Age of Arrakis: State Apparatuses and Foucauldian Biopolitics in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*

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Bachelor’s thesis  
Literature  
Spring, 2019  
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Abstract

Frank Herbert’s *Dune* is generally recognized as the best-selling science fiction novel of all time. While it is commonly referred to as a novel of environmental characteristics, this essay investigates the depiction of society and how the power dynamics in this far future setting are presented. I argue that *Dune*’s portrayal of power within the state apparatuses of the ideological and repressive kind are to be related to issues and concerns that were observable within the state powers of America and the west during the decades of 1950 and 60. By using the concepts and theories of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, I claim that the centralized ideology found within the whole state apparatus of *Dune* endangers the freedoms of the individual in ways that can be related to its contemporary real-world setting. The first part of the essay is an exploratory investigation in how power is being expressed within the two institutions of the military and the church, as well as how the protagonist deals with the burden of authority. This is analyzed in terms of Althusser’s arguments on the reproduction of ideology and the Foucauldian concepts of biopolitics and disciplinary expressions. The second part revolves around a historicist approach, namely how these expressions within the novel are related to the contemporary setting of the United States and its western neighbours. This latter analysis addresses the foreign and domestic policy of the western powers and how, I argue, these are exemplified to an extent within the pages of the novel. This discussion shows how centralized power is presented as an issue due to the influence of ideology, how the different institutions that we perceive as secular and independent become tools for social injustice. Such instances revolve around the subtle insertion of religious values in state affairs and how imperialist intervention is legitimized by the defense of economic and cultural interests, but also how societies are prone to react in the presence of charismatic leaders. Apart from this I also emphasize how the status and subsequent influential significance of *Dune* have come to play an important part in the development of its genre and how its capabilities of social commentary have been vital to the emergence of “soft” science fiction.

**Keywords:** power, ideology, biopower, religion, science fiction, Herbert, *Dune*, America, colonialism, state apparatus.
Frank Herbert’s *Dune* is considered a major milestone within the genre of science fiction. This 1960s cult classic tells the story of a young ducal heir in a distant future, stripped of his heritage and thrown into the struggles of the natives and oppressors on the faraway planet of Arrakis, a desert planet of scarce resources and harsh realities, colloquially known as Dune. The reason for this interest in Arrakis lies in its single tradeable resource, a byproduct left by the monstrous sandworms that roam the desert surface. This element is known as *mélange*, a spice with prescient capabilities vital to the economics of the galactic empire. The narrative follows Paul Atreides as he fights to reclaim his title from the occupying forces of House Harkonnen and the Padishah Emperor whilst also dealing with the issues of leadership and his gift of prescience, the power to foresee the future.

According to the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, the praise of *Dune* lies first and foremost in its undoubted signaling of ecological and environmental awareness, and among other aspects manages to foreshadow the future struggles between near-term demand and the long-term preservation of natural resources (Slonczewski and Levy 183). Previous research has thus mainly revolved around these aspects of the novel, often highlighting the eco-dystopian characteristics within the narrative and how this has greatly impacted the genre. It is no wonder the novel found its true audience among the campuses of the late 60s and early 70s, this following the emergence of the countercultural movement and a heightened concern for the environment. However, while contemporary popular culture might have deemed this era as an emerging age of harmony and understanding, *Dune*, as a product of this time, establishes a setting which is strongly contrasted with this notion. For whereas *Dune* has influenced many environmental writers and eco-oriented thinkers, the depth of Herbert’s novel is also presented in terms other than that of earthly speculation. The universe within *Dune* is a place of intricate political maneuvering with various factions and institutions utilizing both subtle and open means of exploitation to further causes and alike. Herbert presents a narrative which explores and investigates the notions of freedom and subjugation, religious authoritarianism, societal structures and not least issues that are concerned with power. Power is indeed a recurring theme throughout the novel which implies the portrayed issues are to be interpreted as statements oriented
towards the practices of state rule and leadership, which are positions that are not positively portrayed within the autocratic imperium in which the novel takes place.

Many literary academics and critics have sought to explain the functions and expressions of power in fiction, often adhering to the Marxist tradition of literary criticism. This is also where this essay takes its stand, in the way of highlighting and analyzing the relations between ruler and the ruled. By applying the theories and concept of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, concerning state power and how it is expressed, I will address how these issues found within the novel are related to its era of conception. After this introductory section in which I will define key terms and theories, this essay will continue in two parts. Part one will address the societal structure within Dune, using the defined concepts to highlight expressions of power within the narrative. These expressions are to be found within the spheres of the religious and military institutions, in which I will emphasize the workings of ideology in relation to leadership and abuses of power. In part two these findings are put into a historical perspective, this by exploring the relationship between the novel and its contemporary real-world setting. As for the significance of such research, one must see to the rather brief history of its genre as well as Dune’s position and influential status.

