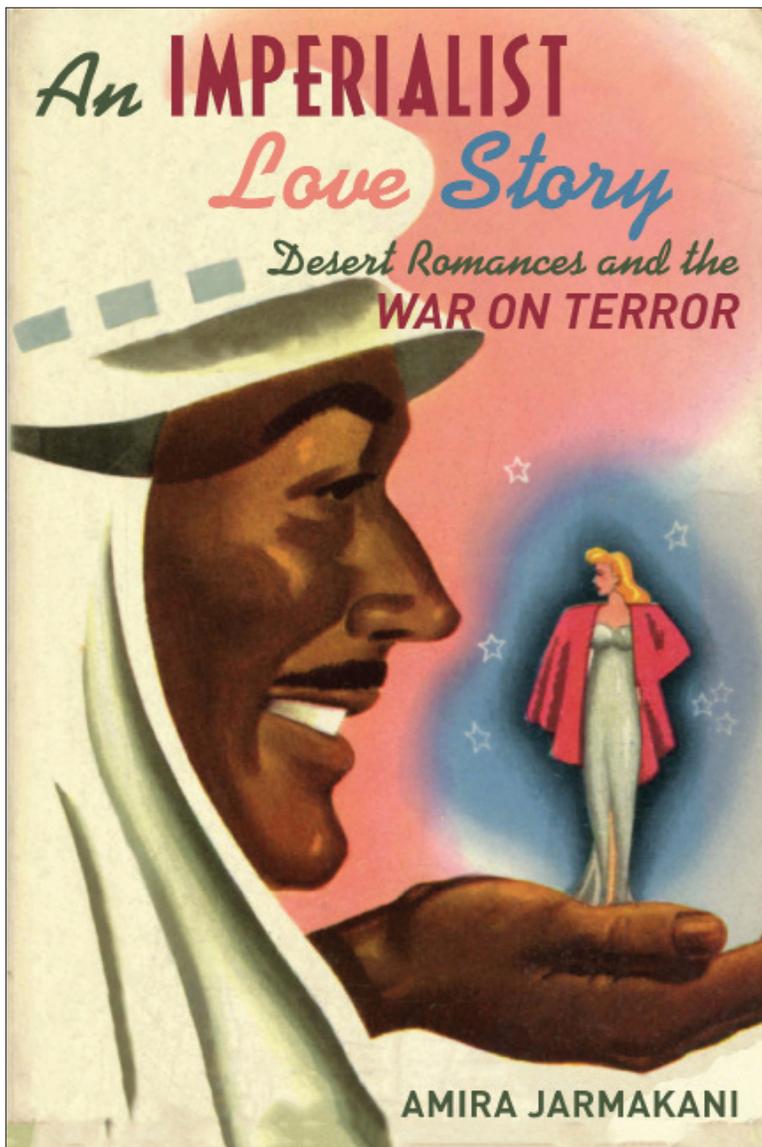


# AN IMPERIALIST LOVE STORY

## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



A curious figure stalks the pages of a distinct subset of mass-market romance novels, aptly called “desert romances.” Animalistic yet sensitive, dark and attractive, the desert prince or sheikh emanates manliness and raw, sexual power. In the years since September 11, 2001, the sheikh character has steadily risen in popularity in romance novels, even while depictions of Arab masculinity as backward and violent in nature have dominated the cultural landscape.

*An Imperialist Love Story* contributes to the broader conversation about the legacy of orientalist representations of Arabs in Western popular culture. Combining close readings of novels, discursive analysis of blogs and forums, and interviews with authors, Jarmakani explores popular investments in the war on terror by examining the collisions between fantasy and reality in desert romances. Focusing on issues of security, freedom, and liberal multiculturalism, she foregrounds the role that desire plays in contemporary formations of U.S. imperialism. Drawing on transnational feminist theory and cultural studies, *An Imperialist Love Story* offers a radical reinterpretation of the war on terror, demonstrating romance to be a powerful framework for understanding how it works, and how it perseveres.

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Romance novels are an important area of inquiry in the fields of Cultural Studies; Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and Literary Studies. The study of romance novels is also an important sub-field in its own right. An excellent online resource for the subfield is "Teach Me Tonight: Musings on Romance Fiction from an Academic Perspective": <http://teachmetonight.blogspot.com>. This instructor's guide provides supplemental information about the scholarly debates surrounding romance novels as an additional resource for teaching.

Early feminist inquiry into romance novels largely addressed the question of whether (and to what extent) romance novels are oppressive to women insofar as they uphold patriarchal ideals and realities (i.e., the desire for the "happily ever after" ending). While some early scholarship did come down on the side of viewing the mostly female readership as "dupes" for buying into a fantasy that simply served to oppress them, most of it took a more nuanced view. Though Ann Barr Snitow's 1979 article referred to romance novels as pornography, for example, her argument carefully situated the rape fantasy within a patriarchal context hostile to female sexual pleasure in order to understand it as a trope that actually freed readers up to imaginatively engage with their own sexuality.

