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## **For myself and the others**

Paola Beate von Pückler and Egypt

A Documentary by Thomas Ladenburger

### **Synopsis:**

Being on the road...

A documentary about the journey to the past of a 75-year-old woman and a travel to the future. A travel from Andalusia to Egypt; between Orient and Occident. A travel to meet death in order to find life. A beautiful and dangerous travel...

### **All inquiries:**

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### **Short Description:**

The life of the 70 year old Paola Beate von Pückler, semiotition, and goat herder is the main line of this documentary.

Aside from the villages, she lives in a Moor Tower inmidst the Andalusian desert, surrounded by her goats, pigs , ducks, chicken , geoses and horses.

On the steps of her great-grand uncle Fürst Hermann von Pückler – Muskau, the well known landscape architect and writer, she is traveling to the Orient - to Egypt.

She is traveling to a place she has already been before with a husband and two daughters, 39 years ago.

Back then, she had to flee from the boudaries of her marriage, caught in the golden cage of the upper colonial life and the role model of a woman that her surrounding required.

At that time, she already was more emancipated than her surrounding and was radical enough to fight for her convictions.

Now, she is setting off, to meet the future in the known distance of the Orient. Like her relative she records her impressions with „the warm pen“.

But suddenly she is pulled over from her own past, the trigger of her deadly illness – cancer.

Encounters with simple people, their longings and destiny – a glimse on the daily life in Egypt.

A film about life, love and death...

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### **Background:**

The first time, I met Paola Beate von Pückler was as a ten year old student in school. She was my art teacher.

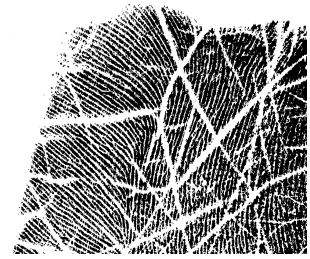
Out of the begining teacher-scholar-relationship, a friendly working and exchange-relationship developed over the years.

In January 2001, disguised as mother and son, our first travel to Cairo/Egypt began, to collect stories for a film on the ancestor of Beate - Hermann von Pückler-Muskau.

Out of the beginning idea to make a film of the present way of traveling in comparison to the 19 th century, resolved a story between the past life of Paola Beate and stories in Egypt two months after 11th September 2001.

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**FOR MYSELF AND THE OTHERS**  
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Text: Stefan Grill  
Translation: Seumas R. Coutts

**Commentary**

As travelers, the protagonist and film author put themselves on the road, in a narrative that starts back 39 years earlier – in Egypt. The story is about a woman who is over 70 years old and an art instructor, semiotician and goat herder - Paola Beate von Pueckler. We follow her as she flees together with her two children from Cairo to Germany, to free herself from the constraints of marriage. Now, that so many years have gone by, she returns to the places of her former life.

The film relies on the strength of its images. There is no commentary, though in dialogue with the film maker, Beate von Pueckler talks about her experiences, perceptions and imaginations. While she reflects on her daily life and past life, she draws a line between the orient and occident. Her memories create the plot of the film, it is her life story that is the "red line" that takes the viewer to Egypt. However, the story of the travel is told through the lens. The images let us dive into a world that is beautiful and foreign. Moments that create a closeness to the figures, rarely seen in documentary movies. It allows an intimate view into a life. A specialty, that distinguishes this „auteur" film.

The numerous portraits in the film raise more and more questions about the how and why of this particular life. Many of the questions, the film leaves unanswered. For example, it remains open, what exactly happened in the years between the life of Beate von Pueckler today and her escape from Egypt. Her life path is shown only as fragments. We meet her the first time in Al Andalus, where she lives today. There Beate von Pueckler runs a modest goat farm on the Spanish coast of Andalusia. Unprejudiced the viewer is confronted with her. Little by little, we find out through her own descriptions the reasons that made her live a life that is relatively simple compared to contemporary western lifestyle. A life on a self sustained farm with goats and many other animals in a deserted astonishingly beautiful landscape. Crucial for her decision was cancer, that gave Beate a new direction. Convinced about the healing forces of goat milk, she chose this form of life. She talks about how she has learned to perceive herself in a new manner, to better understand herself and her body. She talks about the influence of the landscape and daily work which has changed her perception of herself and her body.

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How she comes to understand to live with cancer.

The film opens show what impact the absence a commentary can create. Instead of arbitrarily following the conclusions of a narrator, the images and comments at the beginning of the film bring us together with Beate from the abstraction of a civilized life to a more concrete form of being. In its whole length, the film stays true to this principle that pays off for the spectator. Carefully guided by the camera, from the peaceful Andalusian coast to the busy streets of Cairo we find ourselves in a different world. There we experience in numerous human encounters more about life in a country that from a western perspective seems foreign. Here, the actual travel begins, back to the country in which Paola Beate has lived with her family, confronted with her own painful memories.

