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—1938—

*One family's story  
of a homeland lost  
and a new one found...*

## Nowhere in AFRICA

—a film by Caroline Link—

**WINNER**  
**5 GOLDEN LOHAS**  
GERMAN FILM AWARDS  
for Best Film and  
Best Director



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in association with Bavaria Film International presents  
an MTM Medien & Television Munchen production  
in co-production with Constantin Film,  
Bavaria Film and Media Cooperation One

*Nowhere*  
*in*  
**AFRICA**

(NIRGENDWO IN AFRIKA)  
A film by **Caroline Link**

Based upon the novel by  
**Stefanie Zweig**

Starring  
**Juliane Köhler**  
**Merab Ninidze**  
**Matthias Habich**  
**Sidede Onyulo**  
**Karoline Eckertz**  
and  
**Lea Kurka**

Written and Directed by  
**Caroline Link**

Producer  
**Peter Herrmann**

Executive Producer  
**Andreas Bareiss**

Co-Producer  
**Bernd Eichinger**

Co-Producers  
**Thilo Kleine**  
**Michael Weber**  
**Sven Ebeling**

*Zeitgeist*  
FILMS

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

# *Nowhere* *in* AFRICA

A love story spanning two continents, *NOWHERE IN AFRICA* is the extraordinary true tale of a Jewish family who flees the Nazi regime in 1938 for a remote farm in Kenya. Abandoning their once-comfortable existence in Germany, Walter Redlich, his wife Jettel (Juliane Köhler, of *AIMÉE & JAGUAR*) and their five-year-old daughter Regina each deal with the harsh realities of their new life in different ways. Attorney Walter is resigned to working the farm as a caretaker; pampered Jettel resists adjustment at every turn; while the shy yet curious Regina immediately embraces the country—learning the local language and customs, and finding a friend in Owuor, the farm's cook.

As the war rages on the other side of the world, the trio's relationships to their strange environment become increasingly complicated as Jettel grows more self-assured and Walter more haunted by the life they left behind. As they eventually learn to cherish their life in Africa, they also endeavor to find a way back to each other.

Winner of the 2002 Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, as well as five 2002 German Film Awards (Golden Lolas), including best film, director and cinematography, *NOWHERE IN AFRICA* was written and directed by Caroline Link and is based on the best-selling autobiographical novel by Stefanie Zweig.

# AWARDS WON BY NOWHERE IN AFRICA

## **Academy Awards 2002**

Winner: Best Foreign Language Film

## **Golden Globe Awards 2002**

Nominee: Best Foreign Language Film

## **The 52nd German Film Awards 2002**

Winner: Best Feature Film

Winner: Best Director—Caroline Link

Winner: Best Supporting Actor—Matthias Habich

Winner: Best Director of Photography—Gernot Roll

Winner: Best Music—Niki Reiser

## **Hamptons International Film Festival 2002**

Winner: Audience Award for Best Feature Film

## **Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2002**

Winner: Fipresci Award

Winner: Special Jury Award

## **Jerusalem International Film Festival 2002**

Winner: Mayor's Prize for Best Feature  
(in the International Competition Section)

## **High Falls Film Festival 2002**

High Falls, NY

Winner: Best Feature, Audience Choice

## **St. Louis International Film Festival 2002**

Best Foreign-Language Feature, Jury Prize  
Interfaith Ecumenical Award (tie)

## **Washington DC Jewish Film Festival 2002**

Audience Award Best Feature Film

Official Selection

## **Toronto International Film Festival 2002**

# PRODUCTION NOTES

**NOWHERE IN AFRICA was shot on location in Germany, Kenya and the North Sea from January through April 2001. The following was written by producer Peter Herrmann.**

In 1995 I came across Stephanie Zweig's autobiographical novel NIRGENDWO IN AFRIKA. In her novel, she tells the story—from an adult perspective as a journalist living in Frankfurt—of her family's fleeing the Nazis to settle in Kenya when she was a child. In Kenya they try to start a new life but finally return to Germany after the war. I bought the rights to the novel before it became a bestseller. In 1998 Caroline Link agreed to write the screenplay and direct the film. In early 1999 the two of us traveled to Kenya for the first time to see the original locations.