Desert romances hold a privileged position in relation to the landscape of romance novels in general. Perhaps the most direct link between the sheikh sub-genre and the wider field of mass-market romance novels is the 1919 novel *The Sheik* (later made into a major motion picture starring Rudolph Valentino), which is often heralded as the progenitor of the modern romance (See Raub 1992, 199; Flesch 2004; Dixon 1999, 138; and Regis 2003, 166-17). E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* can be understood as a quintessential "bodice ripper" novel, a term that itself points to fraught tensions around discussions of sexuality between members of the romance industry and feminist researchers. As several feminist scholars have argued, the "bodice ripping" type of sex in romance novels (sometimes labeled as "rape fantasy" or "rape saga" and sometimes described as sadomasochistic) actually represents a complex relationship between the reader and notions of sexuality (see Creed 1984; Snitow 1979; and Wardrop 1995). Rather than simply participating in their own patriarchal oppression, these scholars argue, romance novels may open up a different kind of space in which readers can positively identify with their own sexual agency and in which readers can experience a fantasy of sexual pleasure unmediated by social scripts that attach guilt to female sexual agency and desire. For example, Patricia Raub reads Hull's *The Sheik* as the first romance novel to establish the theme of the white heroine as a liberated and powerful female character who embraces her own sexuality. One of the most comprehensive resources for understanding desert romances and especially their literary context is Hsu-Ming Teo's *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (2012).

## WHY DELEUZE AND GUATTARI?

**Deleuze and Guattari might seem like an unnecessarily densely theoretical choice for the book. The use of Deleuze and Guattari as a theoretical framework for the book is stimulated by the primary materials of the book—romance novels—and the main underlying question they invite: how do people come to desire hegemony? The temptation with romance novels has been to answer this question from a somewhat limited, psychoanalytical perspective, and to therefore draw (sometimes denigrating) conclusions specific to the readers of the novels. Deleuze and Guattari allow for a way of thinking about romance novels as one example of a much larger pulse of desire. The book employs their theories because of the way they take desire seriously, and because of their insistence on removing desire solely from the domain of psychoanalysis and on considering it in the domain of social. This instructor's guide incorporates short synopses of some key theoretical terms as employed in the book.**

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ➔ What is your experience with romance novels? Have you read any before? If so, what kind? If not, what is your perception of them?
- ➔ Alan Boon, one of the founders of the famous romance novel press Mills & Boon, described the expansion of the romance novel industry as a “new British Empire of sorts.” What does it mean to think about romance novels as an empire? How, if at all, can romance novels be related to imperialism? Globalization?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- ➔ The book's introduction sets the stage for taking romance novels seriously as an area of scholarly inquiry. Visit romance blogs online to get a sense of them. What seem to be the most popular themes and conversations?
- ➔ The following sites represent some of the most popular and should give you a good start:
  - *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*: <http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com>
  - *Romantic Times*: <http://www.rtbookreviews.com/genre/romance>
  - *The Pink Heart Society: For Lovers of Little Books with Lots of Heart*: <http://pinkheartsociety.blogspot.com>
- ➔ Visit the *Reclaiming Identity: Dismantling Arab Stereotypes* online exhibit, paying particular attention to the “What is Orientalism” section, which talks about representations of “sheiks and terrorists.” <http://arabstereotypes.org/why-stereotypes/what-orientalism>. Have students create their own anatomy of a sheikh. What characteristics and associations seem to be attached to this figure?

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- ▶ Screen the documentary *Valentino's Ghost: The Politics Behind Images*, by Michael Singh: <http://www.valentinosghost.com>. The title references Rudolph Valentino, the actor made famous by the popularity of the 1921 film *The Sheik*, which was based on Hull's 1919 novel. Talk about the relationships of popular culture to historical events.
  - ▶ Read chapter 1, "Challenging the Terrorist Stereotype," of Evelyn Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, focusing specifically on what she describes as strategy #7 in contemporary TV drama depictions of Arabs and Muslims: "Fictionalizing the Middle Eastern or Muslim Country." Ask the students to theorize why creating a fictional geographical landscape for the Middle East is a common technique used in popular representations. What are the benefits and drawbacks of Jarmakani's choice to call this territory "Arabiastan"? Note: The map of fictional Arabiastan (for the romance novels) can be accessed here: <http://www.spaceandculture.org/2007/09/07/hot-desert-nights/>