Dune (1965), together with contemporary works such as Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert A. Heinlein (1961) and The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin (1969), was at the time of their release considered to belong to what was called “The New Wave” of science fiction. Roger Luckhurst, author of Science Fiction: A Literal History, claims that by general consensus the 1960s are considered an epochal moment within the genre as it marks a radical break from the pulp-magazine oriented technophilic adventure stories which had been seen before (157). As to why this shift occurred, critics see this as aligned with the cultural politics of the decade and therefore “strongly resistant to the cybernetic languages of capitalist efficiency” (141). This new wave was in light of the older writings within the genre considered boldly experimental and even militantly political, although one should not overstate the revolutionary aspect of this movement since viewpoints that emphasize rupture often happen at the expense of continuity (157-158). However, there is no denying the fact that the 1960s is considered a progressive decade, in which the rise of the civil rights movement, the decolonization of European colonies and the emergence of new countercultural anti-establishment ideas are only some evidence that support this. These ideas of ridding the world of poverty, racism, sexual repression and economic exploitation are also ideas of a utopia, and utopian portrayals are a common theme within science fiction. In light of
this, literature critic Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr claims in his chapter *Marxism and science fiction* that science fiction became one of the instruments for these current thoughts, which also led to tremendous success for *Dune* and Heinlein’s *Stranger* among others (116). In terms of production, the research for *Dune* is said to have started in the mid 50s yet it was not published in its entirety until 1965 (B. Herbert 171). Since its release, *Dune* has been rewarded with a wide legacy which consists of sequels, rewards, films, video games and numerous television adaptations and is generally considered the best-selling science fiction novel of all time. While it is impossible to account for all reasons as to why *Dune* became, and to this day is, a success, its impact upon the genre and ascribed influence on its development is apparent.

As mentioned, the majority of praise and research previously conducted towards *Dune* has been of the ecological variety. Less thought has been given to the issues concerning that of societal structure and its criticism, although there are some scholarly works worth mentioning. Several chapters within *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* explore the relationship between science fiction and the social sciences, mainly that of politics, life sciences, religion and Marxism. In-depth studies of the power relations and societal structure within *Dune* are scarce, however, one should mention Brandy Eileen Allat’s master thesis *Lies and Individuation: External and Internal Authority in The Politics and Anima of Dune* as a perhaps similar approach to the subject. What can be said regarding Allat’s thesis is that the main focus lies on the class-distinction in a pure Marxist reading of the novel, while the issues of power are not the main subject of attention and does not relate to a historical context. Other noteworthy articles are Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr’s *Science Fiction and Empire* and Lorenzo DiTommaso’s *History and Historical Effect in Frank Herbert’s Dune*, both addressing the structure of society and its portrayal.

Theories concerning that of power and government are not in short supply, and while this essay does recognize the terminology of Marxist literary criticism its aim does not lie in analyzing a general pattern but rather to investigate the issues that concern power. For this, Louis Althusser’s theories presented in his work *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* can be used to explain the relations between the institutions that are presented throughout the narrative. Althusser’s ideas revolve around what he refers to as the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), both being expressions of power or state power as well as being distinctly different in the way that power is wielded. To produce such a theory of power, Althusser emphasizes that it is imperative
to consider not only the distinction between “state power (and those who hold it) and state apparatus, but also another ‘reality’ that must clearly be ranged alongside the Repressive State Apparatus, but is not conflated with it … the Ideological State Apparatuses” (75). Repressive, in Althusser’s words, should here be considered as using physical violence, which is separate from the institutions and apparatuses which belong to the ideological sphere as the bearers of values and ideology of the holders of state power. Ideological values thus become less apparent and more internalized. These ISAs can therefore, in the more Gramscian tradition, be considered hegemonic.

Michel Foucault is another theoretician who, by general academic consensus, has been vital to the development of theories of power. His works *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (Vol 1, 1976) introduces numerous concepts of how to examine and analyze power and its expression, which among others are the theories regarding “sovereign power” and “biopower”. In *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, sovereign power, sometimes referred to as disciplinary power, is explained as the relation between a sovereign (whether it may be one person or a governmental “many”) and its subjects, with the term referring to the dissymmetrical system of permissiveness and seizure that exists between these (Cisney and Morar 2). Biopower, in contrast, is explained as mainly focused on the other structures of society, how societal institutions structure the forces of individuals into the economic machinery to the result of producing productive members of that society (6). These biopolitical expressions are to be seen as affecting whole populations, having an impact on people en masse.

As for the choice of approach, Michel Foucault is usually considered one of the forbearers of the school of New Historicism.¹ The *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* states that at its simplest, this historical method does not concern itself with asserting the autonomous aesthetic values of a texts but rather in researching the contexts of their production, consumption and status (Cuddon *et al*. 545). It is by this historicist approach that I will address how *Dune* problematizes the covert workings of ideology within religious and military institutions, which in turn allows for the rise of leaders and policies which are prone to abuse of power. The depicted uses of power within these different institutions can be related to issues concerned with leadership and state power in America during the 1950s and 60s, where the intervention of the

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¹ Controversy concerning the term “new historicism” has been voiced in ways that may or may not limit its function and recognition within literary criticism. Dino Felluga states that some of the more prominent writers within this school, such as Stephen Greenblat and Alan Liu, critiques or reject the very term “New Historicism” (Felluga cla.purdue.edu).
ideological and repressive state apparatus endanger the essential freedoms of the people.

