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Contextualizing *Harry Potter* as a Narrative of the Third Reich: A Reading in Identity Politics

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ABSTRACT

The aim of fantasy fiction is rarely to talk about a fantastical world, rather, its function is to evoke everyday issues. The Harry Potter series evokes political issues from the Second World War to critique the politics of eugenics, and discrimination. A cross-cultural and cross-temporal study reveals a nuanced appraise on identity politics, in the garb of fantasy fiction. Riddled amidst these political issues is the authorial figure that attempts to politicize a children's fiction.

Key Words : Harry Potter, Second World War, Eugenics, Identity, JK Rowling, Children's Fiction, Fantasy Fiction

INTRODUCTION

The *Harry Potter*[1] series is and perhaps will remain, one of the most celebrated fantasy fictions of our time. The bildungsroman of Harry Potter and the wizarding world envisaged by British author Joanne Kathleen Rowling is one of the most stunning tales that the fantasy fiction genre has had to offer, and yes, fantasy fiction is the genre in which the series is most often contextualized. The obvious question that comes to the mind is, what has the *Harry Potter* series got to do with the Third Reich? After all, the events of the series are set in circa 1990's, over fifty years after Second World War ended.

However, long after the war ended in 1945, the events and horrors of the Second World War have acted as an inspiration for several children's fiction writers. The fantastic appeal of the *Harry Potter* series notwithstanding, there are several underlying references to intense political and philosophical ideologies that Rowling alludes to. One could say that the series that began with being a work of children's fiction ended being much more than merely that. Just like other major children's fiction writers, such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, Rowling too encompassed several serious debates and themes in her writing.

With the background in place, the theme which I will focus on is, the *Harry Potter* series as an allegory for the Third Reich; Lord Voldemort is to the wizarding world what Adolf Hitler was to the 1940s Europe. Moreover, we will try and understand the author's motive behind such a comparison and question the politics of politicization of children's fiction.

Since I have undertaken a cross-cultural and cross-temporal study to link two ostensibly disparate phenomena, it is essential to justify such a comparison. Moreover, it is essential to assert that it is beneficial to make such a comparison for serious discursive assessment since the *Harry Potter* series has become a renowned and prominent body in the field of fantasy fiction and is an intrinsic part of the popular culture.

To start the comparison, the view of Hitler and 'National Socialism' (Stone 25), better known as the Nazism, on eugenics was distinctly similar to that of Voldemort and his band of Death Eaters in *Harry Potter*. Their belief was that some races are superior to others and hence they should indulge in copulation only amongst

1. Refers to the *Harry Potter,* series, a set of seven books written by the British author J.K. Rowling.

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themselves to yield healthy offspring. Coitus with any other races was considered against 'racial hygiene'. Extermination of the undesired races was propagated in both the weltanschauungs. The comparison between Hitler and Voldemort seems lucid when we consider that the former believed the Aryan race as the most superior race, and that to maintain its purity, ethnic cleansing was required, and Voldemort had similar ideas about the superiority of wizarding people, those with 'pure-blood'.

While Hitler 'cleansed' Jews, gypsies, and Slavs to maintain purity of the bloodline, Voldemort did the same for muggles, muggle-borns (referred to by the derogatory 'mud bloods'), half-breeds and blood-traitors. Also, the formation of the superior army of the Dark Lord in Harry Potter, called Death Eaters, is very similar to the *Schutzstaffel* (Protective Squadron) of the Nazi regime of Hitler.

In his biography of Hitler, Norman Stone says, "Over sixty years after Adolf Hitler came to power, it is time for a reassessment of the legendary figure who rose from such an ignominious childhood to change the course of history" (20). One can see that there is a distinct similarity in the upbringing and the "ignominious childhood" from where both Hitler and Voldemort emerged. Voldemort was born with the name of Tom Marvolo Riddle. His father was a muggle and mother, a wizard. Her mother was a descendant from the pure bloodline of Salazar Slytherin[2] . After his father deserted them and his mother died of poverty immediately after giving birth to him, Tom Riddle was brought up in an orphanage. Later, when he learns the true identity of his father[3] , he kills him. Thereafter, he does away with his father's name and lineage, and rechristens himself as Lord Voldemort.

