

Jihad in Outer Space

The Orientalist Semiotics of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and the Image of Lawrence of Arabia¹

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Introduction

»Over [50] years ago, Frank Herbert crafted a remarkable depiction of our time, so, read, or reread, *Dune*—and read it hard.«²

Not everyone agrees with William A. Senior's evaluation of the plot and importance of *Dune* (1965), the novel by Frank Herbert (1920–1986), which has been turned into another movie, directed by Denis Villeneuve, and shown on the big silver screen again in 2021. British journalist Janan Ganesh even demands that intellectual debates about the plot and its depiction be stopped, although he offers at least some interpretations himself when he argues that »[t]he grandiose silliness of *Dune* cost [him] 155 minutes of LA sunshine.« Although *Dune* (2021) »might be the handsomest thing committed to screen since *Lawrence of Arabia*,« Ganesh argues that the film is not »profound. Showing a dust bowl of a planet is not an insight into climate change. Showing a case of imperialism is not a rumination on imperialism. Whispering a sentence does not make it wise. If the big idea is that power is a burden, it is a Harry Potter film.«³ However, such an eval-

1 The present chapter is a shortened and condensed version of the author's monograph *The Orientalist Semiotics of Dune: Religious and Historical References within Frank Herbert's Universe* (Marburg: Büchner, 2022).

2 William A. Senior, »Frank Herbert's Prescience: ›Dune‹ and the Modern World,« *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 17, no. 4 (2007): 320.

3 Janan Ganesh, »Stop Intellectualising Pop Culture,« *Financial Times*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/cf224502-1f57-4204-8da4-9720e39bd509>.

uation neither considers nor understands the vast semiotics that lie within *Dune* and have kept the story alive and even ready for two more blockbuster movies in the third decade of the 21st century. Ganesha wants to de-contextualize the movie and understands it purely as something entertaining when he states that »[t]he problem is its investiture by critics and audiences with more meaning than it can bear.«⁴ I disagree with such an evaluation and would rather claim that there is more meaning to the film, drawn to it from the original novel, than the audience can take in while watching the film only once, especially if those who watch it are unfamiliar with Herbert's novel. In fact, every form of literature or visual media is in a way impacted by the time of its creation and the message the author or creator wants to transport with the story. Consequently, it is hard to read or watch *Dune* without constructing a connection to motifs or historical contexts Herbert had in his mind when he drafted the plot for his story about a future universe. The present chapter will therefore show the extent to which Herbert used orientalist semiotics for the creation of the universe his plot is related to. Furthermore, I will show the extent to which Paul Atreides, the central protagonist of the first of his *Dune* novels, resembles the history and perception of T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935), better known as Lawrence of Arabia. The chapter is thereby to be understood as an attempt to decode the sign system the first novel of the *Dune* series was based upon and the extent to which these semiotics, especially the orientalist ones, have been conserved and represented to later generations on the big silver screen as well.

The central conflict of the novel, between two aristocratic houses—the progressive Atreides and the villainous Harkonnens—as well as the influence of the Space Guild, representing contractors and oil companies within this global conflict, points to the Cold War but also to more historical conflicts related to the history of the First World War in the Middle East.⁵ It is not surprising that Paul Atreides, or

4 Ibid.

5 Senior, »Frank Herbert's Prescience,« 318.

later Paul Muad'Dib, just like T. E. Lawrence in the Western imagination, acted as if »he were a contemporary imam promising glorious salvation for all [suppressed Fremmen, representing the people of the Middle East] willing to die for their cause.«⁶

These orientalist semiotics of the novel have been preserved over the years and are even more visible in the film released in 2021, directed by Denis Villeneuve, than they were in David Lynch's *Dune* in 1984. The sign system Herbert based his considerations on has consequently not been separated from his vision for a future universe, a fact that makes *Dune* sound and look very orientalist in its perception and depiction of Middle Eastern culture. Therefore, this chapter presents a discussion of these specific aspects of orientalism and the semiotics related to them in the novels and films, showing how deeply the semiotic and stereotypical motifs related to Islam and the history of the Middle East affected and still affect the creation of popular media.

I will therefore show how orientalism is semiotically constructed and preserved within *Dune* in multiple ways. Eventually, I will take a closer look at the depiction of Paul Atreides, the novel's heroic main character, in relation to the (hi)story of T. E. Lawrence, an orientalist role model for the former, and the role of a holy war, the jihad, whether it be considered as part of the First World War in the Middle East or Herbert's story in outer space.

Orientalist Semiotics

Herbert stated in an interview that he did not just start writing *Dune* but actually spent five years on research, reading mostly works that were non-fiction.⁷ Some of the names he created for his protagonists do obviously resemble Arabic words, and, considering his intensive research work and his education, it cannot be assumed that Herbert

⁶ Ibid., 319.

⁷ M. S. Winecoff, »Frank Herbert: Author of *Dune*,« *Friends* 23, February 2, 1971, 11.

was unaware of his semiotic constructions when crafting the universe his story takes place in and the people that determine the course of history in it. With Paul Muad’Dib at the center, the resemblance with *mu’adeb*, the Arabic term for »private tutor,«⁸ seems to be one of those aspects pointing directly to the question of how far Herbert thought about the terminology and how far it was chosen for a specific semiotic purpose. The latter, willingly or not, often replicates orientalist stereotypes and considerations and must therefore be seriously taken into consideration when one takes a closer look at the orientalist semiotics of *Dune*. Haris Durrani has already emphasized »the books’ engagement with Islam to transcend linguistic wordplay and obscure intertextuality.«⁹ The deep »Muslimness« of *Dune* and its links to Middle Eastern culture, history, and religion almost demands a closer analysis of these aspects and the presented orientalist semiotics in particular. In fact, »*Dune* does not cheaply plagiarize from Muslim histories, ideas, and practices, but actively engages with them.«¹⁰ However, at the same time, the novels and the films alike reconvey orientalist stereotypes and narratives about the Middle East that have been widely perceived in Western popular culture since the late 19th century. While Herbert’s deeper interest in Middle Eastern culture and reflection is clearly obvious, and although the novel’s »Muslimness reflects a serious engagement with those sources and histories, a conversation with their underlying ideas and affects that surpasses exotic aesthetics, easy plagiarism, cheap appropriation, the assumption of unchanging religion or language, and even scintillating references,«¹¹ there are orientalist elements in it that were maybe unconsciously replicated by Herbert as well. In that regard, Herbert without any doubt »enjoy[ed] rifling cultures almost as much as Tolkien, but there is less logic to

8 Haris Durrani, »The Muslimness of *Dune*: A Close Reading of ›Appendix II: The Religion of Dune,« *tor.com*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.tor.com/2021/10/18/the-muslimness-of-dune-a-close-reading-of-appendix-ii-the-religion-of-dune>.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

his semantics.«¹² One of these aspects, which will later be taken into closer consideration, is the resemblance of Lawrence of Arabia in Paul Muad'Dib. First, however, it seems to be in order to introduce some essential thoughts related to orientalism and semiotics.

Edward Said (1935–2003), in his famous work *Orientalism* (1978), argued that »[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.«¹³ He furthermore considered orientalism to be »a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.«¹⁴ Northern Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East were used as projection surfaces that were needed to define the self-image of Europe or the West in abstraction to this orientalist otherness. Therefore, the perception of the former regions within the latter was essential for the creation of what Said understands as orientalism, especially since it »expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.«¹⁵ The starting point for these developments was supposedly the end of the 19th century, and Said used French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) thoughts about discourses as a base for his reflections about the establishment of this particular semiotic system related to the »Orient.«¹⁶ Discourse about the latter in the West eventually led to the establishment of a particular semiotic system that became related to and essential for perceptions of the respective regions, particularly that of the Middle East. Signs that

12 Anthony Haden-Guest, »Fave Rave,« *Friends* 21, January 1, 1971, 16.

13 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), accessed November 13, 2021, http://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/criticism/guest/Said_E/Said_E3.htm.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 On this aspect, see Seumas Miller, »Foucault on Discourse and Power,« *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 76 (1990): 115–125; Stephen Frederick Schneck, »Michel Foucault on Power/Discourse, Theory and Practice,« *Human Studies* 10, no. 1 (1987): 15–33.

were accepted by Western societies to be linked to and to represent the »orientalist Other« were systematized step by step and thereby inscribed into images and narratives that consciously or unconsciously were transported over decades until Herbert eventually accessed them for his future vision of the *Dune* universe.