I. State Apparatuses and Biopolitics

*The Sovereign Empire*

The existence of an authoritarian “Empire” is a common tool within the genre of science fiction, usually as a means to portray a particular struggle or subjugation of the characters and protagonists but also in ways of displaying centralized power as a premise for unity and order. We see the former as the case within *Dune* where this is represented by the Padishah Empire and its ruler Shaddam IV ( F. Herbert 9), thus suggesting that the narrative is, at its core, opposed to the idea of imperialism and the issues it raises. Ken Macleod convincingly states that the societal structure within *Dune* is to be considered the general exception to science fiction’s broadly liberal consensus, in the way that no other world than Herbert’s is less congenial to the implicit values of the genre (236). Heavy emphasis is being put on the construction of an autocratic regime and the structure prescribed to it, this being the nature of a feudal and colonial state of law. Yet while we are presented with an omnipotent and successful imperial presence this does not actively mean that there exists support for such a regime, but rather the opposite. Csicsery-Ronay Jr offers an explanation in that he claims most serious writers of science fiction are in fact skeptical of entrenched power, often because of the tyranny that is usually prescribed (*Empire*, 241). One could argue that science fiction from this era thus seems to have inherent capabilities of criticism of imperialism, however one should be cautious in making general claims. In the Marxist tradition, this view of science fiction’s innate capacity for critique can be considered a typical standpoint despite the fact that social analysis rarely plays a central role in science fiction narratives (241). It is my claim that *Dune* would be one of the exceptions, for the narrative does indeed problematize the notions of social injustice and abuse of power by highlighting these features within the institutions that are portrayed.

These notions are consequences of an internalized ideology found throughout the entirety of the state apparatus. To start, one can without further difficulty identify

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2 Centralized power or imperial structures deemed as benign are for example portrayed within Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* television series and Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* trilogy.
certain similarities of what Althusser refers to as the repressive state apparatus, or RSA, within the power structure of *Dune*. The first general insight in how power is structured and how, to some extent, economic means are divided among the populace is described within a conversation between a representative of the religious authority, a reverend mother (F. Herbert 501), and the concubine to the duke, who is also the mother of the ducal heir:

We’ve a three-point civilization: the Imperial Household balanced against the Federated Great Houses of the Landsraad, and between them, the (Spacing) Guild with its damnable monopoly on interstellar transport. In politics, the tripod is the most unstable of all structures. It’d be bad enough without the complication of a feudal trade system, which turns its back on most science. (28)

There are several important observations to be made here. This episode serves as a way of explaining the functions of what Althusser refers to as ideological state apparatuses and the singular repressive state apparatus. The religious authority is to be considered separate from the holder of state power since these are said to be consisting of the Imperial Household and the Landsraad. The “church” does express concern regarding this system of structure, stating its imbalance and complications, thus emphasizing the ineffective rule of such a communion. However, Althusser suggests that it is the ruling ideology (in this case the ideology by decree of the Imperial Household) that is realized within the ideological state apparatus of the church (76), and the same can hence be said regarding the Spacing Guild. Therefore, while there may be signs of contempt between the different state apparatuses there also exists an internalized ideology which is reproduced within all institutions of the empire. Willing participation in the religious community and space travel thus implies participation in the reproduction of the state power ideology.

Certain aspects of Althusser’s theory are harder to apply, mainly those regarding that of what a repressive state apparatus consist of. I would suggest that the absence of juridical institutions create a portrayal of a state power which governs by instant means of disciplinary action as a constant threat. The lack of a police force or a system of judicial courts is a prominent feature within *Dune*, so much so that we might as well deny their existence within the empire. Since these are important tools of the state apparatus (75) we must instead consider that the function of these institutions has been applied to other repressive institutions within the apparatus, such as that of army or military. The military branch of the empire is known as Sardaukar and are portrayed
as “dread Imperial troops, killers without mercy, the soldier fanatics of the Padishah Emperor” (F. Herbert 25). These constitute the biggest known military power in the empire and functions under the authority of the emperor. The army is, as Althusser states, a supplementary repressive force to be used as a last resort when police and auxiliary corps are overrun (70), however within *Dune* the army is the sole violent repressive force to be wielded at any instance. This transference of function creates a portrayal of a state power with disciplinary action as its main repressive expression. Consequently, the removal of the police and judiciary institutions suggests an extreme depiction of sovereign power, which relies on disciplinary action to be delivered without notice, thus instilling a general fear among the populace. This depicts the ultimate power over life; sovereign power as the power to let live or make die (Cisney and Morar 2).