Similarly, according to Stone, Hitler was born an "illegitimate son of a housemaid, Anna Schicklgrubler in a poor rural district, and he could not even be sure who his father was … There is at any rate no foundation for the rumour, still current, that the real father was a Jew in whose household Anna Schicklgrubler served" (Stone 20). He later grew up to ascribe himself with the title Führer,[4] with which he was called in the later part of his life.

To cite more examples, the overpowering of the Ministry of Magic in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is similar to the way Hitler overtook the Weimar Republic in 1933. The attitude of Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic, to the threat of Voldemort was distinctly similar to that of Neville Chamberlain. The denial of Fudge has a resonance with Chamberlain's speech of "peace in our time". After Chamberlain, Churchill came into power and dealt with the threat of Nazism which more authority. Likewise, in the magical world of *Harry Potter*, Fudge gave way to Rufus Scrimgeour, who took the threat of Voldemort much more seriously.

Voldemort calls the dementors and giants his "natural allies" (Rowling 2000, 564), an exact phrase that Hitler used to describe the Italians. The idea of brandishing a swastika and a dark mark[5] is alike too. The final act of Hitler was destroying himself when he committed suicide, and likewise, Voldemort too destroys a part of himself (albeit unknowingly) hidden as a Horcrux[6] in Harry Potter before he dies. Rita Skeeter's style of journalism and propaganda warfare of *The Daily Prophet* is vaguely similar to the propaganda machinery run by Joseph Goebbels through media for Hitler.

Back in 2004, when the first five of the *Harry Potter* books were already written, J.K. Rowling in one of her interviews said "I saw one in the Holocaust Museum in Washington when I had already devised the 'pure-blood', 'half-blood' and 'muggle-born' definitions and was chilled to see that the Nazis used precisely the same warped logic as the Death Eaters… A single Jewish grandparent 'polluted' the blood, according to their propaganda" (Author 2004)

Later, in 2007, in another interview Rowling says, "Voldemort is Hitler-like. When you read books about megalomaniacal types like Hitler, Napoleon and Stalin, it is interesting to observe how superstitious those people are; they with all their might. It is part of their paranoia, part of their desire to be more than they are. They love

2. One of the four founding members of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, who believed that only 'pure-bloods' should be imparted the knowledge of magic.
3. His father was called Tom Riddle. He killed his own father simply because he was a muggle and deserted his mother after coming to know that she was a witch.
4. In 1944 he took up the title, which means 'Leader' as an indication that he was the head of the state.
5. Dark mark is a tattoo which is brandished by the death eaters who are the followers of Voldemort. It is described as "a skull, with a snake protruding from its mouth".
6. A powerful magical object in which a fragment of soul is hidden. This is a kind of dark magic and is forbidden.

to introduce fate, predestination and such. I wanted to give Voldemort the same paranoid characteristics" (New Interview 2012). It seems from her interviews that in the later books of the series, Rowling was consciously trying to make Voldemort seem Hitler-like and his concepts were meant to be fascist.

Furthermore, in 2007, when asked if it was a conscious decision on her apart to include allusions from the Nazi era, Rowling said, "It was conscious. I think that if you're, I think most of us if you were asked to name a very evil regime we would think Nazi Germany. There were parallels in the ideology. I wanted Harry to leave our world and find exactly the same problems in the wizarding world. So you have the intent to impose a hierarchy, you have bigotry, and this notion of purity, which is this great fallacy, but it crops up all over the world. People like to think themselves superior and that if they can pride themselves in nothing else they can pride themselves on perceived purity. So yeah that follows a parallel. It wasn't really exclusively that. I think you can see in the Ministry even before it's taken over, there are parallels to regimes we all know and love" (J. K Rowling at Carnegie).