Semiotics in general can be very shortly defined as the study of any human-made or interpreted signs, which are »traditionally defined as ›something which stands for something else« (in the medieval formula, *aliquid stat pro aliquo*) [and a]ll meaningful phenomena (including words and images) are signs.« This then means that »[t]o interpret something is to treat it as a sign. All experience is mediated by signs, and communication depends on them.«¹⁷ What the study of semiotics is consequently particularly interested in is the meaning-making that is achieved by the use and implementation of visual or textual signs.¹⁸ Semioticians consequently look at the intentional creation of signs and the perception of these signs within larger sign systems, i. e. the semiotics of beings, things, or actions.¹⁹ Semiotics as such, therefore, is the science related to the creation, knowledge, and intention or perception of signs in different historical and cultural contexts and seems to offer a very suitable approach to study the orientalist signs represented in Herbert's *Dune*. In other words, one can—and in the case of *Dune*, this actually makes sense when one wants to reflect upon the semiotic system related to Herbert's universe, Arrakis itself, the spice, the worms, or the Fremen—»approach signs as objects of interpretation indistinguishable from our responses to them. But we can also approach signs in such a way that we suspend our responses to them so that deliberation is possible.«²⁰ In fact, as semioticians Su-

17 Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 2.

18 Gary Genosko, *Critical Semiotics: Theory, from Information to Affect* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 1.

19 Kalevi Kull, »On the Limits of Semiotics, or the Thresholds of/in Knowing,« in *Umberto Eco in His Own Words*, eds. Torkild Thellefsen and Bent Sørensen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 42.

20 Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded: Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 3.

san Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio argue, »[s]emiotics as human semiosis or anthroposemiosis can scour the entire universe for meanings and senses that can then be treated as signs.«²¹

Of course, signs do not always stand out but are linked within a system and a kind of chain as well as a historical context, which means that sign systems change according to time and space.²² Some semiotic meanings of Herbert's *Dune* are consequently more obvious than others, or perhaps more accurately, more prominent than others. Some are hidden and some are in plain sight, some are Western and some are not, but some are, without any doubt, a Western interpretation of the Middle East, i. e. orientalism, in accordance with Herbert's own time and the time of the creation of the first *Dune* novel. Although often accused of being an unfitting academic field,²³ I consider the semiotic approach to Herbert's text and its later presentations in visual media a very suitable one, as it highlights which attempts were made, intentionally or unintentionally, to fill *Dune* with some kind of common orientalist semiotics that people around the world, but especially in the US, shared with regard to their reading of *Dune*.²⁴ This attempt is therefore closely linked to the demands for semiotic research, which were summed up by Gary Genosko: »A properly semiotic investigation into meaning ends up on the side of how it is produced, and what sort of systems are involved; what kind of mediations need to be taken into account, and how to account for the relationalities involved, not to mention the veils that have to be lifted in the process.«²⁵

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 4.

23 Paul Cogley, »What the Humanities Are For: A Semiotic Perspective,« in *Semiotics and Its Masters*, vol. 1, eds. Kristian Bankov and Paul Cogley (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 4.

24 For a discussion of this law of signification, see Julia Kristeva, »Introduction: Le Lieu Sémiotique,« in *Essays in Semiotics/Essais de Sémiotique*, eds. Julia Kristeva et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 1–2.

25 Genosko, *Critical Semiotics*, 1.

In the *Dune* films, Herbert's text and the filmic visualization also created a communicative unity,²⁶ although, depending on the film, the orientalist semiotics were more or less strong than was perhaps intended. This, however, requires a detailed comparison of the films and mini-series, which is not the intention of the present text. The focus here is rather on the substance as well as the limits—generally an aim for semiotic or semiological studies²⁷—of the orientalist semiotics of Herbert's *Dune*, and thus the present study is also linked to general systems theory,²⁸ in the sense that it not only looks at a semiotic system per se but at a system of semiotic orientalism as presented by Herbert in one of the most successful science fiction (SF) novels of all time. This approach was chosen to open a dialogue oriented towards the representation and perceptions of cultural images in Western popular media.

Considering »the strong historical link between names in the Freemen culture and real-world Middle Eastern societies,« Herbert consequently continues orientalist semiotics, which »juxtaposes the Freemen as an exotic Other with the Western, ruling-class Atreides family.«²⁹ It is without any doubt more than obvious, when one takes a closer look at the Middle Eastern elements in *Dune*, that the novel can be evaluated as a misrepresentation of Arabic communities and societies in Western SF.³⁰ Herbert actually seems to have been relying on

26 Thomas Friedrich and Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Bildsemiotik: Grundlagen und exemplarische Analysen visueller Kommunikation* (Basel/Boston/Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2010), 16.

27 Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 9. See also Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979); Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

28 Ludwig von Bertalanffy, »General Theory of Systems: Application to Psychology,« in *Essays in Semiotics/Essais de Sémiotique*, eds. Julia Kristeva et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 191.

29 Kara Kennedy, »Epic World-Building: Names and Cultures in *Dune*,« *Names* 64, no. 2 (2016): 100.

30 For a broader discussion of this issue, see Hoda M. Zaki, »Orientalism in Science Fiction,« in *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and*

»the ignorance and ethnocentrism of his American audience« when he presented »foreign neologisms to create exotic effects.«³¹ Paul, of course, becomes part of the Fremmen society but transforms it, even militarizes it, according to his needs, which are related to his concurrent role of being the Duke of House Atreides. The supposedly symbiotic relationship between the West and the East would eventually be perceived as the former dominating the latter. The name Paul, in this regard, is also a problematic reference to Saint Paul, who founded the Christian Church and initiated »missionary work.« Another biblical name is also represented in Jessica.³² The House's name, however, is a reference to ancient Greek mythology and refers to Atreus, whose sons Agamemnon and Menelaus played important roles during the Trojan War. The use of the name of Leto, Paul's father, also points towards Greek mythology, as this name is also that of the titan mother of Artemis and Apollo.³³ Although Herbert sometimes changed names, e. g. Bene Gesserit, which probably stands for »good or benevolent Jesuit,«³⁴ the connection still remains quite visible, maybe more so for readers in the 1960s than today. Besides the names, however, there are also some central references to the history, culture, and religion of the Middle East, which shall be taken into closer consideration in the remaining part of this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the references to Jewish people and their traditions appear relatively late in Herbert's *Dune* series, namely in the sixth and last book by the author, *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985).³⁵

Arab-Canadian Feminists, ed. Joanna Kadi (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994), 181–187.

31 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 41, cited in Kennedy, »Epic World-Building,« 100. See also Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

32 Kennedy, »Epic World-Building,« 100.

33 Ibid. For a broader discussion of historical references in SF, see Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 106, 214 and 235.

34 Kennedy, »Epic World-Building,« 101–102.

35 Frank Herbert, *Chapterhouse: Dune* (New York: Putnam, 1985).

Surprisingly, »unlike other faiths, the Judaism of the far future has changed not a whit,« and therefore, as Michael Weingrad emphasized in contrast to everything else that is different in Herbert's universe, the »Jews are as they have always been.«³⁶ In his final book, he therefore uses as many Jewish and even antisemitic stereotypes as he had used orientalist ones in his first novel. However, Paul, »the most heroic SF hero since Gully Foyle,«³⁷ is used to make a positive reference to Jewish religion in the novel. He could, due to the breeding program of the Bene Gesserit and Jessica's decision to bear a son instead of a daughter, become the super being, the *Kwisatz Haderach*. The term is a reference to the Hebrew *kefitzat haderech* (shortening of the way),³⁸ which is used in Jewish sources and Hasidic folktales to describe some kind of magical transportation or teleportation.³⁹ And this is what Paul eventually achieves, namely the possibility to travel through time and space without actually moving. In addition, he can see the future much clearer in the end, while his initial visionary experiences often seem to have been blurred or unclear. It is the spice that allows Paul to access his visions, which, however, are often not clear but only offer possible alternatives of the future that he has to eventually let happen or somehow avoid. In that way, the visions appear to be what Dietmar Dath called sideviews on alternate timelines for the future and there-

36 Weingrad, »Jews of *Dune*.«

37 Haden-Guest, »Fave Rave,« 16.

38 Chaim Bentorah, *Hebrew Word Study: A Hebrew Teacher Finds Rest in the Heart of God* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2013), 16–18. See also »Kwisatz Haderach,« in Peter Schlobinski and Oliver Siebold, *Wörterbuch der Science Fiction* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 193. For the use of the term, e. g. by Ben Gurion, see David Ohana, *Nationalizing Judaism: Zionism as a Theological Ideology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 29.

