgrade and of course Berlin. Kate also writes about Germany for a wide range of other publications, from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Munich to the *LA Times*. She was born in Newbury in Berkshire, studied German and English at Leeds University, freelanced in Vienna and Prague before moving to Berlin in 2001. She's married to a German doctor and is currently on maternity leave after the birth of their second child Samuel.

Kate, after living all this time in Germany, do you see it as your home? Is it your *Heimat*?

Kate Connolly

Ah, *Heimat*, that's a very complicated word...

Rosie Goldsmith

I thought I'd throw it in...

Kate Connolly

I suppose that's a nice term which is quite hard to translate into English, isn't it? It's certainly very much part of who I am. I do though consider it very important to keep my British identity, I find that a very important part of who I am, obviously, but being in Germany has shaped much of my life. The fact that my two children now, particularly the 3-year-old is speaking English and German, and it's definitely the literature I read, the newspapers, the way I lead my life when I take out a mortgage – somehow everything has to do with being in Germany. So it is very hard to detach myself from it.

Rosie Goldsmith

From a media point of view, do you miss the British media?

Kate Connolly

You know when I started out that was quite hard. I started out in 1996, long time ago now it seems, and then came armed with cassettes of Radio 4 programmes, videos and things like that. Now of course that is completely unnecessary, because all of it is available online, there are ways in which you can get British TV, there is the iPlayer and what have you, so I'm quite well equipped.

Rosie Goldsmith

What would you say are the main differences between German and British media?

Kate Connolly

I suppose as a working journalist what I notice is the German journalists or newspapers are much less competitive. And that goes slightly against my instinct as a journalist, because you want to beat the competition. Whereas in Germany you quite often will have a story that developed one week and then a couple of days later or a week later it could be in another newspaper. And you think: "Hang on a second, I've read that before". Which, of course, doesn't really matter from the reader's point of view, but from the point of view of the people who are creating the newspaper that is a complete anathema to a British news editor.

Rosie Goldsmith

When I cover stories in Germany, I do notice that there is for me quite a big difference, there is more formality, for instance on television and radio among German journalists and there is a bit more deference as well, a little bit more of the "Herr Professor, Doktor Doktor" kind of deference.

Kate Connolly

You would not get a German journalist asking a politician the same question nine times. That wouldn't happen. But when you also notice the deference - and certain German politicians realise that and they try and modify their behaviour if they are going to have an interview with the Anglo-Saxon paper - what I find quite hard is this whole idea of having an interview approved. So that is you sit down, you have an interview and then afterwards you go through the whole painful process of having that approved by the ministry or whoever, so that gives the person that you've interviewed the chance to literally go through it, metaphorically, with a red pen, and cross out a lot of the things. What does tend to happen with quite high-ranking German politicians in particular is that you end up then having a lot of the meat taken out. Anything that might verge on being controversial or could be misinterpreted; humour often then ends up being removed, which is quite a shame. I think that they would benefit often from that sense of another side of their character coming out and sometimes that gets sacrificed, which is a shame.

Rosie Goldsmith

Tell me about some of the main stories you've covered, the real highlights for you.

Kate Connolly

I suppose the biggest one would have to be the rise of Angela Merkel, the rise and rise and rise of Angela Merkel. And that's been fascinating to watch. Obviously because of the fact that she is a woman, that's how I would first and foremost see it. And she comes from East Germany - that's been fascinating to watch. And particularly because she's been plunged into the Euro Crisis and how that has not only shaped the way German politics is perceived, but also the way Germany is perceived and the way the Germans are perceived. So that's been, I suppose, the rise of Merkel and the Euro Crisis have been the dominant stories. Are they the stories that people ask me about when I go back to Britain, at dinner party conversations and things like that? Do you think? Not really. The ones that you get asked about are cannibals...so one of the big trials we ended up covering here as foreign correspondents was the German cannibal and that got an awful lot of coverage. And things like Knut the polar bear.

Rosie Goldsmith

I want to talk to you about Angela Merkel a little bit more. It is, as you say, the age of Merkel, or *Mutti*, as she is called in Germany. You've actually met her quite a few times, I know, and you've interviewed her a couple of times. What would you say she is really like?

Kate Connolly

What come across very well when you meet her is the warmth, also, from her point of view, I think, not a sense that she knows everything better. She is very open, she lets you interrupt her, she doesn't come across as being arrogant, there is warmth there. One time I thought she really reminded me of an old English teacher I had, who I had a very warm relationship with. I think she would be a very good person to sit down and have a glass of wine with. She knows her stuff. Even though she always has advisers with her, she has the facts and figures at her fingertips and has a very, very good way of structuring her answers when you ask her a question. And, yeah, definitely a sense of humour. That comes out as well. Quick witted.

Rosie Goldsmith

We tend to see Angela Merkel as a kind of Iron Chancellor, a very strong woman, standing there in the middle of the Euro Crisis, being totally in command and the centre of European power. Do you think she is? And do you think she's handling the euro crisis well?