Now that the comparison is established, it is essential to ask the question, as to what was the need for politicization of a Children's Fiction.

As a critic says, "Fantasies allow the reader to consider and speculate about central and sometimes painfully realistic themes in a way that is more palatable than in realistic fiction or fact. The fantastic nature of the characters and the setting provides readers with emotional distance that gives them room to consider sensitive and important ideas more objectively than in other genres. The irony about fantasy is that despite the fanciful characters, strange imaginary worlds and bizarre situations encountered, it has the power to help us better understand reality" (Kurkjian 292).

In a way, fantasy fiction and in this case *Harry Potter* series talks about pertinent issues from the twentieth century, but in the garb of a fantastical illusionary world. From the perspective of J.K. Rowling, an author residing in twentieth century England, what more significant issue to talk about than the Second World War (and the horrors of The Third Reich)?

In the magical world created by Rowling in *Harry Potter*, we see how there is a clear distinction between the wizarding world and the muggles. The muggles are the non-magical people, whereas the wizarding world encompasses wizards and witches from all around the world; whether those staying in the wizard communities of Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade, or those at Hogwarts, or Durmstrang schools.

As we find out in the series, there have always been wizards who have sought to implement wizard domination over the world. Just like Hitler, Lord Voldemort too has a xenophobic hatred towards the muggles. Just like Hitler, he too shares his parentage with an illegitimate muggle father, the kind of which he went on to hate. Voldemort wants to eradicate "half-bloods" and muggles in favour of the pure-blood when he is himself a half-blood, just as Hitler wanted to eradicate Jews when he himself was not completely an 'Aryan' by his own logic.

However, Voldemort was not the first wizard who sought to establish wizard superiority over the muggles and other magical creatures. Gellert Grindelwald, who is on the list of the 'Most Dangerous Dark Wizards of all Time', had earlier tried to establish dominance over the world. Grindelwald continued with his plans of wizard domination and had his own army of followers. He even built a prison for his opponents referred to as Nurmengard over which was written "For the Greater Good".

Nurmengard sounds similar to a city in Germany called Nuremberg "that was the site of many important Nazi rallies, and also the place where the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws were promulgated" (Nurmengard). The year 1945 when Grindelwald was defeated could be a reference to the Second World War (which ended in 1945). Also, "For the Greater Good" written on the gates of Nurmengard could be a reference in German to '*Arbeit Macht Frei*' which literally means 'work liberates' or 'work will set you free' which was engraved in the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

It is interesting that the muggles do not even know of the presence or existence of the wizards. They happily live their lives oblivious to the fact that there is another community of wizards, witches and magical creatures living by their side. Referring to muggles, Stan Shunpike in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* says, "Don' listen properly, do they? Don' look properly either. Never notice nufink, they don'" (32).

Wizards, however have complete knowledge of muggles, they even have a Muggle Liaison Office for accidental or necessary dealings with the muggle community. It seems that their knowledge of the other community is an important thing. This knowledge of the existence of a separate, different community is what

makes the wizards aware of their identity of being different from them. The wizards themselves create this identity of the muggles as non-magical creatures, as the other, as those not being able to have the knowledge and knowhow of magic.

As Sartre pointed out, it is not the Jews that create the anti-Semite; it is the anti-Semite that creates the Jewish identity. Similarly, it is not the muggles that create their own identity; rather, it is the wizards that create the muggle identity. So in a way, the concept of the world is hinged on the question of identity and the bonding of people is hinged on the basis of it.

For example, what comprises racial distinction between wizards and muggles? It identifies you as being identical to the other and yet different from the other. Therefore, identity is a measure of your commonality with the other as well as your distinction.

So, we see how discrimination on the basis of identity is envisaged by Rowling in the *Harry Potter* series. This allusion that she draws is her text is very similar to the issue of racial politics in twentieth century Europe, which led to the genocide of millions of Jews, Bolsheviks, Slavs, liberals, homosexual, physically handicapped, mentally challenged and so on. Moreover, this oppression and politics on the basis of identity, fractures the principle of democratic existence which entails that all human beings are equal and they have equal rights to equal existence.