39 Sandherin 95a, *The William Davidson Talmud*, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.95a.16?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>. The belief that a person could appear in distant places almost simultaneously was not uncommon in other ancient contexts either. See Frank Jacob, »Die Pythagoreer: Wissenschaftliche Schule, religiöse Sekte oder politische Geheimgesellschaft?,« in *Geheimgesellschaften: Kulturhistorische Sozialstudien*, ed. Frank Jacob (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 17–34.

by present possibilities that must be seen from the perspective of what is actually an optional view of what could happen.⁴⁰ This motif of the *Kwisatz Haderach* is quite central within *Dune*; however, it seems to be the only strong Jewish element in the first novel, where orientalist semiotics are much stronger in regard to the presentation of Muslim elements within Herbert's universe.

In his novels, he intended to present the future of something his readers would be quite familiar with, i. e. the development of Islam into a religious belief that would still be part of the known universe thousands of years later. The specific »Muslimness of *Dune*«⁴¹ is particularly and sophisticatedly described in the appendix about the »Religion of *Dune*.« It provides a deeper insight into the Orange Catholic Bible that is mentioned in the novel as well as the religious beliefs of the Fremmen. It has been emphasized by Haris Durrani that »[w]hile the appendix incorporates a variety of religious and philosophical references—including to Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Navajo traditions, Roman paganism, and even Nietzsche—the thrust of the historical narrative is overwhelmingly Muslim, and perhaps specifically Shi'i.«⁴² The allegories used by Herbert to describe the conflict between indigenous people and the ones who intend to exploit them is, however, only one way to read the novel, as the supposedly existent conflict between Islam and modernity is presented by Herbert as well. In an interview,⁴³ he argued that his Middle Eastern friends considered the book to work more as a kind of religious commentary and understood it rather as a work of philosophical fiction and not SF.⁴⁴ It has been suggested that Herbert used different existent Islamic narratives as the base for his own universe building. In the appendix, Herbert mentions a *Kitab al-Ibar* (Book of Lessons) as an

40 »Dune: Interview with Dietmar Dath.«

41 Durrani, »The Muslimness of *Dune*.«

42 Ibid.

43 Accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZGJ3pGEuas&t=63s>. Durrani referenced the interview in his analysis.

44 Durrani, »The Muslimness of *Dune*.«

essential text for the Fremens' religious views and assumably is making a reference to the Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun's (1332–1406) work of the same title.⁴⁵ The title of Paul's own work, *The Pillars of the Universe*, is at the same time an obvious reference to T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.⁴⁶ Taking into account that Herbert must have been familiar with the film about Lawrence that premiered in 1962 and that he had a copy of *Seven Pillars* as well as a later translation of Jordanian historian Suleiman Mousa's (1919–2008) *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View*,⁴⁷ the resemblances between Paul and Lawrence, which will be discussed in some more detail in the following part of this chapter, are hardly surprising.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, there are some other references to Islam and the Muslim Middle East that should not be omitted when talking about the orientalist semiotics of *Dune*. The Padishah Emperor of the *Dune* universe, the title in itself being a reference to Middle Eastern history,⁴⁹ is named Shaddam IV, referencing the Arabic word *Ṣaddām*, »one who confronts.« One could therefore argue here that Herbert's naming of his novel's characters was already a way of pointing towards their position within the newly created universal order of his book. When Paul is riding the worm, he uses a *kiswa* maker hook, and the term *kiswa* is explained as »any figure or design from Fremens mythology« by Herbert.⁵⁰ The *kiswa*, however, is the black brocade cloth that covers the *Kaaba* in Mecca. Considering just these few terms, it already seems more likely that Herbert was very sensitively crafting linguistic meanings for his figures, which is why the orientalist

45 James W. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue, Arabic Edition and English Translation of Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman's Kitab al-ʿalim wa-l-ghulam* (London/New York: IB Tauris/Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001), 13.

46 T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: Penguin, 1922).

47 Suleiman Mousa, *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

48 Durrani, »The Muslimness of *Dune*.«

49 Padishah is an old Persian term for »Master King.«

50 Herbert, *Dune*, xvii.

semiotics of the overall work can hardly be considered orientalist by accident. That Herbert also actively references historical events is visible in Paul's personal guard, the *Fedaykin*, a reference to *Fedayeen* (»those who sacrifice themselves«), the term used for Arab commando groups, e.g. for Egyptian groups in the 1940s who fought against British rule there or Palestinians fighting against Israel in the 1950s.⁵¹

The term used for the worms, Shai-hulud, might also be pointing towards the Arabic words *sai'*, which translates to »thing,« and *khulud*, which means »to live forever.« The sandworms are also called the Makers, and considering the ecological system of Arrakis and the production process of the spice, it is obvious why this is the case.⁵² Similar to the orientalist semiotics applied to the worms, the Fremen are depicted with images that strongly link them to the Middle East and Arabic or Islamic cultures.⁵³ According to Kara Kennedy, it is this »strong association with real-world Arabic and Islamic societies th[at] helps to construct the Fremen's identity as a religious people with a history of persecution, which leads to their desire for retribution and, ultimately, a jihad against off-worlders.«⁵⁴ The religion of the Fremen was linked, as mentioned above, to old Arabic texts like the *Kitab al-Ibar*, while the priestesses' name, i. e. *Sayyadina*, and the role taken on by Jessica after she and Paul were granted access to the Fremen's society refer to an Arabic term, i. e. *sayyid*—»to be lord over.«⁵⁵ This meaning might also be related to the fact that the *Sayyadina* were the ones who could transform the Water of Life and would thereby become superior over the death this liquid held ready for anyone else who would try to drink it. The appearance of the Fremen reminds readers of the Bedouins, nomads of the desert. However, they are pre-

51 Zeev Schiff and Raphael Rothstein, *Fedayeen: Guerillas Against Israel* (New York: McKay, 1972).

52 Kennedy, »Epic World-Building,« 102.

53 Gwyneth Jones, »The Icons of Science Fiction,« in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170.

54 Kennedy, »Epic World-Building,« 102.

55 *Ibid.*, 103.

sented in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, the Fremen »appear as a quasi-Arabic and Middle Eastern people bent on jihad to avenge their historical oppression, unable or unwilling to think rationally and modernize their way of living,«⁵⁶ while on the other, they seem to be unable to achieve this without the leadership of an outsider who enters their own society to save and lead them alike.

The fact that Paul is referred to and greeted as the *Mahdi*⁵⁷ is another reference, albeit one that, in a way, reverts the historical events related to the Mahdist War in Sudan between 1881 and 1889. In contrast to the historical case, where a British officer, General Gordon, was sent to Khartoum to suppress a rebellion, in *Dune*, the foreigner is actually considered to be the Mahdi and leads it. At the same time, the Mahdi is not really going native but uses the Fremen for an extended war, supposedly a jihad, to defeat his enemies across the whole universe. This turns the independence-oriented fight of the Fremen into an expansionist religious war that supports pragmatic aims that are in no way related to the original needs and demands of the indigenous people of Arrakis anymore. Paul uses the legends about the »Lisan al-Gaib, the Voice from the Outer World.«⁵⁸

The orientalist semiotics of *Dune* eventually all point towards another jihad, a holy war in the name of the Atreides, led by Paul Muad'Dib, the Lisan al-Gaib of the Fremen, who not only won power on Arrakis but intends to expand this power across the whole known universe. This part of the plot, in a way, could be understood as a resemblance of a spread of Islam across the MENA region, but one wonders if Herbert really wanted to emphasize violent expansion as the most important aspect of this jihad. In fact, the jihad rather

56 Ibid., 104.

57 The term translates as »the guided one« and is used as the »honorary title of the expected deliverer or messianic figure in Islam.« Marcia Hermansen, »Madhi,« in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, vol. 2, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 421, cited in *ibid.*, 105.

