Orientalism

**Seminar question:** “So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialised caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression.” Edward Said, ‘Islam through Western eyes’ 1980

Edward Said – Orientalism (1978) – revolutionises the study of the Middle-East. Has sparked intense debate and disagreement in the last 20 years.

Edward Said’s interest was sparked during the Arab-Israeli war → Arabs were described as cowardly, always going to be defeated because they’re not “modern”

-- Constant disparity between his experiences of being an Arab was and the representations of that – in art (Jerome, etc.) → those representations had very little to do with his experiences as an Arab.

He saw a repertory of ways India, Egypt and Syria were represented creatively..... the sensual woman whose there to be used by the man, the east as a kind of mysterious place full of monsters and secrets. It had very little to do with people who had actually been there.

Journey to Egypt – Gerard de Nerval sounded exactly like other pieces of work on the East – written 5 decades ago.... that the orient, unlike the west, it does not develop. Placid.... Still... after a

British and French → conquered the East not just militarily but also what we could call “ideologically”

America inserts interest into Israel (Israel – Palestine) because of its Jewish/western ties. Whereas, there is no other interest in countries such as Iran, unless it is for oil. There is the idea in Israel that all Arab countries are direct enemies or foes, which is imported into American orientalism. Nothing is said about the dispossessed, miserable Palestinians, who are in that position because of Israelis.

“How this affects journalists:

- We must think about how we report stories and we must FULLY understand a culture before we begin to criticise it.
- Edward Said called some of the journalism during 9/11 ‘lazy’ → using the interests of the government, using the lines of the governments

The Sunday Times headline (Princess Diana and Dodi el Fayed): “A MATCH MADE IN MECCA”
This idea of Muslim conspiracies taking over this white woman with Mohammed stage-managing the whole thing... the power of the discourse.

Oklahoma City bombing: American news networks jump at the immediate thought that the crime was committed by Arabs when in actuality, it was a white boy.