According to Immanuel Kant, rational beings are meant to have basic moral equality, even if it is merely on the basis of the fact that they are 'rational beings' and have a will of their own. Furthermore, he thought and considered it to be irrational to force these rational beings to work not for their own self-interest, but that of others. Similarly, indifference to this injustice or prejudice is considered equally wrong. Although they are fictitious, house elves, giants, goblins and centaurs all seem to have a will and a rational consciousness.

Centaurs are magical creatures with the upper body of humans (with torso and hands) and the lower body of a horse. They are extremely proud creatures and have a high notion of self-righteousness. It is unfortunate that despite possessing the level of intelligence of humans, they are coined as beasts by the Ministry of Magic. As the text progresses, we see that their movement is restricted and banned by the ministry and hence their hatred towards the Ministry of Magic is understandable. Centaurs are specially gifted in the power of divination. That is to say, they can read and understand the future, something that even powerful wizards cannot do. One of the main centaur characters in the series is Firenze, who saved Harry's life in the Forbidden Forest (his encounter with Voldemort) and gave him a ride on his back, to which another centaur Bane suggested that he was a "common mule". Even though they are proud creatures, they have a nice disposition (as shown by Firenze). And most of all, they have free will to choose what to do, like Firenze did. As we see later in the text, Firenze is banished by his group for helping Dumbledore and sharing the knowledge of centaurs with the headmaster of Hogwarts. He had to leave the Forbidden Forest, and he stayed in Hogwarts instead, teaching divination to the students.

Similarly, goblins too are very smart, intelligent and clever. Due to their skills with money and finances they run the Gringotts Wizarding Bank where all the treasures of the wizarding world are stored in various vaults. Goblins are especially good with metal workmanship. Famous artifacts of the wizarding world are created by the goblins, including the famous sword of Godric Gryffindor, who is one of the founders of Hogwarts. However, goblins are mistrusted amongst wizards, and this feeling is mutual. The first introduction that we get to goblins in Book One is where Rubeus Hagrid takes Harry to Gringotts in *The Philosopher's Stone*. It seems that even Hagrid does not trust Goblins much. It is ironic how Hagrid, who himself is a half-giant, is untrusting of Goblins. Giants themselves are not liked by the wizards as they are very violent and have a lower intelligence level than humans (neither are half-Giants). However, that does not mean that they do not possess any intelligence at all. Getting back to goblins, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* the final book of the series, referring to the goblin named Griphook, Bill Weasley said to Harry, "We are talking about a different breed of being. Dealings between wizards and goblins have been fraught for centuries ... There has been fault on both sides, I would never claim that wizards have been innocent. However, there is a belief among some goblins, and those at Gringotts are perhaps most prone to it, that wizards cannot be trusted in matters of gold and treasure, that they have no respect for goblin ownership" (417). Wizards often consider goblins inferior. However, this idea is completely skewed because they can perform their own special magic, even without wands.

Interestingly, none of the magical creatures are allowed to use wands in the wizarding world according

to "Code of Wand Use" which was perhaps created by the wizards and witches working in the Ministry of Magic.

There are several references in the *Harry Potter* series regarding goblin rebellions against the biases and atrocities of wizards and witches. The rebellions caused due to differential treatment of goblins are described by the *Daily Prophet*[7] as "bloody and vicious". However, there was perhaps a point of time in history, when the wizards and the magical creatures lived happily together without the magical creatures been ostracized and prejudiced against. The Fountain of Magical Brethren, a statue at the Ministry of Magic is a good example of this.

The statue is described in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* as, "Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his hand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin and a house elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and the wizard. Glittering jets were flying from the ends of the two wands, the point of the centaur's arrow, the tip of the goblin's hat, and each of the house-elf's ears, so that the tinkling hiss of falling water was added to the pops and cracks of Apparators and the clatter of footsteps as hundreds of witches and wizards, most of whom were wearing glum, early morning looks, strode towards a set of golden gates at the far end of the hall" (117).