58 Herbert, *Dune*, 97, cited in *ibid.* According to Kennedy, »Lisan al-Gaib is a combination of the Arabic *lisān*, meaning ›tongue‹ or ›language,‹ and *ġaib*, meaning ›invisible‹ or ›supernatural.‹ *Ibid.*

finally links all kinds of strings of the novel to one climax, when Paul's acceptance of a partial Fremen identity also becomes uncontrollable, and he accepts unleashing a universal jihad as the ultimate consequence of his claim for leadership of the Fremen. Paul and his mother Jessica have turned into hybrids,⁵⁹ members of both worlds, the Great Houses and the Fremen alike, but this link seems to be responsible for setting in motion a much bigger danger for the whole universe, i. e. a universal jihad that will eventually lead to a renegotiation of power in all its galaxies.

In the end, Paul is unable to prevent the jihad, although he had feared it as well.⁶⁰ He had set powers in motion that could no longer be controlled,⁶¹ an aspect that very much relates to Herbert's intention to warn of false leaders and the populist control of religiously motivated masses. These elements are essential for the inner order of Herbert's universe, but they are similarly related to historical events and future dangers he would refer to in his fictional work. Nevertheless, the images he creates are ambivalent. Herbert describes an anti-colonial struggle leading to colonialism in the name of religion, maybe even something one could call an ideology, and thereby emphasizes the menace religious fundamentalism seems to pose. While anti-colonial in nature, the signs presented are very often related to an orientalist semiotic system, which was not fully decolonialized in 1965, and, considering the new film, not in 2021 either. One particular image shows this particular ambivalence as well, namely the white savior narrative in relation to the history of T. E. Lawrence during the First World War. The following part of this chapter must consequently take a closer look at Paul of Arrakis and Lawrence of Arabia.

59 Kennedy, »Epic World-Building«, 105.

60 Lorenzo DiTommaso, »History and Historical Effect in Frank Herbert's ›Dune‹«, *Science Fiction Studies* 19, no. 3 (1992): 320.

61 Herbert, *Dune*, 482.

Paul of Arrakis vs. Lawrence of Arabia

The focus on Paul as the male savior of Arrakis and the universe as a whole clearly establishes an almost fetishization of masculinity within the first *Dune* novel, as only a man can become the Kwisatz Haderach.⁶² At the same time, Herbert's narrative draws from and relates to another famous story related to the Middle East, namely the one about T. E. Lawrence, or Lawrence of Arabia, as he has commonly been referred to since the end of the First World War.⁶³ The historical Lawrence served in the British Department of Intelligence in Cairo as a map officer. He had no sense for rules and hierarchies, and as »[a] subaltern on the staff, without a Sam Browne belt, and always wearing slacks, scorching about between Cairo and Bulaq on a Triumph motor-cycle, he was an offence to the eyes of his senior officers.«⁶⁴ In contrast to some of his superiors, Lawrence seemed to be really interested in the fate of the Arab people, and it was during a guerilla war against the Ottoman Army in the Middle East that he received his nickname of »Prince Dynamite«⁶⁵ before he would become known to the world as Lawrence of Arabia. His story was eventually filled with legends and stereotypes, which were particularly strong in the film about him that premiered in 1962, with Peter O'Toole (1932–2013) becoming the incarnation of T. E. Lawrence for a wide audience. The film tends to highlight the ambivalence of the famous man; when the journalist Jackson Bentley, who had accompanied Lawrence during the war, said that »[Lawrence] was a poet, a scholar and a

62 This kind of super-masculinity, however, is not an exclusively Western phenomenon. See Man-Fung Yip, *Martial Arts Cinema and Hong Kong Modernity: Aesthetics, Representation, Circulation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 24.

63 On the man and the myth see, among others, James Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire: T. E. Lawrence and Britain's Secret War in Arabia, 1916–1918* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Nicholas J. Saunders, *Desert Insurgency: Archaeology, T. E. Lawrence, and the Arab Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

64 David Garnett, ed., *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 182.

65 *Ibid.*, 184.

mighty warrior,« he then adds that »[h]e was also the most shameless exhibitionist since Barnum and Bailey.«⁶⁶ When Lawrence is depicted receiving the order to go and find Prince Feisal in the desert, he cheers, but Mr. Dryden, a diplomat from the Arab Bureau, warns him about the venture: »Lawrence, only two kinds of creature get fun in the desert: Bedouins and gods. And you're neither. ... For ordinary men, it's a burning, fiery furnace.«⁶⁷ Since Herbert was probably not only familiar with Lawrence's history but also the film, both seem to be important sources for his novel, especially since there are important similarities between Paul of Arrakis and Lawrence of Arabia. The present chapter therefore intends to take a closer look at these two characters to show which elements of the historical Lawrence might have had an impact on the creation of the fictional Paul.

Just as Paul is challenging the rule of the Harkonnens on Arrakis, Lawrence, during the early period of the war, is thinking about the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East in similar ways, as he »wanted to root them [the Ottoman rulers] out of Syria, and now their blight will be more enduring than ever.«⁶⁸ However, internal quarrels about the most suitable policy in the region destroyed his plan to take over Damascus quickly to push the French out of Syria.⁶⁹ In the early years of the First World War, Lawrence's »own hopes for promoting a rebellion of Mesopotamian Arabs against the Turks and for co-operation between them and the British Army came to nothing. The last thing that the British Indian Army officers wanted was the Arabs as allies. And the Indian administration was looking forward to annexation.«⁷⁰ Just as Lawrence had understood that a war in the Middle East needed the support of the Arab tribes, Paul realizes in *Dune* that an alliance with the Fremen is of utter importance on Arrakis. The

66 *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962, dir. David Lean).

67 *Ibid.*

68 Letter to Mrs. Fontana, Oxford, October 19, 1914, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 186–187, here 187.

69 Letter to D. G. Hogarth, Port Said, March 22, 1915, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 195–196.

70 Garnett, *The Letters*, 202.

tension between the Arab natives and the Ottoman occupiers was historically as intense⁷¹ as the one that was so endemic with regard to the relationship between the Harkonnen rulers and the exploited Fremmen. Lawrence also described the region as such as harsh and hard to live in for non-natives, a description that would fit for Arrakis, too: »It will be a wonderful country some day, when they regulate the floods, and dig out the irrigation ditches. Yet it will never be a really pleasant country, or a country where Europeans can live a normal life.«⁷² Feisal, one of the sons of the Sherif of Mecca, prominently portrayed in the film by Sir Alec Guinness (1914–2000), confirms this view on the cinema screen as well when he says that Lawrence might only be another »desert-loving English« on the search for adventure: »No Arab loves the desert. We love water and green trees.«⁷³

When the revolt of the Sherif of Mecca began in June 1916,⁷⁴ Lawrence must have felt that another chance to undertake his ambitious plans in the Middle East was presenting itself. That he would eventually be sent to get in contact with Feisal and that he was able to mobilize the Arab forces to wage a guerilla war against the Ottoman Empire was the base for the legends that would later be attached to his person, but it was, without any doubt, also inspiration for Herbert's novel.

In *Dune*, the time also seems to be ripe for a revolution against Harkonnen rule, and just as Lawrence seems to be an important aspect of the Arab success, Paul's appearance is a trigger for the successful guerilla war of the Fremmen against the Harkonnens.⁷⁵ The orientalist semiotics are in this regard therefore also greatly highlighted by the environment, i. e. a desert, where the events take place.⁷⁶ However,

71 Letter to his mother, May 18, 1916, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 203–208, here 206.

72 Ibid., 208.

73 *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962, dir. David Lean). Later in the film, Lawrence explains why he loves the desert: »It's clean.«

74 Garnett, *The Letters*, 210.

75 »Dune: Interview with Dietmar Dath.«

76 Karin Christina Ryding, »The Arabic of *Dune*: Language and Landscape,« in *Language in Place: Stylistic Perspectives on Landscape, Place and Environment*, eds.