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## SUMMARY

With a focus on the concept of “security,” the first chapter looks at the character of the sheikh-hero in desert romances. As an updated, and now positive, reincarnation of the greedy “oil sheikh” caricature from the 1970s, the sheikh-hero in contemporary desert romances is interesting because he chooses to cooperate with U.S. and U.S.-allied forces in the Middle East. The chapter first argues that U.S.-allied leaders in the Middle East are under-analyzed in terms of our understandings of the war on terror. It also argues that looking more carefully at U.S. (“special”) relationships with Gulf nations shows that the concept of security works to perpetuate the war on terror by keeping citizens trained to desire security no matter the costs.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Is the author’s use of the metaphor of the “gated community” to describe the sheikh convincing? Why or why not?
- How is oil, as a natural resource, related to the idea of national security? [See related activity below.]
- What does it mean to refer to security as a “technology of imperialism”?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Get in groups (or in full class discussion) to brainstorm all the associations you have with radiation. Next group the associations. Do any involve the Middle East? If so, how? For an assignment option, ask students to investigate radiation as a “keyword.” In what contexts is it usually used? Does it have negative or positive connotations? When? Why?
- Visit some of the *National Geographic* articles discussed in the chapter, available online. Be sure to view the “photo gallery” that accompanies each article. What are the main themes that emerge from these representations?
  - Frank Viviano, “Kingdom on Edge: Saudi Arabia”: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/features/world/asia/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-text/1>
  - Mary Anne Weaver, “Qatar: Revolution from the Top Down”: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/features/world/asia/qatar/qatar-text/1>
  - Afshin Molavi, “Dubai: Sudden City”: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/01/dubai/molavi-text>
  - Matthew Teague, “Isn’t She Lovely?” (about a camel beauty pageant): <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/08/camel-contest/teague-text>
  - Peter Gwin, “Lost Lords of the Sahara: The Fiercely Independent Tuareg Struggle to Survive Amid the Turmoil of North Africa”: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/sahara-tuareg/gwin-text>

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► Read the article “Sheikhs v Shale: The New Economics of Oil” in the *Economist* (Dec. 6, 2014). What image of sheikhs does it present? How does it relate to the argument in chapter one?

<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21635472-economics-oil-have-changed-some-businesses-will-go-bust-market-will-be>

► There isn’t enough room in the book to include quotations from all the desert romances consulted. Below is a wider selection of examples of how the sheikh-hero is positioned as an ally of U.S. and U.S.-allied countries, and as desiring to modernize his country. Analyze them in relation to the arguments made in the book.

- From Penny Jordan’s *A Royal Bride at the Sheikh’s Command* (2007): “Niroli, like so much of the rest of the world, was at a crisis point where traditional values were clashing badly with modernity. Those on and off the island like herself, who wanted to see Niroli move forward into a future that guarded and protected its unique geographical benefits rather than wasted and abused them, were often in conflict with those who could see no reason not to squander Niroli’s natural assets, or even worse those who sought to strip the island of its unique heritage in the name of progress by turning it into one huge tourist attraction” (15).
- From Sarah Morgan’s *Bella and the Merciless Sheikh* (2011): “Sheikh Zafiq loves the desert, but he is a fiercely bright, educated man who has successfully incorporated progressive business thinking into the running of a very traditional country. ... He has turned what was once an ancient desert city into an international centre for commerce. The buildings on the waterfront are as modern as anything you would find in Manhattan or Canary Wharf, but only a few streets away is the old city with many wonderful examples of Persian architecture” (10).
- From Dana Marton’s *Sheik Seduction* (2008): The sheikh had “seen both good and bad things while he had lived in the U.S. He was working on bringing the former into his own country as much as he could” (164). And he “learned things while living abroad that can aid my people. [He] can help make the transition easier as they learn to function in a world that works with different rules that they are used to” (240).
- From Loreth Anne White’s *The Sheik Who Loved Me* (2005): The sheikh desires to bring Azar (the name of his fictional kingdom) “into the global economy” (124). “[The heroine] had a sense that healing Azar, bridging the divide between the ancient ways and the new, would in a sense make this man whole himself” (124). The heroine notes that “even in peasant dress he was regal. He looked like the sheik, the true leader that he was. And like this crumbling and once-majestic desert city of Tabara, he had one foot in an

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ancient world, another in a new one. If anyone was to build a bridge between the two ways of life, this was the man" (212).

