

Orientalism: Skewed Views from a Broken Lens

How Edward Said's ideas of a '*distorted lens*' still radiate today through Political discourse, Ideology and Media Misinformation

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Born in Palestine and raised in the United States, Edward Said's literature is widely credited amongst the Social Sciences, dominating theoretical discourse on subjects such as Imperialism and Culture.

He is most widely recognised for cultivated the theory of '*Orientalism*'.

With roots deeply embedded in Colonialism, the theory is the '*distorted lens*' through which the West observes and examines the Middle East.

Notions of mystical, exotic, backward, and hazardous lands may lend itself to a Westerner's imagination when asked what the Middle East is like.

These images are deeply rooted in our '*othering*' of the region.

To explain a little more in-depth: During Western explorations of the rest of the world, we essentially gifted ourselves the title as the predominant cultural force, far more advanced and civilised than any regions we encountered.

Looking through early observations of these places, through the Western eye, we were mystified by their differences, and assumed the regions to be lesser than ourselves.

Not dissimilar to how early Neo-Americans attempted to '*civilise*' Native Americans through imposing three, regimented meals a day, Said argues that we try to dominate through imposing our Cultural ideology, simultaneously '*othering*' the Middle East.

Essentially, it is the process, by which the West imposes its ideology and attempts to control groups perceived as culturally, socially and economically retrograde and inferior.

Media Dissemination: Old and New

First you can ask yourself, when have you ever seen the human side of the Middle East documented through popular media?

First depictions from Western writers and artists injected a sense of mystery and danger into the Western perceptions of the Middle East.



Disney's *'Aladdin'* is credited as an epitomising example; paisley textiles, magical lands and a culture unparalleled to our own were images that were disseminated with the utilisation of the film industry.

More recently, news coverage of the region exacerbates the all-consuming and continuous perils occurring there, with trepidation and misunderstanding striking the collective mind of the Westerner.

The dissemination of misinformation concludes that 'us' and 'them' are immiscible cultures, and like water and oil, they cannot be mixed.

The 1955 Oklahoma City Bombing

To detail the event briefly; in April of 1995, Oklahoma witnessed a bombing at the *Alfred P. Murrah* Federal Building in the City's Centre.

Three men of assumed Middle Eastern origins were in proximity at the time, and it was almost mechanically deduced that these were the administrators of the attack.

These details alone indicated the extent of detrimental assumptions, but it gets even more absurd.

Edward Said himself, the man who theorised the ideas of distorted Western misunderstanding, was contacted by local news requesting his thoughts on the bombing alongside suggestions for its motives.

You might want to read that over.

Because Said was of Palestinian descent, it was assumed that he would comprehend the motivations behind a bombing in Oklahoma.

The almost automated reaction to this event, regarding the assumed culprits, exposes the hypnotic influence of *'othering'* and the tight grasp of assumption.

To conclude this obscenity, it was later found that the bombing was in fact committed by two white American man called Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

This example unveils the consequences of the absence of critical, thought.

The most pervasive and disastrous habits are the ones that go unacknowledged.

America's status on the Global scale means these ideological misguidances have incredible influence, and Trump's worryingly similar stance towards Mexico in current politics, should be a power to be seriously sceptical and critical of.

The repercussions of Imperialism's misinformation remain ubiquitous today, and the persistent nature of them means they have been swept under the rug of accepted public discourse. This is far from them being uninfluential.

The assumed knowledge and '*truths*' that are so sorely misguided yet fail to be addressed are the ones which retain the highest potential for catastrophe.

Learning that the lens is broken means the viewer can attempt to amend it.