

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The original novel of *Dune* is arguably one of the first science-fiction stories that serves as a foundation for the genre to this day. Denis Villeneuve, the director of the 2021 and 2024 film adaptation, pointed out that *Dune* had a clear influence on many science fiction projects such as *Star Wars* (1977). Space travel comes straight from *Dune* into *Star Wars* (1977), Tatooine is almost a carbon copy of Arrakis, an evil Empire with massive ships appears to have control over the galaxy, and the Jedi possess an inner force akin to the *Bene Gesserit*. It also gave rise to the psychedelic space science fiction movement, which was prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick. The adaptations themselves received many awards, ranging from Best Achievement in Editing at The Oscars to Best Feature Film nominee in Family Film Awards.

In the article “*A Genuine Messiah: The Erosion of Political Messaging in Dune 2021*” by Misha Grifka Wander (2022) have mentioned, the original intent of Frank Herbert when the original *Dune* novel was conceived to analyse how something as dangerous as a religious-political leader might transpire. In the original novel and the films adaptations Paul Atreides is not deluded in the traditional sense. He is instead consciously manipulating the Fremen's belief in him as the *Lisan al-Gaib*, their messiah, to gain political power and influence as he could not become a central figure on Arrakis without the Fremen and *Bene Gesserit*. He is aware of the catastrophic consequences as he could see the future thanks to the spices. He knows that his reign will be built on the Fremen's dead bodies but still

continues on the path. He uses their adoration and religious beliefs as tools for power.

The article highlights how the Fremen's beliefs were artificially tampered by *Bene Gesserit*. Paul knows this and is still intentionally manipulating them to fight for him. His mother, Jessica, on the other hand relies on her training as a *Bene Gesserit* and their knowledge to manipulate these beliefs and lead them both into the path of becoming *Lisan al-Gaib*. This in return trapped the Fremen in a state of false consciousness, believing Paul's actions as divine interventions and caused them to willingly die for him.

Through these concepts, the message that Frank Herbert wanted to convey with the original novels became clear. Paul's rise to power was not by fate, destiny, or a divine intervention, it is a deliberate choice made by him to manipulate the Fremen's belief. It is the failure of his character that would lead to the war, so-called "The *Muad'Dib Jihad*," that will result in 61 billion casualties throughout the galaxy. This helps us visualise how dangerous it is to elevate someone of political power to a divine status. In said article the author critiques *Dune: Part One* of portraying Paul in a sympathetic light. The author believed Villeneuve's adaptation of *Dune* highlights the very mistake Paul Atreides makes, one that Herbert sought to expose the hubris of believing power is a noble pursuit and that the errors of the powerful are forgivable due to their humanity. While the film portrays Paul as a character doing his best to fulfil his "predestined" role, the novel paints a different picture. Herbert's Paul consciously accepts, encourages, and even embraces his role, knowing its consequences but believing that greater power will enable him to alter inevitable outcomes.

In “*The Impacts of Dune and The Lord of the Rings on American Culture*,” Nick Collins (2022) asserts that Paul Atreides' character is heavily influenced by Islamic culture, particularly through the Fremen, who embody characteristics of Middle Eastern tribes. The religious devotion of the Fremen to Paul, who they refer to as *Muad'Dib*, parallels historical messianic figures, reinforcing his perceived divinity and heroism heavily based upon the culture of Middle Eastern and North African peoples. Arrakis, much like many portions of the Middle East, is seemingly uninhabitable and covered in desert. Its major commodity, spice, is a resource that is desired by the rest of the known world and is essential for long-distance travel. The spice is clearly allegorical for the oil possessed so strongly by the US and other Western nations. Local tribes of Fremen band together under *Muad'Dib*, a ruler to whom they are so devoted that they follow religiously and attack under a “religious crusade” known as jihad, one of the many words taken directly from or inspired by Arabic. It should be noted that jihad in its original uses was used to refer to a holy war.

Similar to the political ideology surrounding the Middle East being a major theme of *Dune*, in the original novel Herbert focuses much of his political allegory on the collapse of major world powers and the liberation from Imperial Powers by Middle Eastern and North African countries. As pointed out by Senior, the fight for power between the family of Atreides and the Harkonnen is similar to the political fight between America and the USSR. Just as America gains more influence over much of the areas that they were fighting for influence over, Paul wins favour over the Fremen and pushes out Harkonnen leaders. The Fremen's jihad against the Harkonnens reflects not only a literal battle but also symbolises the larger conflict

of oppressed peoples rising against imperial powers, aligning with themes of messianic leadership and warfare. Paul's evolution from a noble heir to a messianic figure involves the manipulation of religious and cultural symbols to consolidate power. This transformation showcases the complexities of leadership, and the burden of expectation placed upon him.