Caroline Link and I knew that Kenya as a place of movie production would be more difficult, complex, riskier and definitely more strenuous than other locations in Africa (like South Africa). Nevertheless we opted for Kenya. We were sure that the film would be more authentic, atmospheric and better if we shot close to the original locations. The pre-production period started in spring 2000. In August we opened a pre-production office in Nairobi and six months prior to the scheduled production, the concrete preparations began.

In the summer of 2000 a drought of possibly catastrophic dimensions developed. Spring, the rainy season, had not brought any rain. If it didn't rain in Fall, the short rainy season, Kenya's population would face a catastrophe. In August, international relief organizations started to send food to the hardest hit regions, especially to North Kenya. The Nomads of the North, the Turkana, Pokots, Nijem and the Massai were hardest hit by the drought. Even in Nairobi, the crisis was felt. The entire city was filled with Massai and their flocks. The animals were feeding on the sad remains of the few plants still growing along the streets. Nairobi was on the brink of disaster. We had already invested too much to turn back, and wouldn't be able to relocate.

It didn't rain until November. By then we had already started the construction of the farm houses and planted artificially irrigated corn fields. We had already put our trust in the gods of Africa that they would look favorably upon the country and upon our film.

Rongai was the location of the Redlich's first farm. According to Caroline's vision it should be an arid and almost desert-like landscape. On screen it should come across as impressive but also such an inhospitable and bleak place that the audience should understand Jettel when she says "but one cannot really live here."

In Loldaiga, located northwest of Mount Kenya, we had found an ideal setting. It posed a real problem though, since there were no accommodations. The only solution was to build a camp. We had 86 tents, not only to accommodate the team of 100 but also to house the make-up department, the costume department, and the production office, the set design department and the catering. There was also a restaurant tent and a bar

tent. It was literally a small tent town. As there were elephants and lions close to the camp, we could only walk outside when accompanied by one of the guards.

Oi Joro Orok was the location for the second segment of filming which took another three weeks. While Rongai gave the impression of desert and arid landscape, the second main setting, Oi Joro Orok, was supposed to look lush and fertile. In a flat valley, on top of a small riverbed, Susann Bieling and Uwe Szielasko had built an antique-looking farmhouse. Oi Joro Orok looks magical on film, and we filmed all the scenes around the farmhouse. The scenes in the fields and in the village were filmed in Mukutani, the third main setting of the movie.

Before we could go to the third main setting we still had to shoot two other settings that were rather difficult: Hotel Norfolk and Street Nairobi. These scenes featured a large number of historically dressed extras. Some shots required up to 200 extras. Our makeup artists needed to be supported by five extra make-up artists from Germany who knew how to style European hairdos from the 1940s. In order to keep costs low, we organized a small sewing shop in Nairobi, and we were able to make most of our costumes there.

The third main setting, Mukutani, is a community located 40 km northeast of Lake Baringo. We spotted the location from an airplane. We worked with bulldozers to build a road, which would permit trucks loaded with lighting equipment, staging materials, generators, water and gasoline to pass. For possible emergencies a runway for planes was constructed. There are approximately 700 people living in Mukutani, mostly Pokot and Njem, many of whom had never seen a white person before. After long discussions, the village Board of Elders agreed to the filming. The experiences we had filming in Mukutani led us to found an organization in Germany which raises funds to support the village. The money will be used to build and maintain an ambulatory facility and to continue the construction of the road.

Filming in Mukutani proved to be the greatest challenge. We planted cornfields that had to have three different grades of maturity during the shoot. In order to show on screen that time had elapsed we had to have young, low corn plants, green corn plants and the mature yellow corn plants. One of the highlights of the movie, the attack/plague of the locusts was filmed in the field of ripe corn. The first seeds had already been sown in November so that there would be ripe corn in March. To supervise the growth of the corn we had a "corn commissioner" who traveled once a week 100 km. from Nakuru to Mukutani.

