

# OUR FOREIGN AGENDA — THE ORIENTALIST AND THE CURATOR

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**O = ORIENTALIST**

**C = CURATOR**

*Conversation at Pâtisserie Délices, a posh French-style café near the seafront of Alexandria. The European curator and the Orientalist are visiting Alexandria, looking for an artist for their project in Berlin.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION SCENE

**O:** So, you are the curator who is going to join me in Alexandria? Great to meet. I have never worked with somebody from the arts before.

**C:** Great to meet, too. I have never worked with an orientalist either. What do you actually research?

**O:** Eh, it's about possibility. And creativity. I try to study what fantasy and creativity can accomplish as quotidian engagements in the conditions of neo-liberal subjectivation from a phenomenological approach that interrogates the existential...

**C:** Excuse me?

**O:** I mean, the current anthropological discourse on subjectivation and Foucauldian relations of power...

**C:** I mean, I don't understand a word. This way we will never find an artist!

**O:** ...But the intersubjective lifeworlds of the...

**C:** Wait a minute! Nobody is going to understand you! The first lesson: We need a translator.

## 2. SHITTY TITLE SCENE

**C:** Why are we still having this shitty title?

**O:** I think "In Search of Europe" is a good title.

**C:** In Search of Europe? Don't you think everybody hates Europe at this point?

**O:** If they do, then they are thinking of Europe. Remember, the main question of our project is how people compare their situation with Europe.

**C:** I don't understand. What do you mean when you say that people should compare themselves with Europe? Has anybody in Egypt invited us to ask this question?

**O:** Eh, actually, the German Ministry of Research and Education pays us to ask this question.

**C:** There you are! That's why the people are suspicious about it. And right they are!

**O:** But I think it is a good question. It is something I really encounter in Egypt. When people are upset about something in Egypt they ask me: "Do you have something like this in Europe?"

**C:** Why should Egyptians be interested in Europe at all?

**O:** That's the question! That's exactly what our research is about.

**C:** You as orientalist, tell me, why do we Europeans still give Europe such

importance. Why do we think that everybody thinks about us?

**O:** I don't know if everybody still thinks about us. That's what I want to find out.

**C:** But now, after the revolution nobody thinks about Europe. They think about Egypt.

**O:** I hope so. But there is also a lot of European money coming to Egypt.

**C:** So it's all about money again?

**O:** Money makes things possible.

**C:** This is a moral question. Who gives the money and what is the ideology behind it?

**O:** No, The question is, what are they doing with the money?

## 3. WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE SCENE

**O:** Anyway, why do we speak English?

**C:** Well, I don't speak Arabic.

**O:** But it's an Arabic speaking country.

**C:** All your books are in English. You write about this country but you don't write for this country.

**O:** I would like to write for this country, but the people here have difficulty to understand the academic debates I'm involved in.

**C:** So who is your audience?

**O:** Well there is Frank, and there is Sonja, Jessica, Sindre, Hanan, Greg ... Maybe a few more.

**C:** So you get a huge research budget to write books which twenty people read?

**O:** Come on, that's not fair. At least thirty!

**C:** So you don't mind if nobody reads what you have to say?

**O:** Of course I do. I have a lot to say. That's why I'm participating in an art project.

**C:** So you think art is less elitist than academia?

**O:** No, art is even more elitist. But I can tell my ideas to thirty different people. And it's more fun in the arts!

## 4. WHAT IS THE ART SCENE SCENE

**O:** Do the people understand contemporary art here?

**C:** I don't even know if there is an audience for contemporary art here. I haven't seen any museums or exhibitions here. I think they don't even have proper art education here.

**O:** Have you never been to cultural centres they have here? They are very influential!

**C:** But that's not real art, that's socialist ideology for the nationalist project.

**O:** What do you mean, just because you don't like it, it's not real art?

**C:** What do you know about art, honey? You're the expert in science.

**O:** Aren't the artists here experts in art more than you are? Who has the right to say what is real art?

**C:** I have the money, stupid!

## 5. SELECTION SCENE

**C:** I'm here to look for good art and not to be loved.

**O:** So you don't mind if they hate you?

**C:** Of course I do. I want to be loved as well. I'm schizophrenic. On one side I want to make no compromises regarding to art. But I don't know if I and the artists here share the same standards. Will I be hated for insisting on standards?

**O:** There are some people in this city who are more international than you are.

**C:** OK, true. But they don't answer the phone. I work with those who respond to me. One side of me expects European standards. But another side in me wants to give something back.

**O:** That sounds quite patronising.

**C:** No, I mean, I want exchange and dialogue. I want to understand what matters to people here, what contemporary art means for them.

**O:** Maybe you are just trying to go around your bad conscience that you as a curator are shopping for people.

**C:** Sometimes I think: Why not change the whole approach to the selection process?

**O:** Does that mean that we have to consider a collective work?

**C:** Maybe. But then it's less about quality of art, and more about the process.

**O:** I don't care about the process. I want a good exhibition and good products!

## 6. THE GOOD CAUSE SCENE

**C:** But we have an agenda: We do it for the good cause.

**O:** What do you mean with good cause?

**C:** I think we have something important to say!

**O:** What is so important that you have to say?

**C:** I think it is important for a German audience that they know what people think in Egypt, in Turkey, in Mocambique, in Senegal. I think we can change some misconceptions Europeans have about the world.

**O:** Then we have to listen. They just had a revolution in this country. There is something we can learn from them.

**C:** Exactly, I said that before.

**O:** No you didn't.

**C:** Then you didn't listen to me.

**O:** So, what did you say?

**C:** I want to get feedback. I want to know if our ideas have any relevance to the people here. Otherwise our project doesn't make any sense.

**O:** So, then let's hear the people.