Fig. 1: T.E. Lawrence; T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 73535.

while the British officer coordinates the military actions of the indigenous people and in a way solely uses their potential in the name and for the sake of the British Empire, which Lawrence initially seems to have wanted to avoid so as to create an independent Middle East instead, Paul not only uses the Fremen locally but leads them straight into an intergalactic jihad. Other Western powers had tried to exploit the idea of a holy war of the Muslims against foreign rule before, but Lawrence acted rather pragmatically, and Feisal seemed politically experienced enough not to mix religion and politics. While Paul is also the center of a myth related to his military victories and his final

Daniela Francesca Viridis, Elisabetta Zurru, and Ernestine Lahey (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2021), 106–123.

transformation into the Kwisatz Haderach, this myth is destroyed by Herbert in the second novel.

Dune, although it clearly shows some resemblances to the story about Lawrence, is, however, not »a mere copy of the story of Lawrence of Arabia with some science-fictional window dressing.«⁷⁷ Of course, superficially, the stories look very much alike. Two foreigners move into desert lands where they find indigenous people who are ready for rebellion against exploitative rulers. Both lead them to military victory, yet while Lawrence was really interested in providing the Arab people with their own choice for the future, Paul is leading the Fremen into a holy war against the whole universe instead. Regardless of these differences, Herbert, maybe too influenced by orientalist semiotics about religiously motivated violence and the jihad, »saw messianic overtones in Lawrence's story and the possibility for outsiders to manipulate a culture according to their own purposes.«⁷⁸ These overtones, however, might relate to the film rather than Lawrence's actual experiences, although *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*,⁷⁹ Lawrence's most well-known description of his time with the Arab people, is sometimes also written in an almost prophetic tone. Since the story of Lawrence itself, told in many ways and by numerous authorities, be they journalists⁸⁰ or historians,⁸¹ however, became part of the Western semiotic system about the Middle East, it is not surprising to find similarities between the events related to the

77 Kara Kennedy, »Lawrence of Arabia, Paul Atreides, and the Roots of Frank Herbert's *Dune*,« *tor.com*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.tor.com/2021/06/02/lawrence-of-arabia-paul-atreides-and-the-roots-of-frank-herberts-dune/>.

78 Ibid.

79 Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*.

80 Lowell Thomas, *With Lawrence in Arabia* (New York/London: Century, 1924). Thomas also contradicted rumors related to speculations about Lawrence supposedly having turned Muslim during his time in the Middle East: »Another ›bazaar rumor‹ that has been going the rounds is to the effect that Colonel Lawrence has renounced Christianity and turned Mohammedan. This also is the offspring of some feverish imagination! From what I saw of Lawrence I rather believe that he is a better Christian than the most of us.« Ibid., viii.

81 Basil H. Liddell Hart, *T. E. Lawrence: In Arabia and After* (London: Cape, 1934).

First World War in the region and the war Paul is leading the Fremmen into in Herbert's novel.

Lawrence's story gained momentum once Lowell Thomas (1892–1981), an American journalist, made the events in the Middle East known to a larger audience as part of other travelogues related to his experiences during the First World War.⁸² While Lawrence had a rather ambivalent perception of his own role, especially as somebody whose work was related to the war effort of the British Empire, even though he wanted to secure the Arabs' interests and eventually independence,⁸³ in the public perception of his activities, he was the lonely white hero among savage people. His successes stimulated the Western idea that people in the Middle East needed a »white savior« figure to actually achieve something.⁸⁴ For Lawrence himself, as he later emphasized in *Seven Pillars*, »[i]t was an Arab war waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia.«⁸⁵ Similarly, his own relationship with the Arab people and the Bedouins he lived and fought with was much more complex, and the former and Lawrence must have felt betrayed by the course history took, regardless of their achievements during the second half of the war: »We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew.«⁸⁶ In the end, Lawrence confessed that he »was continually and bitterly ashamed« of the way his superiors and the British politicians would exploit the Arab people, a clear difference between him and Paul, as the latter only frees the Fremmen to use their military potential for his own advantage. The Duke of House Atreides consequently falls more

82 Clio Visualizing History, *Lowell Thomas and Lawrence of Arabia: Making a Legend, Creating History*, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.cliohistory.org/thomas-lawrence>.

83 Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 23.

84 Kennedy, »Lawrence of Arabia.«

85 Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 21.

86 *Ibid.*, 22.

in line with the political nature of British foreign policy in the Middle East than Lawrence actually did. Until the end of his Arab dream, the latter had hoped »that, by leading these Arabs madly in the final victory I would establish them, with arms in their hands, in a position so assured (if not dominant) that expediency would counsel to the Great Powers a fair settlement of their claims.«⁸⁷

However, when it comes to blending in with a foreign and different culture, Lawrence's experiences, in a way, seem to be closer to the ones Paul went through on Arrakis. Life in the desert was hard for both men, but it was essential for their respective adaptations. Lawrence described the life of his army in the desert as follows:

For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silence of stars. We were a self-centered army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man's creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.⁸⁸

There are also differences with regard to the acceptance of the foreign intruder. While Paul was protected in a way by the *Missionaria Protectoriva* of the *Bene Gesserit*, Lawrence had to gain acceptance first: »I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe to their beliefs, but charged by duty to lead them forward.«⁸⁹ However, the life of the Arab people, as well as that of the *Fremen*, was quite harsh, or as Lawrence formulated it: »Bedouin ways were hard even for those brought up to them, and for strangers, terrible: a death in life.«⁹⁰ While Paul never really questions his identity, which is an

87 Ibid., 24.

88 Ibid., 27.

89 Ibid., 28.

90 Ibid., 29.

amalgamation of his roles as Duke of House Atreides, Paul Muad'Dib, and Kwisatz Haderach, Lawrence ultimately seems to have been more bothered by his existence among the Bedouins as a foreign intruder:

A man who gives himself to be a possession of aliens leads a Yahoo life, having bartered his soul to a brute-master. He is not of them. He may stand against them, persuade himself of a mission, batter and twist them into something which they, of their own accord, would not have been. Then he is exploiting his old environment to press them out of theirs. Or, after my model, he may imitate them so well that they spuriously imitate him back again. ... In my case, the efforts for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other.⁹¹

The idea of the »white savior« was consequently nothing that Lawrence himself considered but was instead interwoven with his story through the audience's perception. Although this semiotic image also can be perceived by the readers of *Dune* or those who watch the films, it is more actively transported by the way the heroic figure, i. e. Paul Atreides, acts. This orientalist semiotic, related to the idea that Middle Eastern people need Western leadership to be successful, has never disappeared from the screen—nobody so far has thought of a black Paul saving white natives yet—and it will continue to appear as long as existent stereotypes that continue the replication of orientalist semiotics are applied by film-makers and expected by the respective reading or viewing audiences. Emmet Asher-Perrin emphasizes this when he states that

91 Ibid., 29–30.



Fig. 2: View of the desert near Wejh; T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 59014.



Fig. 3: T.E. Lawrence, n.d.; T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 59314.

Hollywood has a penchant for the white savior trope, and it forms the basis for plenty of big-earning, award-winning films. Looking back on blockbusters like *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Avatar*, and *The Last Samurai*, the list piles up for movies in which a white person can alleviate the suffering of people of color—sometimes disguised as blue aliens for the purpose of sci-fi trappings—by being specially chosen somehow to aid in their struggles.⁹²

These films continue a literary tradition in which earlier novels had adopted ideas about white men who entered a culturally different space in which they would act as the saviors of savage and inferior people who could not free themselves. This idea of exporting one's own revolutionary past to other parts of the world might have played into the sustainability of this particular narrative as well, especially in the United States, although other revolutionaries, e.g. in Cuba in the late 19th century, were soon to be identified as inferior due to racist stereotypes and the realization that while the rebellious Cubans were trying to get rid of European colonial rule, they were themselves not white like the American revolutionaries were considered to have been.⁹³

Herbert intended to use Paul as a figure to criticize hopes related to the expectation of a super hero or a super being, but this criticism does not really evolve in *Dune* itself but later on during the series.⁹⁴ The similarities between Lawrence's depictions of the Arab people, which in a way also resemble the ideas of inferior races and peoples as an intrinsic element of the British Empire and its self-perception, and the Fremen, who seem to be hardly more than a suitable tool

92 Emmet Asher-Perrin, »Why It's Important to Consider Whether *Dune* Is a White Savior Narrative,« *tor.com*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.tor.com/2019/03/06/why-its-important-to-consider-whether-dune-is-a-white-savior-narrative/>.