The second high point was the night ceremony of the Pokots in which Regina and Jettel take part in the film. More than 400 Pokots dressed in their traditional robes acted in it.

Nairobi was the location for the last 3 weeks of production. Settings were the train station in Nairobi, the internment camp and the British barracks. Despite many unforeseen events—a robbery, many mishaps and illnesses—we wrapped when we had scheduled, the Thursday before Easter.

This was made possible by the incredible achievements of the entire team, plus the Kenyans, who put so much into the film.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE LINK

**In her novel, Stefanie Zweig tells the story of her own childhood from the perspective of herself as a child. What aspect did you focus on in the film?**

In my version of the story I concentrate very much on the relationship of the parents, their love for each other. They suddenly find themselves in difficult circumstances; their love falters and must be re-found. Stefanie Zweig tells the story from the perspective of a child. She describes her own experiences and memories. But for me, Regina's mother Jettel is the most exciting character. What is most fascinating is her development into an independent and mature woman, who not only has to rethink her own position and priorities in life but also her relationship towards her family.

**Why did you choose Juliane Kohler and Merab Ninidze as your lead actors?**

Juliane is enormously versatile. During rehearsals I was immediately impressed by her performance as a capricious daughter from a privileged home, as well as her transformation into a mature and serious person. Juliane manages to show how deracinated Jettel feels in the African savanna and how, in the course of the story, she is able to make the country her own. For her husband Walter I was looking for a male actor who could hold his own opposite this highly energetic female character. In a far more subtle and thoughtful way he should maintain his ease and quiet strength. For me, Merab radiates this ease and intelligence, without seeming to be boring or even humorless.

**In spite of the lack of infrastructure you made a conscious decision to shoot in Kenya and not in South Africa. Why?**

Peter Herrmann and I agreed from the very beginning that we should have African actors and extras in our movie who actually come from those areas which are featured in our story. I don't think it's a good idea to dress up Zulus as Masai or vice versa. Those details have to be true because, after all, the people tell much about their country and lend a special atmosphere and sense of place to the film. It's not something you can simply re-create. Even if the shooting itself is difficult, that in itself is no argument for sacrificing verisimilitude.

**What impressed you most about Kenya?**

Particularly the landscape! The expanse, the variety of nature! We searched for almost all of our locations north of Nairobi, away from the tourist areas. The landscape changes enormously, ranging from voluptuously green coffee and tea plantations and forests, to arid savannas, rolling hills, lake districts, and the gigantic Rift Valley. And then there are incredibly ugly cities, dilapidated villages, unspeakable poverty. When we first visited the country, there had been a catastrophic drought for three years already. And yet, in spite of everything, the people were so friendly, laughing, giggling. Such joy of life! That really impressed me.

### **Did you create the rituals for the movie or did you participate in real ceremonies?**

We did film real ceremonies. Authenticity was very important to us. The rain ceremony of the Kikuyu council of elders really lasted for hours, though, and so we had to cut most of it. The same goes for the savanna ceremony of the Pokot, during which Jettel and Regina walk into the night. That's really a rite of passage for young men of a specific age group. The only thing we influenced were the clothes. Nowadays the young men also wear T-shirts and colorful shirts, of course.

### **How great was the temptation to allow such a grand scenery more space than you'd actually planned?**

I always wanted the landscape in which our story is situated to portray itself, if you will. I didn't want to use a neon marker and say: Look here! We're making a movie with awesome landscapes and spectacular shots of safaris! Everyone's seen that a hundred times already. Even on TV, in the afternoon shows. After all, my story is about an involuntary escape from the beloved home country. It's not about some great adventure trip to paradise. I always wanted the viewers to slowly fall in love with this alien world, just like my protagonists. And at the outset this world is dusty, uninviting and rough.

### **Looking back to those exciting days, would you plunge into such an adventure again, such a lavish project abroad?**

Absolutely. I love to travel and to learn about the country away from the typical tourist venues. The shooting itself was extremely well organized and prepared by the production company MTM. That's also because Peter Herrmann, the producer, is an ethnologist by training and knows his way around Africa very well. At no time did I have the feeling that we were in any real danger or perhaps acted thoughtlessly. It was always fun to meet the people during the shooting - which, of course, created quite a stir - and to get to know them intensively. However, sometimes I regretted not having more time to simply enjoy the moment, to observe and let matters run their own course. As a director you're always under pressure, you interfere and want to carve a story from the country and its people. That's quite onerous sometimes.