It does seem that the magical creatures are in awe of the wizard and witches, as they are looking up adoringly to them in the statue. This is interesting because centaurs and goblins consider themselves superior to witches and wizards. However, we do see that there was a healthy relation, if not equality, between the wizards and the magical creatures earlier. And then, there is the curious case of house-elves for whom serving their masters is utmost duty and binding.

Soon after the Ministry of Magic was taken over by the supporters of the Dark Lord in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the statue was done away with and a new statue was in place. As described in the book, "A gigantic statue of black stone dominated the scene. It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones... Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words 'Magic is Might'... Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards" (198). As Hermione Granger puts it, Voldemort seeks to put the muggles at the "rightful place", a politics, which was similar to Nazi Germany after the taking over of the Weimar Republic and creation of The Third Reich.

Getting back to the point of house-elves, which is perhaps one of the most interesting character portrayals by Rowling, it raises curiosity when we see house-elves who are wonderfully gifted with magic (even without wands). They can perform magic which even witches and wizards cannot and yet they remain in servitude of wizards and serve wizard families. As a matter of fact, serving the wizard family is their only goal in life and freedom has no meaning for them (with the notable exception of Dobby).

In this text, we see Voldemort's (and his Death Eaters') racist hatred to destroy the mudbloods. We see Dolores Umbridge's xenophobic hatred for Hagrid (and by extension, to all half giants) and the centaurs. But these are, as we can confidently say, the evil characters in the book. But does it mean that only evil characters discriminate? Apparently not! We would see hereof how discrimination in Hogwarts continues to happen under the moral radar.

The house-elf Dobby is introduced in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* when he visits Harry Potter to deliver a message regarding terrible things that are going to happen at Hogwarts (opening of the Chamber of Secrets and killing of muggle borns). He does so out of his own free will. Similarly, after Winky, another elf, is banished from her house and comes to live at Hogwarts, she renounces her wages from a sense of pride. Even Kreacher, the house-elf serving the Black family, tries to thwart the efforts of Sirius, who is his master, to get rid of his mother's belongings (the heirlooms of the Black family, most of whom are sympathizers of Voldemort and placed a lot of importance on purity) and later on possesses a friendly disposition towards Harry Potter – all out of his own free will. So these magical creatures (centaurs, goblins and elves) seem to possessing the rationale and free will that matters in Kant's ethics.

7. *Daily Prophet* is the newspaper publication for the magical world.

Let us take the example of the elves and let us understand why even the protagonists of the series, Harry and Ron, show indifference to their plight. Also, this indifference is shown to a large extent by the rest of Hogwarts (with a notable exception of Hermione and Dumbledore). So this suggests that people who are supposed to be good have prejudices too. This leaves us in a moral dilemma, as being a house elf is akin to being a slave. How can emancipated wizards such as Harry and others take this predisposition towards their (elves') being and identity, which is to live only to serve their masters? But surely, not all house elves are mistreated as Dobby was by the Malfoy family. There are several elves who happily work and get wages in Hogwarts. As Steven W. Patterson puts it, the question here is, in a world view where Death Eaters are running havoc all over the world, is it the time to be thinking about the matter of elfish welfare? Are not their other matters which deserve much more attention? The second question here is, is it the responsibility of good natured wizards to take up the cause of the elves? Just because there are bad things happening, is it the moral responsibility for everyone to stop them? Is it not immoral to hold everyone responsible for the plight of the elves just because they choose not to act? And lastly, as Ron points out, for all you know the elves enjoy their slavery, for all you know they love it, and it would not be prudent to take away from them the only thing they care about. Patterson points out, "Winky for example, is positively devastated by her freedom, ultimately turning to drink and becoming absolutely useless outside of the system of slavery. If house-elves want to be enslaved, then where do we get by freeing them? They have a will of their own and they could exercise it to live differently if they so choose. Certainly they would ask for their freedom if they wanted it, but they don't want it." So it seems, that no matter how good our intentions are in trying to set them free, we should "respect their autonomy", even if that means being in servitude (Patterson).