93 For a detailed survey and a critical source edition, see Frank Jacob, *George Kennan on the Spanish-American War: A Critical Edition of »Cuba and the Cubans«* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

94 Asher-Perrin, »Why It's Important.«

for exploitation to serve Paul's political agenda, are hardly surprising. Whether Paul is a good leader might be questioned by the reader or the viewer at the end, but that he actually led the Fremmen cannot be doubted. Lawrence described the people of the Middle East as simple, yet radical in a sense, when he later stated that

Semites had not half-tones in their register of vision. They were people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were a dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings. They knew only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades. ... Their thoughts were at ease only in extremes. They inhabited superlatives by choice. ... They were a limited, narrow-minded people, whose inert intellects lay fallow in incurious resignation. Their imaginations were vivid, but not creative. ... The Bed[o]uin of the desert, born and grown up in it, had embraced with all his soul this nakedness too harsh for volunteers, for the reason, felt but inarticulate, that there he found himself indubitably free. He lost material ties, comforts, all superfluities and other complications to achieve a personal liberty which haunted starvation and death.⁹⁵

The simplicity of the Arab people is considered by Lawrence to be the consequence of their actual living environment, which leaves hardly any room for »human effort.«⁹⁶ At the same time, the British officer understood the cultural differences that were a result of the Arabs' way of life: »His desert was made a spiritual icehouse, in which was preserved intact but unimproved for all ages a vision of the unity of God. To it sometimes the seekers from the outer world could escape for a season and look thence in detachment at the nature of the gen-

⁹⁵ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 36–38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

eration they would convert.«⁹⁷ At the same time, Lawrence emphasized that the »Arabs could be swung on an idea as on a cord; for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants.«⁹⁸ While he argued he had acted on behalf of their interests, in this statement, it is visible that Lawrence also realized how these people could be exploited by false leaders and promises, something that was not stressed to the utmost in Herbert's *Dune*, although similar concerns were expressed in later volumes.

Like in the novel, however, the experience of »[s]uppression charged the [Arab people] with unhealthy violence. Deprived of constitutional outlets they became revolutionary. The Arab societies went underground, and changed from liberal clubs into conspiracies.«⁹⁹ In *Dune*, it is exactly this situation that forces the Fremen to resist against the Harkonnens on Arrakis, a resistance that was eventually shared by the former and the »voice from the outer world,« Paul, the Lisan al-Gaib. The Fremen culture in itself is consequently used by Herbert to craft yet another »noble savage« image that falls in line with »the narrative's juxtaposition of their militant austerity with their susceptibility to being used by powerful people who understand their mythology well enough to exploit it.«¹⁰⁰ The Fremen seem to have no real political consciousness because although they deal with their life in the desert and their relation with the worms, they were obviously not able to defeat the Harkonnens. It needed the appearance of one man to solve this problem, to use the full power of the desert for his personal advantage, in some way also applying the almost Machiavellian formula »the enemy of my enemy is my friend«¹⁰¹ that was

97 Ibid., 40.

98 Ibid., 41.

99 Ibid., 44.

100 Asher-Perrin, »Why It's Important.«

101 The phrase in some variation even goes back to the ancient »Indian Machiavelli« Kautilya, who described such a situation in Book VI of his *Arthashastra*. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, trans. R. Shamasastri (Bangalore: Government Press, 1915), 319–325, accessed November 27, 2021, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/oolitlinks/kautilya/booko6.htm>.

applied by so many colonial invaders, maybe most prominently by Hernán Cortés (1485–1547).¹⁰²

The choices made by Herbert to build Arrakis in his imagination were not really unbiased, and even if he intended to create something that would focus on the anti-colonial struggles of his time and of the first half of the 20th century, the perspectives he provides are still very much attached to a Eurocentric or Western-centered worldview that had been so dominant in the centuries before. While intending to decolonialize his universe, Herbert was not fully able to decolonialize his own mind—at least when he wrote *Dune*, as later novels in the series seem to highlight his awareness about this fact. Emmet Asher-Perrin outlined that fans defend these sometimes antiquated views by pointing out that the novel was written decades ago, and therefore the time of its creation can be considered »as an explanation for some of its more dated attitudes toward race, gender, queerness, and other aspects of identity.«¹⁰³ However, the adaptations of the novel in later years, and this includes the film from 2021, did not stop replicating the orientalist semiotics of the work, and thereby also continued to represent images related to Lawrence of Arabia in an unfiltered and still heavily orientalist version to the global audience of the 21st century. Both Lawrence and Paul are able to blend in, but they never change their identity to the fullest. In the last resort, they will remain the foreigner or the outsider. They will not adapt themselves to the world they entered, but they will try to activate the people's power in that context to fit their own needs, although Lawrence at least later stated that he had the intention to work on behalf of an independent Arab nation. This exploitative element becomes particularly obvious when the focus is put on »desert power.« The way the Fremen under Paul's leadership wage war against the Harkonnens was without any doubt inspired by the reports about Lawrence's military campaigns and successes in the Middle East.

102 Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

103 Asher-Perrin, »Why It's Important.«

Lawrence needed to unify the Arab tribes to follow Sheikh Feisal and to support his rebellious bid against Ottoman rule. The Fremen were equally important for Paul's bid for power, although they did not need unification and were rather religiously and ideologically radicalized by the young Duke. The concept of desert power, however, is a clear reference to Lawrence, and the worms are almost like an allegory of the camel forces used by the British officer and his men to constantly attack the Ottoman supply lines in different places and with great speed between their respective actions. In a way, they also resemble the fast and unexpectedly attacking force represented by the timeless travel of the Kwisatz Haderach, as »Camel raiding parties, self-contained like ships, might cruise confidently along the enemy's cultivation-frontier, sure of an unhindered retreat into their desert-element which the Turks could not explore.«¹⁰⁴ Paul, who proves his own worth to the Fremen by riding the worm on a planetary scale, uses the latter like Lawrence used the camels to overcome the desert and attack the Harkonnen spice production, severely damaging the spice supplies for the whole universe. The military actions, as well as their impact, are therefore obviously quite similar.

In *Dune*, desert power is essential, and Leto referred to it early on with regard to what is necessary to rule on Arrakis:

»Our supremacy on Caladan,« the Duke said, »depended on sea and air power. Here, we must develop something I choose to call desert power. This may include air power, but it's possible it may not. I call your attention to the lack of ›thopter shields.« He shook his head. »The Harkonnens relied on turnover from off planet for some of their key personnel. We don't dare. Each new lot would have its quota of provocateurs.«¹⁰⁵

104 T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Alden Press, 1946), 345, cited in Kennedy, »Lawrence of Arabia.«

105 Herbert, *Dune*. Quote taken from <http://readonlinefreebook.com/dune/c-six>, accessed November 27, 2021.



Fig. 4: Stilgar explaining how to ride the sandworm on Arrakis to Paul, *Dune* (1984).



Fig. 5: Lawrence on a Camel, Akaba, n.d.; T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 60212.

Ultimately, this desert power is not solely based on the Fremen but also, and equally as much, on the worms, who present, as the camels did for Lawrence, the means of transportation, powerful support for the final attack on Arakeen, the capital of the planet, and the source of valuable resources, i. e. spice in the case of the worms and meat in the case of the camels, if food was more important than transportation.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore not surprising that both men had to prove their ability to actually ride these animals in order to be fully accepted by the respective indigenous people.