# BIOS

## **Juliane Köhler (Jettel Redlich)**

Juliane Köhler studied acting in New York. She became a star of the stage in Germany in HEDDA GABLER (Ibsen), FRÄULEIN ELSE (Schnitzler) and DAS KUNSTSEIDENE MÄDCHEN (Greiffenhagen/Keun). In 1995 she received several prizes, including the Bavarian Cultural Ministry's regional sponsorship of young actors. Juliane Köhler's screen credits include SCHATTENBOXER (directed by Lars Becker), INZEST - EIN FALL FÜR SINA TEUFEL (directed by Klaus Emmerich) and KOMA (directed by Uwe Janson). In 1999 she had her breakthrough movie role in Max Farberbock's AIMEE & JAGUAR. She played the married Lilly Wust from Berlin, who falls in love with a Jewish woman, Felice Schragenheim (Maria Schrader). For that role Köhler received the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the 1999 Berlin Film Festival, as well as many other awards. In the same year she appeared in Caroline Link's ANNALOUSE AND ANTON. She currently lives in Munich.

## **Merab Ninidze (Walter Redlich)**

Merab Ninidze was born in 1965 in Tiflis in the Republic of Georgia, where he also studied acting from 1982 to 1984. He had his film debut in 1984 in Tengis Abuladze's DIE REUE which received the Special Jury Award in Cannes two years later. From 1986 to 1991 he acted for the Rustaveli Theatre in Tiflis and appeared in plays such as Georg Buchner's LEONCE AND LENA and in Shakespeare's HAMLET. In Georgia he shot more than 20 movies. He is well known to movie audiences as Alek in Bakhtiar Khudojnazarov's tragic-comedy LUNA PAPA. In addition to NOWHERE IN AFRICA in 2001 he appeared in Jo Baier's VERLORENES LAND and in Andreas Gruber's BELLA BLOCK.

## **Matthias Habich (Süsskind)**

Matthias Habich was born in Danzig, Germany, in 1940 and studied acting in Hamburg, Paris and the U.S. Habich is one of the most renowned stage actors in the German-speaking world. He has performed at the Actor's Studio in Munich and The Theatre in Zurich, and in Paris for Peter Brook (MAHABARATA), among others. He has also appeared in many movies, among them FANGSCHUSS (Volker Schlöndorff), MAIDEN'S WAR (Bernhard Sinkel), A CORPS PERDU (Lea Pool), BEYOND SILENCE (Caroline Link) and ENEMY AT THE GATES (Jean-Jacques Annaud). In 2002 he won a German Film Award for his role as Süsskind in NOWHERE IN AFRICA.

## **Sidede Onyulo (Owuor)**

Onyulo first studied law in Nairobi, but instead of embarking on a career as a lawyer, he decided to become an actor, playing in numerous Kenyan theatre productions as well as supporting roles in American movies. Local film experts recommended him at a very early stage for the role of Owuor, but he could not be found, having moved away from Nairobi and disappearing without a trace in central Kenya, which is mostly untouched by modern means of communication. A local casting agent finally managed to find him in his home village of Lake Victoria.

### **Lea Kurka (young Regina)**

Ten-year-old Lea Kurka lives in Wuppertal, Germany, where she is in fourth grade. In her spare time she enjoys ballet and jazz dance, as well as painting and reading. Lea thoroughly enjoyed shooting the film in Kenya. She was particularly excited by the life in Mukutani, a remote and very traditional village close to Lake Baringo, where she spent much time with the local children of the Polot and N'Jem tribes.

### **Karoline Eckertz (teenaged Regina)**

The thirteen-year-old high school student from Wiesbaden considers her time on NOWHERE IN AFRICA as the most exciting time of her life. She is an active member of her school's theatre group, reads a lot, listens to hip-hop and The Rolling Stones, and loves the movies.