Beside this depiction of totalitarianism, the narrative also addresses issues of colonialism and monopolized trade. As mentioned in the introduction, Arrakis is deemed important because of its unique natural resource. Acquirement and distribution of said resource plays a vital role in the story, primarily because of its relation to the power dynamics within the aristocracy. In *Dune* these matters revolve around the element *mélange*, commonly referred to as spice. The spice is considered precious to the economic stability for several reasons, although its true purpose lies in its hallucinogenic and geriatric effects. For Paul Atreides its properties enhance his ability to foresee the future, thus giving him the ability of prescience (F. Herbert 342). As a consequence of this the spice can also be considered a source of power as well as knowledge, which is a topic we will return to later. As for the imperial economy, use of *mélange* is required to pilot the interstellar starships (497) thus making spice the equivalent of fuel. The one with control over spice production and distribution is therefore the one with the power over travel, transportation and commerce. This issue is displayed primarily in a dialogue between the Duke and Paul:

“Few products escape the CHOAM touch,” the Duke said. “Logs, donkeys, horses, cows, lumber, dung, sharks, whale fur -- the most prosaic and the most exotic . . . even our poor pundi rice from Caladan. Anything the (Spacing) Guild will transport, the art forms of Ecaz, the machines of Richesse and Ix. But all fades before *mélange*. A handful of spice will buy a home on Tupile. It cannot be manufactured, it must be mined on Arrakis. It is unique and it has true geriatric properties.”

“And now we control it?”

“To a certain degree. But the important thing is to consider all the Houses that depend on CHOAM profits. And think of the enormous proportion of those profits dependent upon a single product -- the spice.
Imagine what would happen if something should reduce spice production.” (46)

**CHOAM**, the public held corporation under the directorship of the Emperor (490), has monopolized trade while the same can be said of the faction known as the **Spacing Guild** in regard to transport. The emphasis on the range of trade products solidifies the notion that this indeed is an all-encompassing monopoly under directorship. By being given the fief over Arrakis the Duke is invited to a subtle gain of the profits of **CHOAM** (45), although this is an action solely contributed to the wishes of the emperor, the seat of power. Power over production is then considered to be distributed through the aptitude of the major shareholder, not by a democratic process. The native inhabitants of Arrakis, the Fremen, do not benefit from this agreement, and their need for spice in order to produce materials and food is not taken into consideration. Those who do not comply with the orders of the occupying forces are instead referred to as “ragged scum of the desert” and targets meant to be “hunted for sport” (F. Herbert 14, 29). What is portrayed here is an extreme depiction of the repressive nature of colonialist intervention. Moreover, this dependency on a single resource emphasizes an important fragility within the imperial economy. While these monopolies, consisting of **CHOAM**’s control of spice and the **Guild**’s control of travel, could be deemed unconventional in the rather capitalist society depicted in **Dune**, arguments can be made for the opposite. Allat mentions that these relations can be seen as an economy held hostage by a few individuals who hold the commodity needed for interplanetary travel (19-20), thereby solidifying their position within the balanced power structure. It is thus implied that complete monopolization of trade and transport is an extension of the centralized power portrayed within the empire, and this power system does interfere with the freedom of the population.

**Biopower and Maintenance**

Apart from the repressive, colonialist practice being employed by the empire, I would argue that the societal structure within **Dune** is inherently repressive in its nature. This would be most prominently portrayed through what Herbert calls *faufreluches*. Faufreluches is “the rigid rule of class distinction enforced by the imperium” (F. Herbert 492), thereby implying a dividing of individuals for the sake of order and maintenance of the system. It is quite apparent that Herbert wishes to inform the reader from the very start that this issue of caste is an important topic within the narrative, as
Arrakis is here perceived as a place without caste or class and free from the prying eyes of the state. The Fremen, also first mentioned here, are at this point the faction with closest resemblance to the proletariat which are held in great contempt by the repressive powers that aim to govern and exploit this land: “mongrel Fremen hiding in the skirts of the desert . . . and some tame smugglers bound to the planet almost as tightly as the native labor pool.” (26). The Fremen presence is allowed because of their importance to the means of production, which is mainly consisting of the gathering and refinement of spice. Foucault, in The History of Sexuality, explains such a process as an expression of biopower, which consists of “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic process” (140-1). As I have addressed, the imperial presence does indeed adjust the population by hunting the Fremen while those that do comply are drafted as workers. This is further shown in a dialogue between baron Vladimir Harkonnen and his nephew Rabban. Rabban wonders whether the Fremen should be eliminated, to which the baron answers; “I said squeeze, Nephew, not exterminate. Don’t waste the population, merely drive them into utter submission (F. Herbert 229). The empire thus successfully manages to produce a capitalist structure by adjusting the relationship between super- and infrastructure. In the passage above Dr Yueh claims that the Fremen are said to exist beyond the reach of the faufreluches, yet we can determine that they are still treated as a lower caste and are certainly not free from oppression. These biopolitical techniques are utilized to uphold the preferred societal structure, a structure which stems from the ideology of the state power. As for other expressions of how this repressive structure is upheld, we will return to the Althusserian argument of ISAs and how it relates to Foucault’s theoretical approach.