The motif of traveling however is a double entendre. It is a search for roots. Beate von Pueckler herself remarked about traveling that „the traveller is not only encountering the strangeness in foreign countries , but on the same time ones own otherness.“ For Beate, to confront her own otherness that suddenly comes back from oblivion through the encounter with the unknown. She enters the place of her past life in Cairo. She is surprised that the old issues and demons return which she believed she had overcome. She tells, how she was considered mad to get an education as a wife and mother of two children, how she covered herself in silence on social occasions due to the attacks on her in certain social environments. Finally, we hear about her decision after violent experiences in her marriage to leave with her children the country that she loved so much. Her encounters with her past let her memories emerge from a past that has become foreign to herself.

The travel to Egypt emerges as a search, a search for the origins of her own being. The travel leads Beate von Pueckler to the traces of her ancestor: Hermann Fuerst von Pueckler Muskau. During his lifetime a shining figure, he became known as a landscape architect, dandy, world traveler, adventurer and liberal writer. The literary result of his orient travels was published in 1844 the documentation of his travels „Out of Mehemed Alis Empire“, today, a valued reference of that time. He was drawing a different image of the Orient. Mehemed Ali was modernizing Egypt after a European model and in the west deviled as despot. Pueckler was correcting according to his opinion the wrong interpretations of Mehemed Ali in the German public. His great grand nice Beate von Pueckler follows his traces and writes down her travel experiences and allows the viewer to take part in her reflections. Consequently the documentary is not following the logic of a critical reporting about dangerous islamic fundamentalism, even though the film was shot shortly after september 11. Daily life stands in the foreground, the encounters with the people and their living habits. Scenes of a bazar and the images of the sensuousness life in Cairo at night leave an impression of a country that must evolve in the western traveler. The encounters during a camel trip at the edges of the desert- - or the portrait of a "*felach*" - - a palm tree peasant farmer - - tells of joy in the life of the people and also their sorrows and needs. Again and again one encounters death, which appears to be something totally ordinary, as life itself. It is the principle of „as well as also..." that becomes apparent once you look closer into the film, which might seem foreign and paradoxical.

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This documentary film breaks refreshingly with our media stereotypes and challenges the spectator. It shows another reality, one that is recorded from a strongly subjective point of view. They tell their own stories. The images speak, borders are crossed. The language of these images help to overcome the paralyzed silence of incomprehension. And who knows, it might be time to revise these images of the orient that are drawn from the west.

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### **Technical Data:**

Type of Film	Documentary
Years of Production	2000 – 2004
Date of Completion	February 2004
Country of Production	Germany
Original Language Version	German / Arabic
Subtitles available in	German, French, English
Running Time	84 min.
Video Finish	Digital Betacam(PAL)
Screening Format	Betacam SP(PAL)
Screen Ratio	1:1.33
Speed	25 frames per second
Sound	Dolby SR

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### **Festival Participation**

#### **Goethe – Institut Cairo**

Summer-Festival 7-13th June 2004

#### **Thessaloniki Doc Market (Greece)**

15.-21.st March 2004

#### **21. Kasseler Dokumentarfilm und Videofest (Germany)**

9.-14.th November 2004

#### **10. Filmschau Baden-Württemberg**

1.-5.th December 2004

Nominated for Best Documentary

#### **Festival du nouveau cinéma de Montréal**

13.-23.rd October 2005



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### **Productionlist**

Protagonist, Text, Voiceover:

Dr. Paola Beate v. Pückler

with:

Ahmed Adri Abd Al Ouanis Gebril  
Mohammed Abd Al Ouanis  
Mohammed Atif Rabeah

Production, Director,  
Editing, Photography:

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Music:

Louis Soret

Sound:

Seumas Raibeart Coutts

Sound Editing:

Ansgar Frerich / Hörwerk Berlin

8mm Film:

Beatrice von Rom

Subtitles English:

Seumas Raibeart Coutts

Subtitles French:

Nathalie Kern

Film Consultant:

Jutta Brückner

Story Consultant:

Lilly Grote

Translation :

Ziad Al-Sati  
Saad Shooman

thanks to:

Heide Breitel  
Dominik Busch  
Heinz Emigholz  
Vera Garben  
Martin Kruppe  
Gerda Ladenburger  
Karl Ladenburger

Jörg Langkau  
Elfi Mikesch  
Astrid Menze  
Achim Sieloff  
Karolin Thomaschewski  
Maria Vedder  
Anny-Lyvia von Franz  
Veronika von Franz