### **Caroline Link (Director and Screenwriter)**

Caroline Link was born in 1964. After graduating from high school she spent a year in the U.S. In 1984 she took her first steps in the movie business as an intern at Bavaria Film Studios. She then participated in many TV and movie projects as a script editor and assistant director. Her graduation project at the Academy for Film and Television in Munich, called SOMMERTAGE, received the Kodak Advancement Prize at the Film Festival in Hof. In 1992 she made the children's film KALLE DER TRAUMER for German TV. In the same year she also started researching the script for BEYOND SILENCE. In 1995 she began shooting the unusual story about a deaf couple and their musically talented child, which received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. In 1999, her successful adaptation of Erich Kaster's ANNALOUISE AND ANTON (which also starred Juliane Kohler) was the recipient of many international awards. NOWHERE IN AFRICA was Germany's highest grossing film of 2002 and Caroline Link received a German Film Award for Best Director.

### **Peter Herrmann (Producer)**

Peter Herrmann was born in 1954. After graduating from high school he first worked as a bookseller and then enrolled in Ethnology and African Studies at Munich University. After finishing his studies he began shooting his first documentaries about animistic cults in Benin and Togo. He has been producing movies since 1994. Together with Gloria Burkert and Andreas Bareis he founded the Medien & Television Munchen, which produces movies for TV and the cinema. In addition, he is managing director and producer for MTM Television and Film GmbH. In 1995 he produced Romuald Karmakar's THE DEATHMAKER which received the German Film Award. He was also the executive producer of the mini-series THE BUBI SCHOLZ STORY by Roland Suso Richter, as well as Jan Schuttes' FAT WORLD and Roland Suso Richter's A HANDFUL OF GRASS.

### **Gernot Roll (Cinematographer)**

Gernot Roll is one of the most renowned German cameramen. Originally from Dresden, he shot his first film, JET GENERATION, in 1967. He went freelance in 1976 and since then has worked with such well-known German directors as Edgar Reitz (HEIMAT),

Axel Corti (WELCOME IN VIENNA) and CAROLINE LINK (BEYOND SILENCE). He has received numerous awards for his work, as well as a 2002 German Film Award for Best Cinematography on NOWHERE IN AFRICA. He has also worked on TV mini-series (DER LADEN, MIT MEINEN HEISSEN TRANEN) and as a director (BALLERMAN 6, ACH HERR DOKTOR). Most recently he shot the part-documentary family saga THE MANNNS.

### **Stefanie Zweig (Novelist)**

Stefanie Zweig was born in Leobschutz, Upper Silesia, in 1932. In 1938 she and her parents fled to Kenya, as a result of the Nazi persecution of Jews. Her father, a lawyer and notary public, worked as a manager on a farm and earned just enough to finance his daughter's education. The family spent most of its stay in Ol Joro Orok, situated directly at the Equator—3,000 meters above sea level. It was a very remote place, even for Africa. In 1944 Stefanie Zweig's father enlisted in the British Army which also enabled him and his family to return to Germany in 1947. Upon their return, they were shocked by so much destruction, hunger and despair. Stefanie, who couldn't read or write German, had problems adjusting to this alien world. However, after graduating from high school she worked as a journalist for a Jewish newspaper. In 1963 she became the chief editor of the culture section of the Abendpost-Nachtausgabe in Frankfurt. She has been working as a freelance journalist and author since 1988. She has written numerous novels, which have won many awards and prizes, and her autobiographical novels NOWHERE IN AFRICA and SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY became bestsellers. In 1993, Stefanie Zweig received the Decoration of Merit by the Federal Republic of Germany.