The church or religious institutions are in Dune foremost represented by the “all-female religious order of the Bene Gesserit” (489) and its function as an extension of the state apparatus is to reproduce the ideology of the ruling state power. Among the
purposes of these institutions are, as Althusser puts it, that they function by means as to normalize and structure individual forces into the societal system (77). The “Panoplia propheticus” is a term used to describe the implantation of dogmatic rule and prophesy used by the “Missionaria Protectiva”, the arm within the faction meant to opening “regions to exploitation by the Bene Gesserit” (F. Herbert 498-9). This exploitation consists of two major themes, as shown in the following quote:

“Bene Gesserit performs another function.”
“Politics”, he said.
“Kull wahad!” the old woman said. She sent a hard glance at Jessica.
“I've not told him. Your Reverence,” Jessica said. The Reverend Mother returned her attention to Paul.
“You did that on remarkably few clues,” she said. “Politics indeed. The original Bene Gesserit school was directed by those who saw the need of a thread of continuity in human affairs. They saw there could be no such continuity without separating human stock from animal stock -- for breeding purposes.”(17)

This explicit statement of control and direction shows that the Bene Gesserit are extremely invested in the continuity of mankind’s progression, even to the extent of separating humans by the cordonning of different classes. Further, this is done by biological means, by actual breeding. The process of continuity, as in retaining order, is therefore expressed in the way of structuring individuals into different spheres of society to optimize order. Biopower can yet again be used to explain this relation to power which does not necessarily depend on the ideology of a repressive state apparatus, yet function as a tool for said ideology. Biopower introduces us to a term which in a sense transcend the classic notion of a state apparatus, the main difference being that institutions and procedures exercises a very specific, albeit complex, power that has the population as its target and apparatuses of security as technical instruments (Cisney and Morar 2). According to Foucault, the emergence of this power became apparent during the classical period with the development of disciplines such as universities and secondary schools, as well as political practices and economic observations which focused on the problems of birthrate, longevity and public health among others (140). These practices became the start of numerous new techniques for achieving subjugation of bodies and the control of population (140). In our example, this is more or less precisely what the Bene Gesserit embodies in an effort to control the development of the population, this by ensuring that the subjugation of individuals further the progress of the human race. The division between categories of “stock” is also a way of cementing the difference between classes a to empower the current
societal system, even so far as to ascribe attributes of “human” and “animal” to different castes. What the use of these biopolitical techniques amounts to is a representation of a society strongly influenced by the teachings found within the religious institutions, which implies that the current and future structure of said society are dependent on the hegemonic values found within the ISAs.

On the topic of these extensions of state power, there is a need for differentiating what is implied. The ideological and the repressive state apparatus have quite different functions, in which the former refers to willingness to partake (willing subjugation) and the latter functions on violence (forced subjugation). Nevertheless, they are both parts of the entirety of state power, in the sense that the ruling class hold state power and exercises it by way of these apparatuses (Althusser 80). As for *Dune*, there exists societal structures where this separation of apparatuses is harder to define. Such an example would be the exaggerated theocratic structure within the Fremen society, which in turn raises concerns for the implications of religious authoritarianism. As Paul Atreides is recognized as the “Lisan Al-Gaib” among the Fremen, meaning “The Voice of the Outer World” as an off-world prophet (F. Herbert 497), he dons the name Muad’Dib and is quickly propelled to messianic proportions, subsequently becoming their leader. This is not a decision taken lightly, for Paul has the power of prescience which allows him to see the future consequences of his leadership. The parallel between power and knowledge is a relation that Foucault addresses in detail, however it is not expressed as mere support of the assumption that “knowledge is power”. Instead Foucault states that it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together, and these discourses serve as both instruments and effects of power but may also become a hindrance (100-1). Therefore, the knowledge of the future may instill power while also rendering that same power obsolete. As Foucault puts it: “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (101). These intricacies of the power/knowledge relation are something of great concern to Paul, a concern that is emphasized during the latter half of the novel. When his father is murdered by the Harkonnens, Paul and his mother flee into the desert where he is one night troubled by visions of a holy war that will spring from his ascendency to power, a galaxy-spanning jihad of terrible proportions. Although fueled by vengeance, Paul assures himself of his righteousness by persuading himself that “surely, I cannot go this way” (192) which leads him to accept his new role among the Fremen. This marks the second chapter of the book, aptly titled “Muad’Dib”.

The Fremen has thus far served as a representation of the proletariat, however as Allat mentions, “Herbert (also) presents the Fremen as an Empire in its own right” (29). With this perspective the unification of state power and religion becomes a fact, and the ideology of the state is thus inherently the teachings of the church. This raises many issues which Herbert mentions in detail:

When religion and politics travel in the same cart…They put aside all thought of obstacles and forget that a precipice does not show itself to the man in a blind rush until it is to late. (F. Herbert 364)

As well as:

You cannot avoid the interplay of politics within an orthodox religion…Because of this pressure, the leaders of such a community inevitably must face that ultimate internal question: to succumb to complete opportunism as the price of maintaining their rule, or risk sacrificing themselves for the sake of the orthodox ethic. (381)

These are also concerns for Paul Muad’Dib which he tries to address by appointing leaders in charge of certain Fremen interests, thus ignoring tradition by sharing leadership while retaining the religious authority (405). This attempt at separating church from state is ultimately proven to be futile, for the authority ascribed to Paul due to the past religious indoctrination of the Fremen trumps the modern thoughts of a divided leadership. This belief in their new prophet as the singular ruler is rooted in ideological and religious convictions, traditions which the Fremen hold dearly. For Paul, the threat of the jihad is becoming more apparent, and this suggests that the intermingling of religion within the sphere of politics and leadership may have terrible consequences. What we witness is in fact a unification of the two concepts of Althusser’s ISA and Foucault’s power/knowledge theory, Paul’s leadership is a result of the combination of extreme ideological conviction of his subjects and his own mastery of the “discourse” known as the future. To permit such a leadership, it is required that the setting of the narrative allows for such characters to arise.