Throughout the story, Paul Atreides undergoes an immense transformation. Through his transformation into Paul *Muad'Dib*, akin to Jessica's substantial transformation through her experiences as a member of the *Bene Gesserit* and subsequently as the Fremen's Reverend Mother. In "*Epic World-Building: Names and Cultures in Dune*," Kara Kennedy noted that their identities as Atreides and Fremen are inextricably linked, and as a result, they occupy a hybrid position in which their worldview, attitudes, and behaviours are a mix of the Fremen community's values and their prior training.

While living with the Fremen, Jessica gives birth to a daughter and names her Alia, which encapsulates this hybridity: in Latin it means "another," and in Arabic it signifies "the Most High" as the feminine form of Ali, one of the 99 names of God. By the end of *Dune*, the Orient and Islam no longer stand for the "ultimate alienation from and opposition to Europe," but form an important part of these characters' new fused identities (Said, 1983: 6). Paul may gain power as an Atreides, but he retains two Fremen, Chani and Stilgar, in his inner circle of advisors, along with his mother. Moreover, Paul struggles and fails to escape the path of the jihad, showing his inability to actually control the Fremen or redirect their power.

In “*Reimagining Colonialism: Dune Within Postcolonial Science-Fiction*,” Barka Rabeh Yacine (2023) mentioned that *Dune* addresses the aftermath of revolutions, such as the Fremen’s Jihad following the decolonization of Arrakis. Yacine pointed out that Gaylard (2010) highlights how the novel presents the progression of Paul Atreides from an anticolonial hero to a dictator, illustrating how revolutions can spiral into extremism. Additionally, the novel’s subtle manipulation by the *Bene Gesserit* underscores the complexities and limitations of such struggles. This mirrors real world anti-colonial movements where the idealistic pursuit of liberation often gives way to unforeseen consequences.

Yacine supports Gaylard’s argument that situates *Dune* as an essential postcolonial text, reinforcing the need to critically reevaluate Herbert’s work within this framework. By tracing the historical and cultural influences that shape its narrative, Gaylard demonstrates how *Dune* serves as a rich commentary on the dangers and complexities of revolution and postcolonial power dynamics. Therefore, the novel not only reflects anticolonial desires but also serves as a cautionary tale of how these struggles can lead to new forms of extremism and oppression.

In *Dune*, the ruling class is represented by the Great Houses, particularly House Atreides and House Harkonnen, who control vast planetary resources, notably the spice melange. The Fremen, inhabitants of the desert planet Arrakis, represent the oppressed or lower classes. Much like the Park family in “*Film Analysis of Parasite in the Light of Marxism*” Sagar Samy (2023) pointed out how the Great Houses benefit from wealth and power derived from their control over

resources, while the Fremen live in harsh conditions, struggling to survive in the desert.

The contrast between the Kims' small, substandard living quarters and the Park family's opulent home illustrates the gap between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Similarly, *Dune* highlights the material disparities between the exploited people of Arrakis and the ruling elite by contrasting the affluence and luxury of the noble families with the nomadic lifestyle of the Fremen. Without the Kims ever being able to rise above their station, *Parasite* (2019) shows how the Kims' labour keeps the Park family comfortable similarly to the dynamic that is at play with the exploitation of the Fremen in *Dune: Part One*, and *Dune: Part Two*. The ruling class, including House Atreides, relies on the spice melange, which is found only on Arrakis and is harvested at great cost to the Fremen people. The Great Houses, akin to the bourgeoisie, profit from the Fremen's labour and suffering, but do not share their wealth or power with them.

Paul Atreides' rise to power mirrors this exploitation. While he aligns with the Fremen and leads them, his messianic vision often blinds him to how he continues to benefit from their labour and their resources. The exploitation is still present, and Paul, despite his noble intentions, represents a figure who uses the oppressed class to secure his power, similar to the way the Park family uses the Kims.

In *Parasite* (2019), the Kims believe they can ascend to a higher social class by integrating themselves into the Park family's life, but their attempt is ultimately doomed because the system itself is structured to maintain class barriers. In *Dune*, Paul Atreides' messianic rise also represents an illusion of change. While Paul's

ascension might suggest the possibility of transforming the socio-political order, his rise doesn't dismantle the power structures of the *Dune* universe. Instead, Paul's rule becomes a continuation of the same imperial system, albeit with a new leader.