# CAST

Jettel Redlich	Juliane Köhler
Walter Redlich	Merab Ninidze
Suskind	Matthias Habich
Owuor	Sidede Onyulo
Regina (old)	Karoline Eckertz
Regina (young)	Lea Kurka
Max	Gerd Heinz
Ina	Hildegard Schmahl
Liesel	Maritta Horwarth
Kathe	Regine Zimmermann
Maid	Gabrielle Odinis
Mrs. Sadler	Bettina Redlich
Inge	Julia Leidl
Eisa Konrad	Mechthild Grossman
Jogona (young)	Peter Lenaeku
Jogona (old)	Silas Kerati
Kimani	Kanya Man
Captain Caruther	Andrew Rashleigh
Mr. Brindley	Anthony Bate
Robert Green	David Michaels
Mr. Morrison	Steve Weston
Mrs. Rubens	Diane Keen
Mr. Rubens	Andrew Sachs
Hubert	Joel Wajsberg
Ruth	Miriam Wajsberg
Johannes	Marian Losch
Sled -boy	Bela Klenze
British Officer in Norfolk	Steven Price
Bure	Ken Brown
Patel	M.M. Sha

# CREDITS

Written and Directed by	Caroline Link
Based upon a novel by	Stefanie Zweig
Producer	Peter Herrmann
Executive Producer	Andreas Bareiss
Production	MTM Medien & Television Munchen GmbH
Co-Producer	Bernd Eichinger Constantin Film AG
Co-Producers	Thilo Kleine Michael Weber Bavaria Film GmbH Sven Ebeling Media Cooperation One GmbH
World Sales	Bavaria Media GmbH
Line Producer	Jurgen Troster
Production Manager	Chris Evert
Director of Photography	Gernot Roll
Steadycam	Mike Bartlett
Set Design	Susann Bieling, Uwe Szielasko
Costume	Barbara Grupp
Make-up	Nanni Gebhardt-Seele, Stefanie Hilke
Editor	Patricia Rommel
Music	Niki Reiser
Sound	Andreas Wolki
Casting	An Dorte Braker
Casting (Children)	Uwe Bunker, Casting Association Team AgenturJaqueline Rietz
Ethnological Consultant	Benedikt Mirow

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# The New York Times

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2003

## In the African Sun While Dark Came Over Europe

By LAURA WINTERS

“WHEN I first read the book ‘Nowhere in Africa,’ I was fascinated by it,” said the German director Caroline Link. “I was caught up by the story it told of a woman from a protected Jewish family who suddenly has to live in the middle of the African desert. I’ve always loved to discover new worlds with my movies, but I remember thinking to myself: ‘Wow, can I do this? Will I really be able to shoot a movie in Kenya?’”

Not only is Ms. Link’s “Nowhere in Africa” a film shot in Kenya: it is an unlikely hybrid, a German film shot in Kenya with the Holocaust as an emotional backdrop. The film does not portray Kenya as the setting for a picturesque safari or as a land with an exotic colonial past, but rather as a harsh, beautiful country that becomes a refuge for the dispossessed.

The film, which opens in New York on March 7 and nationally through March and April, tells the story of a Jewish lawyer and his family who flee Nazi Germany for Kenya in 1938 and find themselves tenant farmers on a sun-parched African plain. While the parents quarrel under the strain of their new life and the dawning horror of what is happening back home, their formerly sheltered little girl embraces African culture and becomes a robust, confident teenager.

This may sound like the stuff of fantasy, but it is, in fact, a true story. Stefanie Zweig wrote “Nirgendwo in Afrika” (“Nowhere in Africa”) about her own experiences of growing up in Kenya during the Second World War. The book was a best seller when it came out in 1995 in Germany, and Ms. Link’s film, which is adapted from the book, was a big hit when it was released. It won five German Film Awards, including best picture and best director, and has been nominated for this year’s foreign-language film Oscar.

“Nowhere in Africa” is both a sweeping saga and an intimate story about a family vanquishing all odds to survive. And it was this personal tale that first attracted Ms. Link. “So many films are about first love,” she said during a recent visit to New York. “I thought this was a great chance to make a more adult love

story. The love of the two parents in this story is not an easy love at all. I wanted to explore what makes a man and a woman stay together, especially if they go through such a difficult time.”

The sporty, blue-eyed Ms. Link, 38, has a quietly forceful, no-nonsense manner. She is one of several young German directors, including Tom Tykwer (“Run Lola Run”) and Sandra Nettelbeck (“Mostly Martha”), who have shown that home-grown artistic films can compete with broad comedies at the German box office.