As Ron says, they elves want to be slaves! But is not there a phenomenon which could explain this elfish behaviour? A phenomenon that shows how the nature of a particular group changes after it has suffered injustice for a prolonged period of time. Over a period of time, the identity for this group becomes the identity that is envisaged by the person binding them. The effect is the loss of self-respect, or a loss of identity, which chains them to this servitude.

In *The soul of the black Folk*, Afro-American writer W.E.B. Du Bois explains the mentality of the slaves. He says, "… a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the reflection of the world. It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the others … One ever feels his two-ness" (Bois 1994).

In a way, the argument says that stereotypes are not always thrust on by the racist, it is often internalized by those who are racially abused. The condition of the house elves seems to be of the same sort, where years of servitude have conditioned them to their situation. Their identity is what their master seeks it to be. House elves if we notice were not always enslaved. The Fountain of Magical Brethren, at the Ministry of Magic, points to the fact that it seems that they were accorded respect, if not equal status with the wizards.

So in a way, the law created by the wizards through the Ministry of Magic seeks to institutionalize the elves, goblins and centaurs. Servitude to wizards is thereby conditioned by the creation of a past and a law for future by the institution.

Talking about how the running of the state and the creation of laws go hand in hand, Mahmood Mamdani says, "The modern state stands up to time, by giving itself both a past and a future. The production of the past is the stuff of history writing, just as securing of a future is the domain of law-making. Between history writing and law making, there is a strategic alliance. Law identifies agency in history. By enforcing group identities on individual subjects, the law institutionalizes group life" (Mamdani 9).

When we talk of elves, what is also deeply distressing is the fact that liberal wizards and those portrayed as good wizards, are malevolent to the elves too. After Harry blames Kreacher for Sirius's death in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, Dumbledore says "I warned Sirius when we adopted the Grimmauld Place as our headquarters that Kreacher must be treated with kindness and respect. I also told him that Kreacher could be dangerous to us. I do not think that Sirius took me seriously, or that he ever saw Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as human's… Kreacher is what he has been made by wizards, Harry… He is to be pitied. His existence has been as miserable as your friend Dobby. He was forced to do Sirius's bidding because Sirius was the last of the family to which he was enslaved, but he

felt no true loyalty to him. And whatever Kreacher's faults, it must be admitted that Sirius did nothing to make Kreacher's lot easier" (734).

This brings us back to the original question about indifference of wizards and if someone can be held responsible for not taking up elfish cause in a world view where Death Eaters are running amok. Dumbledore's answer to Harry on this question can shed some light. He says in *Order of Phoenix*, "Sirius did not hate Kreacher. He regarded him as a servant unworthy of much interest or notice, Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike… We wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward" (735).

So Ron and Harry were perhaps wrong in ignoring Hermione's brainchild SPEW (Society for the Protection of Elfish Welfare) in the beginning, something that they later realize in the series. But whether it makes them bad persons for ignoring SPEW for so long, is a difficult question to answer, because it is difficult for someone to take up all the causes in the world, and it is almost despotism to hold someone accountable to not take up a particular cause and take up another.

Hermione, who noticed the down-trodden condition of the elves and first took up the cause of their welfare by creating SPEW, is perhaps the most important female character in the text. Hermione has muggle parentage, which is to say, that her parents were non-magical people. She, better than anyone else, understands the atrocities committed by Voldemort on muggles and how muggle-borns are abused. For example, she was repeatedly insulted by Draco Malfoy and others who called her mudblood, which is a derogative for someone with muggle parentage. Hence, for her, the cause to stop elfish mistreatment meant a lot.