- From Emma Darcy's *Traded to the Sheikh* (2005): The sheikh notes that: "Wealth was what benefited our people. And we keep investing to consolidate the wealth we have, ensuring that the future will have no backward steps" (101). That's why he invests in and promotes the tourist industry: "They [tourists] come to Zanzibar because of its exotic past and because its very name conjures up a romantic sense of the east, just like Mandalay and Kathmandu.' He smiled, his eyes wickedly teasing as he added, 'Sultans and slaves and spice ... it's a potent combination'" (104).
- From Trish Morey's *Stolen by the Sheikh* (2006): "[The sheikh] was a different man. A real leader of his people, who ensured their ongoing existence in the style of life they had been accustomed to since ancient times. He could have forced them to abandon their way of life and move to the cities in the name of progress, simply by not supplying them with modern medicine and education. Yet he was ensuring the continued existence and preservation of their separate and special way of life" (114).
- From Ann Voss Peterson's *Seized by the Sheikh* (2011): "Efraim [the sheikh] was to usher his country into the modern age. And part of the pact among the island nations would help develop the infrastructure for such an endeavor, financed by profits from the oil leases off their shores" (159).
- From Donna Young's *Captive of the Desert King* (2009): Jarek, the sheikh, confides that his country "'wants to be with the United States in the forefront of new energy technology. This is the first step. We could not do that with ties to OPEC" (118). He realizes that "Taer [his fictional desert kingdom] is changing...For better or worse it is catching up with the modern world and ideas" (153). His countrymen "had to give Jarek credit. He'd moved Taer into the 21st century and put their small country on the international map. As the overseas interest increased, trade expanded, high-rises would soon be the norm—forcing the city boundaries out and international magnates to take notice" (156).
- From Linda Winstead Jones's *The Sheik and I* (2006): The sheikh, Kadir, "desired an alliance with [Silvershire, a monarchy] in order to strengthen Kahani [...] to see the country he loved move into the twenty-first century with dignity and strength. ... Every alliance cemented Kahani's place in the new world" (8). He says to the heroine, Cassandra: "Education is the answer to so many of the world's problems, don't you agree?" [...] How can I work to bring my country into the new millennium without offering an adequate education system for one half of our population? The educational needs of women in Kahani have been neglected for so long, it seems only right that

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we rectify that disservice in as practical and effective a way as possible" (33).

- From Nalini Singh's *Desert Warrior* (2009): The sheikh, Tariq, "leads peace talks between warring Arab states" (8). The heroine, Jasmine, "was impressed by the way old and new had merged so creatively" in the sheikh's country (74). Tariq makes a trade agreement for his fictional country Zulheil: "Zulheil now has a contract with several Western states that will allow our artistic products to cross their borders without duty' [...] 'Zulheil's jewelry and other artistic products are highly prized. They are our third biggest export. The agreement goes both ways'" (106).
- From Kate Hewitt's *The Sheikh's Forbidden Virgin* (2009): The sheikh's father had "married his English rose as an attempt to Westernize his country" (18). Perhaps because of this, the heroine notes the sheikh's "country is very Western and progressive" (114).
- From Marguerite Kaye's *The Governess and the Sheikh* (2011), which is a historical romance: The sheikh vows to take his fictional country, Daar-al-Abbah, "into the modern world" and he "favoured diplomacy over warfare" (12).

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## SUMMARY

Turning to freedom as one of the main concepts explored in desert romances, chapter two focuses on the idea that desert romances (and romance novels more generally) advocate for women's freedom and equality, especially because of their emphasis on female sexual pleasure. In desert romances, the sheikh-heroes are particularly drawn to "Western" women because he thinks they will help him modernize his country and foster women's equality. Based on analysis of both the desert romances and online (mostly blog) discussions about romances, the chapter argues that the desire for freedom ironically manifests in a desire to submit to freedom. While such a twist might not be surprising in a romance novel, the chapter further argues that, through desert romances, one can see the same dynamic operating on a national level in the war on terror. Middle Eastern countries are expected to submit to freedom insofar as they are expected to welcome U.S. and U.S.-allied military intervention that proclaims to bring freedom and liberation.

## ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

Some background about the relationship between feminist scholarship and romance novels would be useful here. As mentioned earlier, some of the early (late 1970s and early 1980s) feminist scholarship about romance novels was perceived as further denigrating the genre by treating it as escapist fantasy that lured women into participating in their own oppression. While most contemporary readers and scholars of romance novels might agree that it is escapist—it is, after all, meant to be a fantasy story—they are careful to point out that that does not make it necessarily oppressive. In fact, they point out that as one of the few forms of popular culture centered on the achievement of female sexual pleasure and fulfillment, it is quite feminist. Most importantly, scholarship in the area is abundant and points to the many interesting complexities of the genre.

Though some might argue that the debate about whether romance novels are oppressive or empowering is dated, fairly recent conversations—both scholarly and popular—continue to engage it as a major theme. As demonstrated by Janice Radway's early work on the topic and Pamela Regis's more recent work, the question of women's "empowerment," "independence," and "freedom" seems to be at the heart of most romance novels, and serves as a primary defense of the genre against what many writers see as feminist attacks (see Jensen 1984, 122-39; Regis 2003, 9-16; Proctor 2007; Phillips 1992; Flesch 2004; Dixon 1999, 9, 179-95). Still other scholars suggest a dialectical relationship between the feminist movement and themes of empowerment in romance novels, noting that markers of female strength and independence become more pronounced due to the successes of the women's movement (Jones 1986; Crane 1994). While this may have truth to it, one of the most crucial (and least