Just as life on Arrakis depended on the worms, the lives of the Arab people and the success of Lawrence's operations depended on camels, as »[t]he economic life of the desert was based on the supply of camels, which were best bred on the rigorous upland pastures with their strong nutritive thorns. ... The camel markets in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt determined the population which the deserts could support, and regulated strictly their standard of living.«¹⁰⁷ Initially, traveling on a camel was hard for Lawrence,¹⁰⁸ but the Arab forces were »mostly camel corps.«¹⁰⁹ In his letter to Colonel C. E. Wilson on 8 January 1917, Lawrence describes Faisal's troops in some detail, not forgetting to highlight how uncommon the appearance of this army might have been in the West:

The order of march was rather splendid and barbaric. Feisal in front, in white: Sharaf on his right in red headcloth and henna dyed tunic

106 T. E. Lawrence, »The Occupation of Akaba,« *Arab Bulletin* 59, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 231–236. »The situation at Akaba was now rather serious, economically. We had no food, 600 prisoners and many visitors in prospect. Meat was plentiful, since we had been killing riding camels as required, and there were unripe dates in the palm groves. These saved the day, but involved a good deal of discomfort after the eating, and the force in Akaba was very unhappy till the arrival of H. M. S. *Dufferin* on the 13th with food from Suez.« *Ibid.*, 236.

107 Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 34.

108 Letter to Colonel C. E. Wilson, Yenbo, December 6, 1916, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 211–213, here 212.

109 Letter to Colonel C. E. Wilson, January 8, 1917, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 214–221, here 217. The letter was also printed in *Arab Bulletin* 42.



Fig. 6–8: Images of Camels related to Lawrence's operations, 1916–1918; T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 59073, Q 58861 and Q 59018.

and cloak; myself on his left in white and red; behind us three banners of purple silk, with gold spikes; behind them three drummers playing a march, and behind them again, a wild bouncing mass of 1,200 camels of the bodyguard, all packed as closely as they could move, the men in every variety of coloured clothes, and the camels nearly as brilliant in their trappings, and the whole crowd singing at the tops of their voices a warsong in honour of Feisal and his family. It looked like a river of camels, for we filled up the Wadi to the tops of its banks, and poured along in a quarter of a mile long stream.¹¹⁰

In addition to this detailed image about the troops he had encountered, Lawrence also reports on the best possible strategy for using them in a war effort against the Ottoman Empire. In this moment, Lawrence seems to be thinking and reporting as a superior white officer of the British Empire. He writes that the Bedouins

still preserve their tribal instinct for independence of order, but they are curbing their habit of wasting ammunition, have achieved a sort of routine in matters of camping and marching, and when the Sherif approaches near they fall into line and make the low bow and sweep of the arm to the lips which is the official salute. ... Man by man they are good: I would suggest that the smaller the unit that is acting, the better will be its performance. A thousand of them in a mob would be ineffective against one fourth their number of trained troops.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, and especially since requests for tanks by Lawrence and Faisal had not been granted by the British War Office,¹¹² Lawrence

110 Ibid., 216–217.

111 Ibid., 217–218.

112 General Headquarters, Egypt to War Office, December 29, 1918, The National Archives, UK, Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies, WO 32/5729; Note by Major Maughan, December 30, 1918, The National Archives, UK, Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies, WO 32/5729.

had to fight a guerilla war, the same kind of war Paul began with the Fremens against the Harkonnens' spice production. While, in the Arabs' case, the Ottoman supply lines could be weakened,¹¹³ the steady attacks on the spice production eventually stimulated the development to move toward the final battle on Arrakis for the future of the universal empire.

What made Lawrence known as a military genius and more important for the overall campaign of the British military in the Middle East was his occupation of Akaba, a geostrategically important spot in modern-day Jordan.¹¹⁴ The Arabs had

needed to secure a base—they needed Akaba—but from his visit in 1914 he knew it was hopeless to take it from the sea, and impossible to march an army across the desert to take it in the rear. But what an army could not do, a band of enthusiasts might attempt with some hope of success. Lawrence therefore decided to cross the desert with Auda Abu Tayi who recently joined the Arab Revolt, with a small party, to raise the northern tribes and take Akaba in the rear.¹¹⁵

Lawrence had therefore crossed the desert with a couple of men, in itself a sheer unimaginable act, and then began to recruit Arab tribesmen in the region around Akaba;¹¹⁶ by 18 June 1917, he had enrolled »535 Toweiha (of whom twenty-five were horsemen), about 150 Rualla ... and Sherarat ..., and thirty-five Kawachiba ... Of these we chose nearly 200 and left them as guards for the tribal tents in Wadi Sirhan. With the rest we marched out of Kaf in the afternoon, and on

113 Letter to Colonel C.E. Wilson, Wejh, March 9, 1917, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 222–223.

114 On the events related to the sacking of Akaba, see Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 234–321.

115 Garnett, *The Letters*, 223–224.

116 Extract of a report on Captain T.E. Lawrence's journey from WJH to NEHL—1,300 miles—contained in a letter from Sir R. Wingate to Sir William Robertson, July 11, 1917, The National Archives, UK, Records of the Cabinet Office, CAB 45/76, 1.

[20] June ... entered Bair.«¹¹⁷ The men stayed there until 28 June, further negotiating with local tribes, i. e. »the smaller sub-sections of the Howeitat on the Akaba road.«¹¹⁸ The Battle of Aba el-Lissan, where Ottoman troops camped near a well, was in reality more important and less glorious than the assault on Akaba that was later overemphasized in the film about Lawrence. The Arab tribesmen had taken the higher ground on 2 July and were

sniping the Turks steadily all day, and inflicted some loss. The Turks replied with shrapnel from a mountain gun, firing twenty rounds, which were all they had. The shells grazed our hill-tops, and burst far away over the valleys behind. When sunset came, Auda Abu Tayi collected fifty horsemen now with us, in a hollow valley about 200 yards from the Turks, but under cover, and suddenly charged at a wild gallop into the brown of them, shooting furiously from the saddle as he came. The unexpectedness of the move seemed to strike panic into the Turks (about 550 strong), and after a burst of rifle fire, they scattered in all directions. This was our signal, and all the rest of our force (perhaps 350 men ...) dashed down the hillsides into the hollow, as fast as the camels would go. The Turks were all infantry, and the Arabs all mounted, and the mix-up round the spring in the dusk, with 1,000 men shooting like mad, was considerable. As the Turks scattered, their position at once became hopeless, and in five minutes it was merely a massacre. In all I counted 300 enemy dead in the main position, and a few fugitives may have been killed further away, though the majority of our men went straight for the Turkish camp to plunder it, before the last shots were fired.¹¹⁹

The Arab assault was actually quite dangerous, and Sheikh Auda Abu Tayi, who would later be portrayed by Anthony Quinn, only »had a

117 T.E. Lawrence, »The Occupation of Akaba,« *Arab Bulletin* 59, in Garnett, *The Letters*, 231–236, here 231.

118 *Ibid.*, 232.

119 *Ibid.*, 233.

narrow escape, since two bullets smashed his field glasses, one pierced his revolver holster, three struck his sheathed sword, and his horse was killed under him. He was wildly pleased with the whole affair.«¹²⁰ The Ottoman soldiers who had actually been taken prisoner did not survive long on the road due to the lack of water and food and an insufficient number of camels. Akaba was eventually handed over to Lawrence and his men by Sherif Nasir on 6 July 1917, especially since the latter wanted to avoid a massacre. So, on this day, Lawrence triumphantly entered the city and would soon enough be well-known for this military success.¹²¹ The same day, Lawrence and eight men left the city and arrived in El Shatt in Egypt three days later to give an immediate report about the events, although he was »somewhat exhausted by 1,300 miles on a camel in the last 30 days.«¹²² The news about Lawrence's victory spread fast, and his achievement was considered a »very remarkable performance, calling for a display of courage, resource, and endurance which is conspicuous even in these days when gallant deeds are of daily occurrence.«¹²³

Herbert, maybe also more drawn by the visualization of Lawrence's story on the big screen, uses the worms as an essential part of the Fremens' final military attack on Arakeen, where the shield wall is destroyed by an atomic attack and opens the way for the worms to transport the Fremens on their backs to the battle zone, while they also are part of some kind of hammer and anvil tactic that could be compared with Alexander the Great's (356–323 BCE) cavalry attacks against the Persian armies.¹²⁴ The sandworms »handily plow through

120 Ibid., 234.

121 Letter to General Clayton, Cairo, July 10, 1917, S. 225–231. S. 228 L1

122 Extract of a report on Captain T. E. Lawrence's journey from WJH to NEHL—1,300 miles—contained in a letter from Sir. R. Wingate to Sir William Robertson, July 11, 1917, The National Archives, Records of the Cabinet Office, CAB 45/76, 2.