The author admits to the fact that Hermione's character is perhaps a slight reflection of her own (Richards, 2013). Hermione is not just a side-kick of Ron and Harry. Rather, she is their equal, perhaps even better than them when it comes to wit and resourcefulness. When she learns that house elves are the cooks in Hogwarts, she is deeply disturbed and refuses to eat the food. She takes up the cause of elf rights and creates a group called SPEW. She thinks of starting with smaller changes such as a hike in their wages and better work conditions and later on she hopes amendments of law to allow the elves to use wands and perhaps give them a place in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.

Where several other pure-born and half born wizards failed to act to protect the rights of elves, a muggle-born girl with humble parentage stood up to act against the wrong. It seems that Rowling's vision of the world is based not on the fact of people's sex, background and parentage, but rather on their actions and the choices they make. That is to say, your identity is what you create of it, and not always about what is endowed to you.

Somehow, Rowling is trying to subvert the dynamics of identity as envisaged by the Third Reich by giving more of a chance to the notion and idea of choice. No doubt people like Umbridge, working with the Ministry, will remind you of Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Eichmann with similar xenophobic disdain, love for sadism, torture and punishment; no doubt *The Daily Prophet* and its biased news stories about muggles and muggle-born wizards will remind you of the propaganda politics run by Joseph Goebbels. But Rowling shows a worldview to the readers through the fantastical journey of Harry Potter of a world with hope and choice even for even those not considered to be high-born.

For her, there is a choice to fight back, and whatever be the cost, the victory remains for the right. The Polish Resistance Movement during the Second World War was by far the largest underground resistance movement in the Nazi occupied territory with the Home Army at its forefront. Acts of everyday resistance became as important as acts of sabotage and diversion and direct combat. There were other similar movements like the French Resistance. Similarly, we see Dumbledore's Army and Order of the Phoenix in *Harry Potter* standing for the right and fighting against evil in various forms (*The Quibbler* and *Potterwatch*)[8] and various avenues.

However, even in this idea of subversion of the dominant codes of hierarchy, are we not creating newer identities? Creating identities which are the other of the then dominant codes of hierarchy? Over a period of time, does this identity of subversion become the dominant hierarchy? It seems that the category of identity and identity politics run in a vicious circle and there is no getting out of it. However, subversion in a way does help break the chain of domination, even if, for a short period of time.

8. *The Quibbler* was a tabloid publication and the *Potterwatch* was a secret radio show which supported the cause of fighting against Voldemort.

In that way, is this identity a way of emancipation? That is to say, would being a part of a commonality, or a group which subverts the dominant hierarchy, give you emancipation? In the book Dumbledore tells the race conscious Corlenius Fudge in *Goblet of Fire.* "You always place too much importance, and you always have done on the so called purity of blood. You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow up to be. See what that man (the son of a prominent wizarding family) chose to make of his life" (614). Perhaps the words of wisdom from Dumbledore suggest that in a structure where personal choice has a lot of value, identity becomes an emancipator category. It is only logical to derive from here that if an individual really wanted it, he could be anything different from what identity he was born with.

So the idea of collective identity is problematic because there will always be a dominant code of hierarchy (a dominant other), and so is the loss of personal identity owing to the fact that it tends to strengthen the idea of a collective identity. So how do we preserve personal identity? Is our personal identity limited to merely being tied to subservience? Is our identity merely a voluntary servitude towards a bigger identifiable category? According to Horkheimer and Adorno, identity can be preserved by "self-sacrifice", similar to Ulysses voluntarily tying himself to the mast of the ship, by his own free will, as he put wax in the ears of the rest of the sailors to protect them (Renault 112).

Harry's sacrifice at the end of the series where he voluntarily goes in the Forbidden Forest to die is similar to this kind of self-sacrifice. Harry learns that he is one of the horcrux that Voldemort unintentionally created. This meant that a part of Voldemort's soul resided in Harry. The only way to destroy the horcrux was by destroying himself, which he willingly does. Giving him up intentionally is also the only way of saving a lot of innocent lives from the wrath of Voldemort.