Ms. Link, who has directed three feature films, has a particular ability to shape serious, offbeat topics into powerfully emotional crowd-pleasers. But even she was concerned about approaching the fraught topic of the Holocaust. “We have seen so many films about the Holocaust in Germany,” she said, “that there’s a danger of fatigue if you show the same images again. So you have to find new angles to reach the audience and make them feel the horror of the situation.”

For Ms. Link, who herself is not Jewish, the new angle was the refugee experience. “I tried to show what the Holocaust meant for people who left Germany early enough to survive,” she said, “but who still suffered terribly because they had to leave their homes, their lives and their loved ones behind.”

In 1999, before beginning to write, she talked to Ms. Zweig, who gave her free rein to adapt the book. “There are many things in the film that are different from my book, but Caroline captured the love of the child for her father — this remarkable man, my father, who refused to hate,” Ms. Zweig said by phone from Frankfurt.

To play the father, Walter, Ms. Link cast Merab Ninidze, a Georgian actor who has lived in Vienna for the last 10 years. For Jettel, the mother, who evolves in the film from a pampered wife into a fearless woman, Ms. Link cast Juliane Köhler, a well-known theater actress. “Juliane is not afraid to play a part that is at first unsympathetic,” Ms. Link said. She cast a Kenyan actor, Sidede Onyulo, as the family’s cook, Owuor, and two German schoolgirls, 9-year-old Lea Kurka and 12-year-old Karoline Eckertz, to play the daughter, Regina, at different ages.

But the most crucial choice, for



Lea Kurka and Sidede Onyulo in “Nowhere in Africa”

Ms. Link, was her decision to shoot on location in Kenya. The film industry there, she said, had ground to a halt, partly because of the country’s poor infrastructure — from roads to telephone lines. “But it was very important to me to shoot this story where it really happened,” she said.

After extensive preparation, Ms. Link began to shoot the film in January 2001. In Mukutani, a remote western village that was one of the locations, the crew built a tent camp in the bush. For the actors, the shoot was intense both because of unforeseen circumstances (one day the rain washed out the only usable road) and because of the beauty and strangeness of their surroundings. “It was such an overwhelming experience,” said Ms. Köhler, “but Caroline always kept her cool. She’d be there with a megaphone on top of a crane, directing crowds of extras in a cornfield.”

Ms. Link nonetheless admits to having been nervous. “And yet I’m surprised that I wasn’t more so,” she said, laughing. “Every night we came to our tents and took showers, and snakes would come out, attracted by the water. I should have been afraid. But I’d just stand there barefoot in the dark, completely distracted, thinking about the next day’s scenes.”

It’s a far journey from night showers in Kenya to Bad Nauheim, the small city just outside Frankfurt where Ms. Link grew up. When she was 16, her family moved to Munich, where Ms. Link eventually went to film school.

After graduation she began to

write a film centering on a father-daughter relationship. Her idea took off when she read a newspaper story about a young girl who had deaf parents. “I thought that was amazing,” she said, “how a little girl is the foreign minister for the whole family because she is the only person who can hear.”

It was an ordeal for Ms. Link, however, to find backing for her movie, “Beyond Silence.” Finally, in 1994, she found producers and cast two deaf actors as the parents. The 1996 film became an unexpected hit in Germany and was nominated for an Academy Award. She then went on to shoot “Annaliese and Anton,” a movie based on an Erich Kästner children’s novel, which was also a big success.

Ms. Link, who recently had her first child with her longtime partner, the filmmaker Dominik Graf, has always featured children prominently in her films. “I identify so much with their point of view,” she said. “But I think my focus is shifting more toward adults now.”

She says with grim relish that she is already looking forward to the discussions with potential backers when she decides to do her next film. “It’s not easy to do films that are unconventional in Germany,” she said. “With ‘Nowhere in Africa,’ when people read the script they said, ‘Where is the wildlife?’ But now no one can tell me, ‘This will not work commercially, Caroline.’”