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discussed) aspects of the discourse on feminism vis-à-vis romance novels is to specify what readers and writers mean when they refer to feminism. As becomes apparent in Lynda Crane's "Romance Novel Readers: In Search of Feminist Change?" though readers largely agree that women's lives have improved over the past few decades (and they can see these changes reflected in the increasing independence of popular heroines), their understanding of feminism often seems to boil down to "increased job opportunity and equal pay" (1994, 266). Chapter two of *An Imperialist Love Story* argues that much of the "empowerment v. oppression" debate engages with a liberal feminist notion of feminism, which centralizes gender equality and parity (through political and legal channels) as a primary concern, and which focuses primarily on the notion of individual rights (mostly through the heroine's own story, but possibly also through the stories of other female characters with whom she interacts).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How do you define feminism? Does feminism have a role to play in military intervention in the Middle East (for example, through promising to help liberate women)?
- Unpack the phrase "fantasy of feminist liberation." What does the author mean, particularly with her use of the word "fantasy"?
- Can the framework of settler colonialism be usefully applied to U.S. engagement in the Middle East? Why or why not?
- Review the discussion and debate on the popular romance blog Smart Bitches, Trashy Books about feminist critiques of romance novels. After reading the blog post and comments in context, do you agree with the author's argument about it? Why or why not?
- In groups, ask students to create a feminism concept map. To do so, they should first brainstorm all the words, ideas, and concepts that come to mind in relation to the word "feminism" and then group and organize them to create a graphic representation of what the words both means and invokes. Where do the desert romances fit, if anywhere? What does the exercise imply about popular meanings of feminism?

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

#### For classes focused on American Studies:

- Review some of the key ideas in the "myth and symbol school" within American Studies (e.g., Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, among others). Can these treatments of the frontier as an important myth and symbol in U.S. national culture be applied to the desert? How or how not?

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- Examine “freedom” as a keyword. Possible sources include *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler and *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, eds. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (both of which have entries for “freedom.”) How do the meanings of the word freedom discussed in these keyword entries relate to the way freedom plays out in the desert romances? What would you add (if anything) to the keyword entries given the author’s argument about “freedom” as a technology of imperialism?
  - Screen sections of *Sex and the City 2*, directed by Michael Patrick King (2010). [Suggested scene: Begin where Samantha spills the contents of her purse in the streets of Abu Dhabi and the foursome are then pursued by Emirati men until they find shelter with a group of Emirati women, who usher them into private quarters and take off their abayas to reveal western fashion beneath.] What does this scene communicate about women’s rights and equality? What is the author’s argument about it?

#### **D&G KEY TERM: DETERRITORIALIZATION/ RETERRITORIALIZATION**

***Deterritorialization can operate in many guises, from literally divesting people of their territory to figuratively divesting a concept of its meaning. At the level of subject formation, it can work to dislodge the set meanings associated with a person’s identification. It might be tempting to think of deterritorialization as solely (or simply) a negative process, then, but it is important to remember that one of D&G’s key theoretical interventions is to think about positive and liberating potentials for deterritorialization. This is why they say it can lead to a “line of flight” for example, away from oppressive or rigid structures of identification or oppression. Reterritorialization, then, is precisely the (often capitalist) move to recapture these potential lines of flight and tie them back down to a rigid, or “stratifying” framework. This, too, can have a positive connotation in the sense of a group of disenfranchised people reclaiming stolen territory (or territory that had been claimed by force).***

***See also: assemblage, since both deterritorialization and reterritorialization could be described as a fluid and constant movement that can impact the potentialities of assemblages.***

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## SUMMARY

Chapter three turns to the concept of liberal multiculturalism to look more closely at how race and ethnicity are constructed in relation to the sheikh-hero. Contrary to the original formula in E.M. Hull's 1919 novel *The Sheikh*, which revealed the sheikh to be of European ancestry at the end of the novel in order to avoid miscegenation fears, contemporary desert romances authenticate the exotic character of the sheikh by giving him an Arabiastani ethnic identity. Because of the increasing overt racialization of Arabs and Muslims (and anyone appearing to be Middle Eastern) after 9/11, though, desert romances must also be careful to tame his ethnic elements enough that he cannot be perceived as a threatening terrorist. This chapter argues that liberal multiculturalism also works as a technology of imperialism insofar as it promotes the idea of U.S. exceptionality while nevertheless maintaining exclusionary and imperialist policies.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does it mean to describe liberal multiculturalism as a technology of imperialism? Can you think of any other examples in contemporary popular culture of how this might work?
- What is your understanding of the terms "post-racial" and "colorblind"? Are they useful? Positive? Meaningful? Give examples from popular culture that demonstrate their meaning as you understand it.
- What does love have to do with it? How, if at all, is love (and the love story) related to the concepts of multiculturalism, tolerance, and diversity?
- Unpack the comment, made in response to a post on *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books* ([http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com/2007/05/meg\\_cabot\\_comfort\\_reads\\_and\\_sheikh\\_romance/](http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com/2007/05/meg_cabot_comfort_reads_and_sheikh_romance/)), that "the werewolf is the new sheik." What are the implications of this comment? How does it relate to the argument made in this chapter and in the book as a whole?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Screen the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (based on Jack Shaheen's book by the same name), available through the Media Education Foundation. (<http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=412>) Talk about the various stereotypical representations depicted and which ones seem to be the most represented in desert romances. Because the film was made in 2006, it might not include the full range of contemporary representations. What, if anything, is missing? Can you name other films or TV shows that demonstrate other kinds of depictions? How do these relate to the author's description of desert romances?