When Harry learns that he can speak Parseltongue[9], can go into Voldemort's mind and shares many of his powers, he fears that he is like him. He fears that he is moving towards the dark side, but he always fights it and it is his choice that makes him a righteous character.

As one would observe, Harry's life is not all about magic at all. He lives his everyday life facing challenges just like every other person. And more often than not, he does not use magic to overcome those challenges. What comes to his rescue is his wit, courage, planning, determination, fidelity and most importantly, his friends. Harry was pitted against great dangers, and he was not shown as a character that did not get afraid; rather it was exactly the opposite. Rowling goes to great length to show the various emotional turmoil in Harry and how he was scared. Even though a fictional character, Harry is shown as a human who has his flaws too. And it only took great amount of courage to overcome it. As Aristotle teaches us, courage is the mid-point of two extremities to danger. Too little courage would be cowardice and too much could be characterized as rashness. Eventually it was his courage, determination and his choices that got him to his objectives, not magic.

As Rowling herself says in an interview, "I wanted Harry to leave our world and find exactly the same problems in the wizarding world. So you have the intent to impose a hierarchy, you have bigotry, and this notion of purity, which is this great fallacy, but it crops up all over the world" (J. K Rowling at Carnegie).

We see that characters like Dumbledore had their flaws too. As a bright young student, Dumbledore found friendship in Gellert Grindelwald who was a dark wizard. Together they made plan of muggle domination, which was, as they put it "For the greater good". At a very young age, he himself admits, he realized that he was not to be trusted with power. Even when he grew old, he tried to put on the ring of Marvolo Gaunt (a horcrux) which eventually shortened his life span. However, he regrets his actions of youth and the knowledge that he must keep away from power makes him wise. He evolves to become not only one of the greatest wizards of all time, but perhaps, also one of the noblest wizards.

Similarly, Severus Snape, who was earlier a Death Eater, renounced the evil side and joined Dumbledore against Voldemort. A special mention has to be made about Arthur Weasley, who even though a wizard, completely and unequivocally loves muggles without any prejudices or judgments. And then, there are characters like Sirius Black on the other side who could be cruel and arrogant not only as a school child but also after growing up. How he treated the elves was disdainful. It shows that even the Death Eaters can choose to be good and the so-called good people are never perfect.

9. Parseltongue is snake language which only some wizards (usually dark wizards) can speak in the *Harry Potter* series. Harry Potter inherits this power from Voldemort when the latter tried to kill him.

Hence, the whole idea of identity for Rowling is hinged on the entity of choices. It is almost as if she says, we are not who we are, but what we make of ourselves. We become whatever we make of ourselves, by the choices we make.

However, the question that one asks at the end of this chapter is, is identity crisis indispensable? Since the whole idea of having a personal or collective identity is the fact that there will always be an 'other', is enmity between two groups inevitable? And if at all something can be done to diminish the boundaries between identities, would not new identity groups sprout and germinate?

Perhaps, as Mahmood Mamdani points out, the answer to this question lies in the story of the cat and the rat. He explains, "Lenin once chided Rosa Luxemburg with being so preoccupied with the Polish nationalism that she could not see beyond it and so risked being locked in the world of the rat and the cat. For the rat, there is no animal bigger in the presence of the cat: neither the lion, nor the tiger, nor the elephant looms as large. For the cat there is none more delicious than the rat. The political world set in motion by the modern state and modern colonialism also generates paired identities endlessly. For every settler, there is a native. In a world where cats are few and rats are many, one way for cats to stabilize rule is to tag rats by tapping their historicity through a discourse on origins – indigenous and non-indigenous, ethical and racial. That is why a world where rats have belled cats, it is entirely possible that rats may still carry on living in the world as defined by cats, fired by the very identities generated by institutions created in the era of cats. The point is simple and yet fundamental: you can turn the world upside down, but still fail to change it. To change the world you have to break out of the worldview of not only the cat, but also the rat…" (11).

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