I am inclined to argue that the lack of technological progress within this work functions as a way to highlight the human and societal struggles in a possible far-future context. By moving away from the technological preciseness of hard science fiction, Herbert manages to depict contemporary issues of power relations that are of human nature, not of technological supremacy. This is done partly by the invention of “The Butlerian Jihad”, an event set before the events of the story explained as a crusade or revolt against computers, thinking machines and conscious robots which stemmed from
the religious commandment of “Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind (F. Herbert 495-6). By removing a large part of the scientific approach from the narrative the author instead highlights the difficulties concerned with societal or religious structures. In his *History and Historical Effect in Frank Herbert’s Dune*, Lorenzo DiTommaso comments on this as well, that “by forcing human minds to develop, the (Butlerian Jihad) ultimately promoted religion over science and technology,” (313). While this notion is presented within the narrative by ways of technological decline, it is also visible in our reading of the novel as a story of humans with human concerns.

II. Historical context

This second part of the essay investigates the relation of *Dune* to its contemporary real-world setting. As our focus during the analysis has been put on the repressive and biopolitical uses of power within state and leadership, the logical continuation would be to observe some expressions of power that were present within the spheres of the military and religious institutions within America and the west during the 1950s and 60s.

*The Repressive State Apparatus*

As stated in part one, the absolute expression of disciplinary power is the power to let live or make die. Following the final events of the second world war, this power came to be associated with the notion of imminent destruction as the result of nuclear weapons, a threat that gave birth to the term “nuclear paranoia”. Several studies have shown that nuclear threat was indeed a general concern during the 1950s and 60s in America³, suggesting that the fear from destruction without any beforehand notice played a large role in the perceived state of the world. This paranoia is likewise portrayed in *Dune*, although we see a shift in how that power is portrayed. Whereas nuclear annihilation was a real concern during the mid-twentieth century, *Dune* presents a setting in which atomic weaponry has already played a large part in the progress of mankind. “Atomics” are in the novel banned as a result of the truce called “The Great

³ Among these are the articles ”Psychology and the Threat of Nuclear War” by Richard V. Wagner and ”Educators and the Nuclear Threat” by Stanley M. Elam.
Convention” (F. Herbert 494), mainly because their destructive power is deemed too great.\textsuperscript{4} Instead this impending threat of immediate destruction seem to have shifted, the imperial Sardaukar are instead seen as the very real tools of destruction which serve under the behest of the Emperor. This shift does however embody the same premise since there are no laws or judiciary system that regulates the use of this power, meaning that there exists a constant threat of destruction. As a result of this, it can be suggested that while nuclear weaponry might be banned there still exists a power that resembles that of an equal destructive force. The use or threat of such a force also enables occupation and acquirement of resources that are of interest of the state.

Instances where such a claim might be applied to a real-world setting can be identified in the 1950s when western powers reacted with military means to the sudden nationalization of the Suez Canal, thereby invoking military action on the basis of economic interests. According to Wright et al., the reasons for said actions stemmed from the dependency for the supply of oil and disputes over ownership (28). While the United States may be considered marginalized in terms of actual military action (33), Britain and France will thus represent the western repressive power prone to the protection of economic resources. The dependency upon a singular resource to uphold a global economy can therefore be claimed to result in violent intrusions by state powers, and the subsequent wars between western powers and the Middle-East is evidence of what sovereign states are prepared to initiate in defense of cultural values and economic interests. In Dune we are presented with a similar conflict, one where a colonial power keeps occupied territories in order by means of repressive force due to the dependency of vital resources, in which spice is considered the allegorical counterpart of oil. This relationship between the fictional spice and real-world oil has also been addressed by David M. Millar, where the role of spice is compared to the importance of oil in the late twentieth-century global economics (Higgins 238). Millar also mentions the threat of an impending spice embargo by Paul Atreides, who states that “The people who can destroy a thing, they control it” (F. Herbert 401) thus claiming dominance over the empire (Higgins 238). Again, we are presented with the idea of destruction as the ultimate expression of power and control, which is strongly related Foucault’s concept of sovereign power. However, it is within the idea of colonialism as

\textsuperscript{4} However, there exist a scene within the story where atomics are in fact deployed. During the final pages of the novel, Paul Atreides uses nuclear weaponry to destroy the walls outside the city of Arrakeen, reassuring himself that they are destroying “the Shield Wall, not humans (F. Herbert 428).
a tool of repression that we may observe the more apparent relation between *Dune* and our world.