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- Read Evelyn Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. What similarities and differences are there between the two kinds of representations (i.e., TV shows v. romance novels)? What do these similarities and differences suggest about contemporary depictions of Arab and Muslim masculinity and femininity? How do both authors' arguments about multiculturalism compare?
  - Read the long endnote about liberal multiculturalism (p. 223-5) and do follow up research about the meaning of the term. (Hint: it might be helpful to break it up into two separate terms—"liberal" and "multiculturalism." The keyword books recommended above would also be helpful for this exercise.) How do you understand the term? What would you add (or subtract) to the discussion about its meaning? Do you agree that it could function in a destructive way?
  - Though the website "Sheikhs and Desert Love" is no longer up and running, it still hosts a list of desert romances from 1969 through 2006. Peruse the list (available here: [http://www.sheikhs-and-desert-love.com/browse\\_year.html](http://www.sheikhs-and-desert-love.com/browse_year.html)) and look up a selection of them on a popular search engine (like Amazon), focusing on the depictions you find on the book covers. Do your findings support or contradict the author's conclusions? How so? What conclusions do you draw from your own analysis of the book covers? Does the old adage "you can't judge a book by its cover" apply?

### **D&G'S TAKE ON DESIRE**

**One of the arguments for using D&G, as explained earlier, is because of the way they extend an analysis of desire to the social realm.**

**In this sense, a Deleuze and Guattari framework encourages us to think beyond the idea that desire is only focused inwardly and toward the idea that it can orient subjects toward a social reality that contributes to upholding the hegemonic structures in which they live. If (as D&G argued) psychoanalysis overly ascribes desire to the familial (mommy/daddy/me) realm, some scholarship on romance novels could be equally criticized for limiting its conclusions about the genre to romance readers. *An Imperialist Love Story* argues that desert romances provide a concentrated and particularly illuminating set of materials through which to understand, on a broader more generalized level, how desire is actively domesticated and oriented toward perpetuating the war on terror.**

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## SUMMARY

Moving beyond a focus on specific technologies of imperialism in the war on terror, chapter four focuses on the overall structure of the romantic narrative as one that depends on the desire for wholeness. While the romance novels use the language of wholeness, one could also understand the narrative as working toward stability amidst a social context of uncertainty and turmoil, which is why desert romances also resonate at the level of a national love story. The chapter argues that, through desert romances, one can see how subjects are trained to desire wholeness and stability, even if it means a foreclosure of revolutionary forms of desire that could free subjects up to explore other possibilities. The chapter further argues that the war on terror could be understood through this same structure of the love story since it, too, trains citizen-subjects to view the war on terror as necessary to maintain national stability in the midst of a social context of uncertainty and turmoil.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the matrix of desire?
- What is the author's argument in the section "States of Fantasy"? How do you understand what "modern melancholia" is and how it relates to liberal subject formation?
- What might it mean to "deterritorialize" love? Give examples, considering both positive and negative meanings of deterritorialization. (For further explanation of the term, see the box above.)
- How does the desire for wholeness relate to the typical "happily ever after" ending? If the war on terror does indeed resemble a love story, what is its proposed happily ever after ending?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Watch scenes from *Lawrence of Arabia*, especially the scene in which Sharif Ali (Omar Sharif) gives Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) his first white abaya. Analyze it in relation to the main argument made in the chapter.
- Judith Butler describes the heterosexual matrix as a "model of intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender ... that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Butler, 194n6). Working in groups, and using her definition as a model, write a working definition of the "matrix of desire" as described in *An Imperialist Love Story*.
- Do a Google image search for kuffiyeh (or ghutrah), igal (or iqal) and abaya (or

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thobe). You might also try some of the terms that appear in the desert romances, like “Arab headdress.” What kinds of websites host these images and what do they depict? What overall representation or impression of the cultural dress is presented (or what are the main themes you find)? Now compare your findings to additional descriptions of the sheikh-heroes’ cultural dress from desert romances (provided below; you might also notice the variety of ways to describe and spell the different forms of dress). What similarities and/or differences do you find? What conclusions can you draw about popular perceptions or representations of traditional forms of cultural dress given your findings and analysis?