The Fremen's belief in Paul as the *Lisan al-Gaib* mirrors the Kims' hope in climbing the social ladder, but ultimately, both are caught in systems that perpetuate class domination and exploitation. Paul's vision of himself as a messianic figure who will bring freedom to the Fremen is, in part, a delusion, his leadership still exploits the Fremen's labour and resources, just as the Kims are exploited for their labour in *Parasite* (2019).

In “*Violence and Freedom in Isayama's Attack on Titan*”, Zuraikat et al. (2024) argue that violence acts not just as a destructive force but as a mechanism for freedom and self-realisation, central to Eren's journey. Peace is exceptional, and freedom and justice are questionable, as the cycle of violence pervades human existence, symbolising the perpetual struggle for liberation against oppressive forces. This view aligns with Paul Atreides' transformation in *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two*, where Paul's calculated manipulation of the Fremen's beliefs reveals that the pursuit of freedom can, paradoxically, trap both liberator and liberated within systems of exploitation. Like Eren, Paul leverages messianic prophecy to mobilise a marginalised group for his cause, embracing violence as a necessary means to secure his ascendancy. Both characters find that wielding power and enacting violence ultimately entrench them within the cycle of domination they sought to escape.

Zuraikat et al. (2024) emphasise the productive potential of violence in a world where power defines existence, stating that characters of *Attack on Titan* try

to free themselves by resorting to violence, which enables them to discover the truths of their life and existence. In *Dune*, Paul's assumption of the messianic mantle likewise unveils grim truths about the cost of power. While Paul envisions that his elevated status might end systemic oppression, he ultimately fuels a jihad that will claim countless lives, much like Eren's realisation of violence as both a curse and liberation. This nuanced depiction, present in both series, suggests that the pursuit of freedom through violence traps individuals in cycles that neither truly liberate nor dismantle oppressive systems, echoing themes of existential struggle.

Previous studies have explored various themes in *Dune*, such as power, culture, and class. Grifka-Wander (2022) discusses Paul Atreides' use of religious manipulation to gain control, while Yacine (2023) shows how Paul's journey reflects a shift from revolutionary hero to oppressive ruler. Kennedy (2023) highlights how the blending of Atreides and Fremen cultures shapes character identities, and Collins (2022) points out the influence of Islamic culture in *Dune*'s messianic themes. Samy (2023) draws parallels with *Parasite* (2019) by showing how elite groups benefit from the labour of the oppressed, and Zuraikat et al. (2024) help to draw parallels between Eren's use of violence for liberation in *Attack on Titan* and Paul Atreides' manipulation of the Fremen in *Dune*, illustrating how both characters' quests for freedom ultimately reinforce cycles of exploitation. While the previous studies have discussed Paul Atreides' rise of power, this study offers a new perspective through the lens of ideology as a state of false consciousness in Althusserian Structural Marxism regarding Paul's messianic delusion, focusing on how it reinforces the systems of exploitation where the ruling class felt more deserving of power than the lower class.

1.2. Research Problems

The researcher formulated research questions as below:

1. How do *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two* portray Paul Atreides' messianic delusion?
2. How does Paul Atreides' delusion cause the Fremen's to be trapped in a state of false consciousness?

1.3. Purpose of the study

The researcher has formulated the objective of the study as below:

1. To analyse how *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two* portray Paul Atreides' messianic delusion.
2. To examine the impact of Paul Atreides' delusion on the implications of the Fremen's autonomy.

1.4. Significance of the study

This study aims to contribute to Structural Marxist literary research by examining themes of power, exploitation, and false consciousness in *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two*. Through the lens of Paul Atreides' messianic delusion and his manipulation of the Fremen, the research explores how leadership and dependency in fiction mirror class struggle, exploitation, and ideological control. By highlighting the continuation of oppressive systems despite promises of liberation, it draws parallels between the narrative and real-world political dynamics, especially in the context of Israel's genocide of Palestinian, where a charismatic leader such as Benjamin Netanyahu uses religion as his political

avenue, equating the successes and failures of the nation state of Israel to the Jewish religion. This study addresses gaps in Structural Marxist discourse on fiction by showing how narratives reinforce or critique structures of domination and offers a critical foundation for future research in literature and film.

1.5. Scope of Study

This study will exclusively analyse the figure of Paul Atreides, his motivations, and interpersonal dynamics within the narrative of Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* adaptations. No other characters, political themes, and case study will be the subject to semiotic analysis. The discussion will only engage with other characters solely to the extent of their relationship with Paul's character arc. This author will also view both *Dune: Part One* and *Dune: Part Two* as one cohesive story as they are adapted from the same book.