On this topic of colonialism, I would claim that the narrative at its core resent the idea of imperialist structure, which is displayed primarily through the construction of characters and factions. As for a contemporary real-world reference, the Vietnam war can be seen as one of many instances showcasing western power as a way of ensuring subjugation, both globally and domestically. Domestic in the way of enlisting young men to the repressive apparatus thus ensuring its growth and status, and globally in the way of displaying massive military power by deploying a part of that apparatus within another sovereign state. Former president John F. Kennedy also reportedly told journalist James Reston that “Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place.” (Bostdorff and Goldzwig 520). Drawing from this argument of colonialist intervention, similar notions can be ascribed to the imperial rule within *Dune* where we can determine military power being deployed on foreign worlds as a means of claiming cultural and economic supremacy. What further supports this argument are the comments of Brian Herbert, Frank Herbert’s son, who in *Dreamer of Dune* claims that the Fremen bear likeness to many repressed social groups throughout history, notably the North Vietnamese who drove the occupying American forces from Vietnam (182). While this parallel might seem compelling for the sake of argument, the concerns regarding colonialism and decolonization are portrayed as far more problematic.

The 1950s and 60s are generally considered the decades that marked the end of colonialism, and we can see how this concept of decolonialization likewise plays an important part in *Dune*. In the article *Psychic Decolonization in 1960s Science Fiction* it is suggested by David Higgins that Herbert implies that imperialism is beneficial for colonies since all progress within the novel is simulated and guided by heroic outsiders (239). Higgins also states that it is not the injustices of imperial system itself that is questioned but rather the tyranny of bad leaders, thus allowing Herbert to offer critique of colonialism while upholding the practices that motivate imperial exploits in the first place (239). While it is true that the narrative does highlights the abuse of power in authoritarian positions, which is indeed one of the main points of this essay, I would have to disagree with the assumption that imperialism is to be seen as beneficial. Paul successfully liberates Arrakis as a consequence of defeating the emperor, which does imply that outside help is needed to rid oneself from oppression, but he does so with the knowledge of what will come; “he saw how futile (were) any effort of his to change
any smallest bit of this. He had thought to oppose the jihad within himself, but the jihad would be” (F. Herbert 457). Paul’s actions stem from the decision of choosing vengeance and redemption over the collective, for even as this may be seen as leading the Fremen to freedom he also accepts the terror that the coming war implies. If he is to be regarded as an agent of colonialism this would suggests that the practice of imperialism does not guide progress, but breed oppression in that it is reproduced. For while the reign of Shaddam IV may be over, the new Fremen empire will instead start to expand, bringing new values and ideology as a result their crusade.

I ideological and Cultural Hegemony

Biopower, and the biopolitical consequences of its existence, provides us with the analytical tool in determining how power operates within ideological institutions. We have seen how this concept is recognized within Dune in the apparatus of the Bene Gesserit, which is the most structuralized religious institution that is portrayed to the readers. While there is no real argument for a theocratic imperial structure due to the Bene Gesserit’s perceived secular standing in relation to the empire, certain preferable values and structural discrimination is indeed present and thoroughly displayed. Some may be considered more explicit than others, such as the concept of the faufreluches caste-system. It is my opinion that what we witness in Dune in terms of covert ideological influence are in fact an exaggerated portrayal of how religious values have affected the societal structure of the United States. In her essay Family, Church and State, Carol Weisbrod suggests that religious groups in America may view themselves as a source of authority at least equal to the state and that this is given solidity by recognition that churches, as well as states, attempt to regulate the lives of their citizens or members in many aspects (745-6). These aspects of regulation are primarily recognized in the influence on marriage, family and adoption with religious groups attempting to influence state law as it relates to family (748). The intermingling of politics and religion is also presented in Seymour M. Lipset’s work American Exceptionalism, where it is noted that the Americanized protestant values are the source of the relation between church and state that has characterized subsequent American history, as well as provided the moral passion for political change (63). With the emergence of a middle-class and the preferable portrayal of the nuclear family in the 1950s, one may argue that these values derived from the church helped create the cultural hegemony at the time. Instances where this became prominent revolved around
the “religious heritage” of children during adoption processes (Weisbrod 762) and, in a more culturally repressive manner, the burning of comic books and the subsequent juvenile delinquency hearings in 1954 (Nyberg 26, 61). Although Dune does not present the reader with actual repressive acts concerning art and literature, the influence of religion on a state-power level is visible through other means. The introduction of the Panoplia propheticus as a tool for subjugation and the intricate breeding program within the Great Houses are two such strategies that can be associated with the interplay of religion and politics. Starting with the latter, one of the more prominent acts of defiance can be observed when Paul’s mother, the Lady Jessica, disobedies the commands of the Bene Gesserit by giving birth to a boy instead of a girl, thereby halting their breeding program and becoming a target of punishment (F. Herbert 27). Consequently, she is later shunned by the order and villainized. As for the other matter, the sowing of superstition affects the populace in covert ways as well, it is for instance noted that Fremen are “beautifully prepared to believe in (the Bene Gesserit)” and will serve their needs should the need arise (271, 57). This implantation of beliefs will therefore serve the order while obscuring their true purpose. The reproduction of state ideology within the ideological apparatuses, and vice versa, is thus shown to interfere in essential freedoms of the people.