➤ From Tessa Radley’s *The Desert Bride of Al Zayed* (2007): Tariq [the sheikh-hero] had “shed the dark designer suit and wore a traditional white thobe. It added to his height, emphasized his dark, hawklike features and made him appear more imposing than ever” (29). “Clad in the thobe, the fearsomely muscled body hidden beneath the white folds, he looked foreign, dangerous and very, very powerful” (34). Jayne [the heroine] “shifted her attention to Tariq, watched him rise from beside her, his traditional robes swirling around him, the white *ghutra* over his head secured by the doubled black cord that made him look more formidable than ever” (51). “She gave him a once-over, taking in the *thobe* he wore, his dark tanned face. He looked like an ancient desert warrior. Timeless. Fierce. Unforgiving. Yet he was as comfortable negotiating state affairs abroad in a western business suit as he was here in the desert” (89).

➤ From Sarah Morgan’s *Bella and the Merciless Sheikh* (2011): Zafiq, the sheikh-hero, “was dressed simply in a white robe, the fabric glaring under the beginnings of the Arabian sun” (7). Bella’s [the heroine’s] mouth dried as she watched him slide a dagger into the folds of his robe and her stomach fluttered with nerves” (31). “Stunned by the need gnawing at him, Zafiq reached for his robe and drew it over his head, forcing himself to ignore the urge to tumble her back onto the bed. ‘I’m taking you back to civilization, habibiti!’” (109).

➤ From Dana Marton’s *Sheik Seduction* (2008): “[The heroine] pictured Sheik Abdullah in flowing white robes edged with gold, a kaffiyeh on his head, looking fiercely royal, surrounded by the splendor of his station” (21). “His robe fluttered behind him. In his traditional desert clothing, he looked a lot more like the sheiks of old than ever before” (161). “She could see him now too, in the ceremonial tribal outfit, his dark hair glinting in the light of the lamp, his dark eyes glowing with untamed desire. He was more than the sheiks of her fantasies—more fierce, more proud, more passionate. And tantalizingly real” (203).

➤ From Liz Fielding’s *The Sheikh’s Unsuitable Bride* (2008): The heroine anticipates meeting the hero for the first time, “her head full of snowy robes, the whole Lawrence of Arabia thing” (12). She can’t help but fantasize about him in robes: “He was wearing a casual suit, and yet in her mind he was wearing robes”

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(135). Finally, the sheikh fulfills her fantasies: "For a formal visit to his mother, this formal visit, only traditional robes would do. The gossamer-fine black and gold camel hair cloak. A *keffiyeh* held in place by a simple camel halter" (145). "[The heroine] found herself staring at her fantasy: The desert prince she had expected when she'd dashed to the City Airport. The whole white robes, gold-trimmed cloak, headdress thingy" (171).

- From Emma Darcy's *Traded to the Sheikh* (2005): "[The sheikh] was back in sheikh clothes, the long white tunic and richly embroidered over-robe in purple and gold, making her feel even more nervous about his foreignness" (124).
- From Trish Morey's *Stolen by the Sheikh* (2006): "Tonight he looked more like a sheikh than ever. For the first time he had put aside the western garb she was used to seeing him in and that was so much a part of business in modern Hebra and instead he wore the traditional robes of the region. ... a real desert king" (120).
- From Brenda Jackson's *Delaney's Desert Sheikh* (2002): Sheikh Jamal wore a "white kaffiyah" on his head (45) and occasionally appears "dressed in his native Arab garb" (158). For example: "He was dressed in his Eastern attire... Today he was wearing a long, straight, white tunic beneath a loosely flowing top robe of royal blue. He also wore a white kaffiyeh on his head" (83).
- From Abby Green's *Breaking the Sheikh's Rules* (2011): "She'd seen Nadim [the sheikh-hero] from a distance earlier that day, for the first time in the traditional Merkazadi dress. In theory he should have looked ridiculous in the long flowing cream robes, with the distinctive turban on his head, but it had made an ache of gigantic proportions settle low in her belly... [he was] exotic and regal" (81). "In his turban and traditional robes he looked so...exotic and other-worldly" (103). "He was dressed in dark gold robes now, and Iseult could see that the sun was setting outside, just beyond his turbaned head and broad shoulders" (112). He was "looking stern and austere in black robes. They made him look even more dark and gorgeous. And dangerous" (118).
- From Meredith Webber's *Sheikh, Children's Doctor ... Husband* (2011): "She touched his robe above his arm and he felt the heat of her fingers sear through the fine cotton material [...] the swaying robes making it seem as if he glided just a little above the earth" (31). "An image of the man ungowned—broad chest, toned abs—flashed into her head but was quickly banished" (60). "But could one remove a headdress from a prince to feel his hair? Could one slide a hand beneath the sleeve of his gown to feel his skin, and the muscles beneath it?" (142). "[S]he reached out and touched out his headscarf. 'Will you take this off?'" (143).
- From Jane Porter's *The Sheikh's Chosen Queen* (2008): "Now he looked like

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someone altogether different. His baggy sweatshirts were gone, and the faded, torn jeans were replaced by a *dishdashah* or a *thoub*, as more commonly known in the Arabian Gulf, a cool, long, one-piece white dress and the traditional head gear comprised of a *gutrah*, a white scarflike cloth, and the *ogal*, the black circular band that held everything together" (10).