123 Ibid., 2.

124 Frank Jacob, »Der Aufstieg Makedoniens: Eine Erfolgsgeschichte antiker Kavallerie,« in *Pferde in der Geschichte: Begleiter in der Schlacht, Nutztiere, literarische Inspiration*, ed. Frank Jacob (Marburg: Büchner, 2016), 19–38.



Fig. 9: The triumphal entry into Akaba, 6 July 1917, T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 59193.

the Emperor's forces in their surprise appearance,¹²⁵ almost like a massive wall of camels when they hit the enemy lines during a full-speed advance.¹²⁶ As efficient mounted forces, the description of the sandworms and their final attack consequently closely match Lawrence's story about camels and their use during his campaigns.

However, it is not only their use of animals in a traditional way but the combination of this with knowledge that is related to either Lawrence or Paul that secures the Arab and Fremen victories, respectively. It therefore seems like both men act as a link between the impe-

125 Kennedy cites Herbert's description of the sandworms' attack: «Out of the sand haze came an orderly mass of flashing shapes—great rising curves with crystal spokes that resolved into the gaping mouths of sandworms, a massed wall of them, each with troops of Fremen riding to the attack. They came in a hissing wedge, robes whipping in the wind as they cut through the melee on the plain.» Herbert, *Dune*, 464, cited in Kennedy, «Lawrence of Arabia.»

126 Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 145.



Fig. 10: Ageyl bodyguard, n.d., T.E. Lawrence Collection, Imperial War Museum, Q 58858B.

rial worlds both represent and the indigenous one the two men dive deep into. Lawrence's superiors also had no doubt at all that it was the part played by the British officers that was decisive for victory, an aspect that Herbert, consciously or unconsciously, also emphasized, as the Fremen only began to be successful in their military operations after Paul joined them.

General Sir Reginald Wingate (1861–1953), for example, in his description of the successes of the military operations between June 1917 and June 1918, was not hesitant to explain why the Arab forces were so efficient, and so his report shall be quoted here in some detail:

Throughout September and October the railway was again subjected to constant attack at various points between Tebuk and Medina, resulting in the effective dislocation of traffic and inflicting upon the enemy considerable loss in material and personnel. ... Although the record of these operations thus briefly surveyed contains few mili-

tary achievements of outstanding importance, yet the general results attained by the persistent aggression of the Arab's against the enemy's communications must not be under-estimated. ... Constantly harassed by a mobile and almost invulnerable enemy, the moral and material pressure to which the enemy has, during the past twelve months, been continuously subjected, may be estimated by the fact that between Tebuk and Medina during this period an aggregate of more than fifteen thousand rails, fifty two culverts and five bridges have been destroyed, two trains have been completely wrecked with electric mines, several station buildings and considerable quantities of rolling stock have been burnt, communication by telegraph and telephone has been interrupted almost daily, four hundred and fifty Turkish dead have been buried by the Arabs and nearly double that number of prisoners taken, whilst material captures during the same period include five field guns, four machine guns, nearly one thousand rifles and large quantities of ammunition, in addition to £.T.25,000 in Turkish gold, and several big convoys conveying live-stock and supplies to Medina from the east. ... Such success as the Arabs have achieved must be attributed largely [orig. almost entirely] to the unsparing efforts of the British and Allied Officers attached to the Sherifian forces, to whom, working often under intensely trying conditions of climate, [erased: and constantly obstructed by native jealousy and incapacity,] have been due to the conception, the organization and, in great measure, the execution of these operations.¹²⁷

A similar impression is generated in *Dune*, where the Fremen seemed to be unable to free themselves from foreign rule before Paul arrived to deliver their »liberation.« The image of the indigenous people in Herbert's novel consequently remains in some way a romanticized one: »The overall characterization of the Fremen may be considered

127 Report by General Sir Reginald Wingate on military operations conducted by the King of Hedjaz, June 1917—June 1918, Ramleh, June 15, 1918, The National Archives, Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies, WO 32/5577, 5–11.

an overly romantic vision of Arab Bedouin society: long, flowing robes and dark or tanned skin; the practice of polygamy; values such as honor, trust, and bravery; and tribes that live primitive and simple lives in response to a brutal environment.«¹²⁸ As Lawrence, Paul accepts that he needs these indigenous people to be successful militarily, but the latter often remain limited, in the sense that, when depicted by Lawrence and Herbert alike, they remind the reader of the »noble savage.«¹²⁹

In contrast to these indigenous leaders, Paul and Lawrence—at least the one in the film—develop some kind of hubris as well, as they consider themselves to be superior beings, ones that are in control of everything and are thereby unable to fail.

In reality, Lawrence was rather burnt out, especially since »every year out in Arabia counts ten.«¹³⁰ The British officer actually confessed in a letter to a friend on 24 September 1917 that »I'm not going to last out this game much longer: nerves going and temper wearing thin, and one wants an unlimited account of both.«¹³¹ Lawrence felt that he needed to explain why he felt this way in some detail, which he did as follows:

... on a show so narrow and voracious as this one loses one's past and one's balance and becomes hopelessly self-centered. I don't think I ever think except about shop, and I'm quite certain I never do anything else. That must be my excuse for dropping everyone, and I hope when the nightmare ends that I will wake up and become alive again. This killing and killing of Turks is horrible. When you charge in at

128 Kennedy, »Lawrence of Arabia.«

129 When Paul first meets Stilgar, such an image is created: »A tall, robed figure stood in the door ... A light tan robe completely enveloped the man except for a gap in the hood and black veil that exposed eyes of total blue—no white in them at all ... In the waiting silence, Paul studied the man, sensing the aura of power that radiated from him. He was a leader—a *Fremen* leader.« Herbert, *Dune* [1984], 92, cited in *ibid.*

130 Letter to a Friend, Akaba, September 24, 1917, in *ibid.*, 237–238, here 237.

131 *Ibid.*, 238.

the finish and find them all over the place in bits, and still alive many of them, and know that you have done hundreds in the same way before and must do hundreds more if you can.¹³²

For Paul, on the other hand, it is violence that paves his way to become the Kwisatz Haderach, something that is emphasized in the film directed by Denis Villeneuve as well. Paul has to kill a man to be accepted by the Fremen and to be able to rise as the super being in the future. He continues by killing Harkonnens and, in the end, only fears being unable to contain the jihad of the Fremen, a fear not shared by Lawrence at all, especially since religious aspects are relatively absent in the latter's writings. Regardless of these differences, however, it is safe to argue that Herbert was inspired in multiple ways by the story of and about T. E. Lawrence, and he used several elements of it when he crafted Paul's relationship with the Fremen. However, Herbert did not always consider the historical but rather and primarily the imagined Lawrence when he found inspiration for life on and the war for Arrakis. Furthermore, the jihad that Paul is worried about might actually have been inspired by the conflicts in the Middle East that were created after Lawrence of Arabia had motivated the Arab tribesmen to join the rebellion against the Ottoman rulers.

Conclusion

Every new generation might be attracted to *Dune* because it is so rich in motifs and topics that do not lose any of their actuality. While readers today will probably relate more to the ecological aspects of Herbert's work, those who read it in earlier decades might have been drawn into the *Dune* universe due to its resemblance with the history of »Lawrence of Arabia.« Herbert was not really trying to write SF, although the universe he built supposedly exists thousands of years

¹³² Ibid.

in the future. Inspired by semantics, religions, and other aspects, like considerations about political power and leadership, Herbert offers the reader a fascinating yet at the same time somehow familiar world to dive into.

However, the author, consciously or unconsciously, also adopted a lot of orientalist semiotics that had been circulating in Western popular culture and the cultural imagination of Western readers for quite a long time. While Herbert's novel seems to lead directly into the post-colonial struggles of the post-Second World War world and the global conflicts related to anti-colonial movements—often perceived as a menace, a global jihad leading to the clash of civilizations Huntington later predicted—and caused by a long history of abuse and exploitation, *Dune* actually replicates many stereotypes about the Middle East and its peoples. Although the Fremen can be considered to be suppressed indigenous people who eventually rise in rebellion, they are led by Paul Atreides, a heroic figure who clearly represents a »white savior« narrative, which had been forged in close connection with the stories about T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt during the First World War, and which continued to be displayed that way on the big silver screen in 2021 as well.

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