Kate Connolly

I think what a lot of people, even within the German government, would say is that the message, the German government's message, is not communicated that well, I think. And I think that is quite interesting because the whole area of PR and how you present yourself is not necessarily something that comes naturally - this is a sweeping generalisation that I'm making - but to Germans in general. I think it's something where Britain is maybe more advanced, in the way that the PR machine works in Downing Street is a bit more... There is lot more spin, they are more sophisticated at it, they've been at it for

longer and the Germans are still, you feel, sort of learning it from other people, but I definitely think that Merkel has not come out of it as well as she might have done. And I think that's a shame.

Rosie Goldsmith

How do the Germans now see our attitude in Britain to Europe?

Kate Connolly

I think they are quite confused about it. And I think they are also quite concerned and, even though they will not express this in public, I do think it is what they think in private, Merkel in particular. In recent conversations she has had publicly and privately, with Cameron, it is: "We definitely want you to stay on board and it's good to have that balance". But I think what I found also quite interesting here is the way you would think that, for example the Conservatives in Britain and the Christian Democrats in Germany would have an awful lot of common ground, the one area which they cannot communicate on properly is Europe. And that's always amazed me. And that means it's extremely difficult. So I think we are going to see Merkel, or whoever is in power, giving as much support to try and keep Britain in as possible.

Rosie Goldsmith

Is it interesting covering German politics?

Kate Connolly

It is interesting. It can get quite muddy, it can get quite difficult sometimes to sell the German story to a news editor in the UK. That is always a challenge. But selling Germany in general has often been a challenge. It's not France, it's not somewhere where Britons aspire... They aspire to be a bit like the French in the way they dress, the way they eat. They have homes in France. Germany has not had that sort of appeal. Certainly one particular newspaper I have worked for, that made quite a difference, I think, in the way they viewed Germany. I think the Euro Crisis in many ways has helped, because it's meant that there's been an awful lot of a focus on Germany that wasn't there before, trying to understand the good things about Germany, about the way the apprenticeship system works, about their attitude, about the way the banking system works and the Germans' attitude towards spending and credit and things like that. I think that's meant there was lots more focus on Germany. What also helped of course is Berlin and the rise of Berlin and the fact that I don't think it can be underestimated, the number of people coming first as backpackers, then as clubbers, people then buying second homes in Berlin – Britons I'm talking about. That has done an awful lot to boost the image of Germany and its cool factor in the UK.

Rosie Goldsmith

You're, I know, an avid reader and you are a musician as well. You cover the arts as well as politics for your various papers and magazines. How would you sum up the German approach to the arts, by comparison, I suppose, with Britain?

Kate Connolly

I think it was very interesting from the point of view that there is such a lot of money pumped into culture here and it's recognised how much money culture also makes for the economy. Here you do get the feeling that the art is something that is open to everybody and everybody feels that they have a right to it and can enjoy it and it's not just something that is reserved for the privileged.

Rosie Goldsmith

Politicians in Britain, if they said they went to the opera, of course, then they would be pilloried, as you say, but they are allowed to go to football matches, that is OK.

Kate Connolly

They are allowed to go to football matches, but yes, I know for sure that they have expressed the fact that if they are seen in the theatre that would be extremely damaging for them whereas you have somebody like Angela Merkel, who puts her poshest frock on every year to go to the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth. And takes her husband with her and that is one of the few times he is seen in public. For that he is called the 'Phantom of the Opera'. The fact that she does that endears her to the Germans whereas I think in Britain it would not do so, it wouldn't have the same effect.

Rosie Goldsmith

Is there the same concern in German media that we discuss, as you know, a lot in the UK about transparency, press regulation, data protection, the Snowden files, WikiLeaks, that kind of thing?

Kate Connolly

I think the German public in general has been very concerned about what has emerged through the WikiLeaks and the Snowden file stories. I think in some ways it has confirmed suspicions that they had, there is this sense that the Internet can be quite a dangerous place and has caused German fears to emerge which were there in the past of being under surveillance, whether by the Stasi or the Gestapo. Often people say: "Oh, that's a ridiculous comparison to make", but I think that if you have had long periods of your history when you have been under surveillance, and often by your neighbours, then it does make you feel very, very wary of that.

Rosie Goldsmith

You've lived in Germany now a very long time, you've had children here, you are married to a German. Do you feel you've really got under the skin of this country, not just as a journalist?

Kate Connolly

Sometimes I do and sometimes I feel still very much that sort of an outsider, which I think is good to be if you are a journalist. And sometimes I wonder do I court that, do I want that? That's sometimes maybe a comfier position to be in, to be the outside observer. I think it goes in waves. It's a bit like the language: some days you would speak in a language and you feel you are really almost like a native and on other days you stumble over words and think: "God, where has my German gone?" I think it's one of those things, it's a constant changing relationship, as Germany changes as well and its attitudes to certain things change. You think: "Gosh, this is the country I really like being in" and at other times you think: "Gosh, there are some things that I'd really like to change". What I do know is that if I ever went back to Britain one thing I would really miss is the bread. The bread is the best here.

Rosie Goldsmith

German bread, say no more. I travel miles in London to find German bread too.

Kate Connolly, thank you very much indeed.

Kate Connolly

Thank you.