These freedoms are also further threatened by the rise of charismatic leaders, and an argument could be made in that the reproduction of ideology within all institutions of society offers a perception of society as egalitarian or inertly good, when instead it may serve as a guileful front for social injustice. In the American context, this is visible in how state apparatuses are constructed. Lipset explains how the notion of populism can be observed in the way that law enforcement and judicial positions are appointed by certain voters or elected officials (43). This is further explored in comparison to parliamentary countries where legal and police authorities tend to have life tenure, therefore they are not under pressure to handle matters so as to facilitate reelection or attainment of higher electoral office (43). The trickling of ideology through the whole state apparatus is thus expressed in how matters of law are conducted. According to Brian Herbert, Frank Herbert was said to have voiced concern during the hearings conducted by senator Joseph McCarthy during the early 1950s and strongly believed that McCarthy had gone too far in blacklisting suspected communist sympathizers, leading to the endangerment of freedom for the individual (B. Herbert
This rather exemplifies how a convincing figure of authority may rally support among the populace for the deliverance of injustice, all due to ideological conviction. This conviction is also enhanced by the assumption that one’s own society is benign and just. Within *Dune*, such an assumption would be Allat’s depiction of the Fremen society as the egalitarian counterpart to the oppressive Empire, in which the political blend of socialist and communist values provides communal ownership and unalienated labor (8, 11). However, I would argue that within these residing values lies also the acceptance of religious authoritarianism and the blind following of charismatic leaders. The consequences of such a leadership also results in the dreaded jihad which Paul through the novel fights to prevent. On his crusade to reclaim his rightful title as duke and bring prosperity to Arrakis, Paul ultimately accepts this jihad built upon the ideological values of his new society. His claim to leadership lies in the indoctrination of the population which stems from the workings of ideology within the state apparatus, and his knowledge of the future allows him to utilize this power to lead the Fremen to victory and freedom. Yet, this alleged notion of freedom is in fact merely a continuation of the cycle of oppression, and Paul’s reign might prove even more tyrannical than that of the former empire.

In conclusion, I believe that the way power is expressed and wielded within the depicted state apparatuses emphasizes the notion of abuse of power within state leadership. For while the far-future setting of other narratives might provide us with a technologically superior civilization in which the dynamics of power have transcended our common understanding, the dealings of the Padishah Empire closely resembles that of contemporaneous imperialist states. The portrayal of a galactic empire to convey the totalitarian setting of the novel provides us with a recognizable antagonist to which we can ascribe its power as abusive and highly problematic. The overt workings of the repressive state apparatus depict an extreme use of disciplinary power, and the expressions of that power does indeed relate to policies within the western powers common during the mid-twentieth century. Colonialism and the exploitation of natural resources are the cornerstones to its rule, and the threat of imminent destruction is displayed to assure the subjugation of its population, occupied territories and enemies alike. Likewise, these practices were also visible within the foreign policies of the

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5 It has also been said that these, in large degree, opinion-based assumptions about abuses of power are portrayed in *Dune* (B. Herbert 91-2).
United States and the western state powers, to which the numerous accounts of imperialist intervention and showcasing of destructive force stand as evidence.

Within the galactic empire, this power is enforced further by the Bene Gesserit’s function as a supplementary apparatus in which the covert workings of ideology shapes and maintains the order of society. This is done by the subtle insertion of normalized segregation and preferred values, which in turn are reproduced by the willing participation of the population. The dealings of the state and church relies heavily on the biopolitical techniques conceptualized by Foucault, which are also concepts we can relate to the development of the cultural hegemonic setting of the United States. This is supported by Lipset’s arguments of how the Americanized protestant values has influenced the judicial practice, but also how this system allows for ideology to influence all instances of a given state apparatus. The novel utilizes this exaggerated expression of the ideological influence on populations to emphasizes the dangers of centralized rule, and how the unification of state power and religious indoctrination implies a dangerous force to be reckoned with. For this is also visible within the Fremen society, led by their omnipotent messiah Paul Muad’Dib. Paul becomes representative of the corruptive aspect of power, in that his seemingly noble quest ends with the realization of how his cultivated leadership might have doomed them all. The Fremen follow him blindly, shaped by the sowing of superstitious prophecy and entranced by his knowledge of the future. The novel thus addresses man’s tendency to follow charismatic leaders, and how this unquestionable faith may have dire consequences.

The limits of this essay do not unfortunately allow for further study of these issues portrayed within speculative fiction from this era. Dune is a saga that spans several novels, and its sequels further elaborates on the dangers of omnipotent rule. Its narrative implies a fatalist perspective, a view of the future that does little in terms of societal progress but rather emphasizes the destructive force of power, regardless of whether it can be deemed violent or biopolitical. The novel does not deliver an alternative answer to how we might handle the forces that abuse power, it merely opposes them in whatever form they may take. Yet, perhaps it is because of this that its contribution to the zeitgeist is recognized so strongly, and that its standing within science fiction is considered unparalleled. It provides us with a speculative scenery in a far distant future, while addressing the concerns and issues that were present in its contemporary real-world. It is indeed a work of its time.
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