➤ From Sharon Kendrick's *The Playboy Sheikh's Virgin Stable Girl* (2009): "Robes of pure silk clung to the hard sinews of his body" (10). "Flowing robes ... denoted his high status" (11). "He swept from the stable in a shimmer of silken robes" (38). He was "wearing robes which shimmered like spun gold beneath the glittering light of tall candles" (60). The sheikh reveals to the heroine: "I am naked beneath my robes! [...] Just slide your hand up underneath my robe and feel how hard I am for you" (93).

➤ From Kim Lawrence's *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin* (2009): "As she glanced at him it was impossible not to see him as a romantic figure in flowing desert robes" (45). "When he returned a short time later his hair was concealed in a traditional white desert headdress, and Molly felt a quiver run down her spine. The covering emphasized the perfect bone structure and hard sculpted contours of his sternly beautiful face" (77). Tair, the sheikh, "was wearing full traditional dress and he looked incredible. Tall, lean, dangerous, vital, and totally unbelievably gorgeous" (161).

➤ From Bonnie Vanak's *The Sword and the Sheath* (2007): "Minutes later he returned dressed in a binish and turban. A curved dagger and scimitar dangled from his belt" (27). "His salt and pepper beard was longer than the other men's, and instead of a binish and trousers, he wore the traditional thobe most desert nomads preferred" (81). "His white turban shone like the glint of sun on river water. In a silk white kamis shirt and white trousers," (97). "Wind fluttered the hem of his dresslike thobe" (143). "Tarik felt dimly grateful for the binish's loose folds concealing his reaction" (279).

➤ From Nan Ryan's *Burning Love* (1996): "He wore a dark thobe the traditional long robe favored by all Arabs. His guttrah, or headdress, was held in place by strands of black woolen headrope" (35). "Seeing the Sheik in the hot desert sun in his native dress made it easier to remember exactly who he was" (119). "Riding at a tremendous speed, his white robes billowing out behind him, Sharif abruptly gave the reins a powerful jerk that sent the big white straight up into the air, spinning high on his hind legs. It was a favored trick among these fearless Arab horsemen" (156).

➤ From Marguerite Kaye's *The Governess and the Sheikh* (2011): "[The sheikh wore] a perfectly plain white silk tunic beneath an unusual cloak, a vivid green that was almost emerald, bordered with gold and weighted with jewels. A wicked-looking scimitar hung at his waist" (35). "His skin, framed by the

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traditional white silk head dress, was the colour of honey" (42). "Daringly, she pushed his head dress back, touching his hair, then his cheeks, with their faint traces of stubble" (130). "He was dressed in formal robes, much more ornate than any she had seen him wear before. A head dress of gold silk edged with emerald, the *igal* that fastened it made of gold thread" (202). "The soft folds of his caftan showed off his perfect physique. She wondered if he wore anything beneath it. She wished she hadn't wondered" (223).

#### **D&G KEY TERM: ASSEMBLAGE**

***An assemblage can be described as the way physical bodies and the ideas, concepts, and meanings that attach to them can form a fluid mixture of understandings and possibilities. Here, it is important to understand "body" both in terms of its organic (e.g., human body or a part of the human body) and its inorganic (e.g., a body of water or an object such as a form of cultural dress) forms. Built into the concept, too, is a sense of fluidity, both in terms of the forces that can spontaneously create and those that serve to destroy assemblages. Sometimes described in terms of intensities, this fluidity can also be conceptualized in terms of the uses to which an assemblage can be put. It can create a new meaning or possibility (in D&G terms, it can be deterritorialized) or it can be appropriated and used in the service of a hegemonic, often capitalist, force (in D&G terms, it can be reterritorialized).***

***As explained on pp. 161-162 (and in endnote 7 on pp. 231-232), the term "desiring-machine" is the antecedent to the concept of assemblage, the former appearing more consistently in *Anti-Oedipus* and the latter in *A Thousand Plateaus* (see Holland 1999 for more on this). Its primary function is to combine the psychoanalytic concept of libido (D&G call this desiring-production) and the Marxist concept of labor (D&G call this social-production) into an amalgamated conception of desire that accounts for the inter-relatedness of these two realms. The concept is also useful because it is based on the idea that desire is fluid and can be oriented both toward upholding hegemony and toward revolutionary potentials.***

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## FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Review the author's use of the radiation metaphor throughout the book. Does it add to the argument? If so, how? If not, what did it leave to be desired? What alternate metaphor or framework would you suggest?
- Talk about the ways that both nuclear energy and nuclear weapons are discussed in contemporary news media and popular culture. What, if any, relation do you find between these discussions and the desert romances? Think, in particular, about the assumptions that the novels make about oil as a natural resource and about weapons of mass destruction as a potential threat. Does it surprise you to find these references in a love story? What are the implications?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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