
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL SEGREGATION
IN ROWLING'S HARRY POTTER SERIES

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Race in the twenty-first century is ubiquitous. It influences our understanding of history and current events, school life and interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. Yet, in many contexts and social circles, race is so emotionally threatening that one has to struggle whole life with this stigma. In routine life we see how the members of a dominant group perceive minorities as inferior, undesirable, dangerous or in some other negative way, the interaction between them is likely to be one between unequal – tense or superficial. This inequality can be said to originate from the former's negative perception of the latter, which is seldom based on reality.

Racial and ethnic prejudice is part at the inequality between the minorities and the dominant group, with the former having a worse life than the latter. The general public thinks of a minority as a category of people who are physically different from others and who make up a small percentage a country's population. Since there are no clear-cut biological distinctions between racial groups- in physical characteristics or genetic makeup- but they are assigned to one race or another not necessarily on the basis of logic or fact but by public opinion, which in turn is modeled by society's dominant group. Some groups do not constitute a race but instead are a religious group or more broadly an ethnic group.

The main objective of the paper is the intertextuality parallels of the numerous hierarchical structures found in *Harry Potter* series, examined how these hierarchies develop the social and racial themes in the stories. A further purpose is to determine if there is a correlation between the power structures found in the books and our own drawing on secondary criticism and theory for support. Above all, although these works should not be reduced to 'this versus that' there is sufficient evidence to argue that a conflict of materialistic versus alternative values is at work. Therefore, the examination of race, gender hierarchy and power assists in the recognition of social and cultural systems at work in these works. The racial discrimination and dehumanizing behaviour of social classes leading society towards the futile struggle frustration and conflict in their lives, in quest of their true existence in the society. Despite of several positive changes some traditional outlook of society has not changed. Gender discrimination, social segregations, great expectations, religious ethics have not improved so far.

J.K. Rowling presents a complex view of racism and discrimination throughout *Harry Potter* series. In all the Potter books, racism and other social inequalities play a major role through the plot. It is a story full of political aspects such as human right issues of war and racism. Rowling has actually created an almost race-blind society where little emphasis is put on one's ethnic origin. Racism and racial discrimination are interestingly the most prominent issues in *Harry Potter* series also. Real world is inflicted with racism so much that no one can escape from its grip. We see that applying the real world issues of racism in a fantasy world.

Rowling illuminates racial politics in a different way by doing so she has aggravated racial hatred and discrimination among youngsters. They are not taught to judge people "by their merits, actions, and morals rather than their race". (CoS 96) Instead the focus lies on concepts like Mud blood, which is a word of insult for a witch or wizard with muggle parents; half-blood, someone with both magical and non-magical close relatives; and squib, someone born by magical parents but who themselves lack the ability to perform magic. In whole series pure-blood is appreciated and the issue of racism is raised high among students.

Potter series encompasses deep-sealed racial themes and constructs a complex and highly satisfied racial hierarchy. Although the novel depicts certain antiquated racial logics, they also ask questions about cultural, national and ethnic bias as well as highlight horrors perpetuated by those who pursue racial purity, offering a multi-layered criticism of the very racial satisfaction that series uphold. The series normalize Euro

centrism, presenting white dominance as the normal expected state of affairs. White characters determine the fate of the world and worldwide conflict is decided by an all-white cast in an all-white atmosphere. Inequality and social discrimination are often directly addressed in the series, be it with regards to Muggle-hating, disrespect of Muggle-born, societal acceptance of half-humans or the oppression of non-magical creatures.

It is obvious in the series that a boy of merely eleven is actually conscious about his race and prejudiced for being superior to others. His hatred against other wizards whom he considers low makes him to prove himself superior anyhow, Ron, Harry's friend also protests this discrimination. At this very age the seeds of racial discrimination had sown in their minds which creates a gap among them that could never be abridged. Ron's frustration is clear:

It's about the most insulting thing he could think of, gasped Ron, coming back up. Mud blood's a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born. You know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards – like Malfoy's family – who think they're better than anyone else because they're what people call pure-blood. (CoS 127)

Through magical and metaphorical racial themes, *Harry Potter* offers evaluations of historical racial tensions in the non-magical world. This thing is most apparent through the novels depiction of various groups of magical creatures. These groups, in line with their level of racialization, often match closely with stereotypes of historically marginalized peoples. The Goblins of the wizard world are slimy, mistrustful and greedy. The character and plight of the house-elves closely matches the stereotypes assigned to their non-magical group, expose the root cause of their oppression when confronted in the Forbidden Forest toward the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*.

The bloodline status of wizards themselves has been interpreted as offering racial theme. Voldemort's obsession with blood purification closely parallels similar racial logics employed at present day situations. Great emphasis is laid on the "blood battles" in these stories where the hypocrisy of the Death Eater's and their system of beliefs becomes very evident. As a matter of fact, their leader is not pure-blood. Lord Voldemort, formerly Tom Marvolo Riddle, is the offspring of a witch mother and a Muggle father. However, while still living under the name Tom Riddle, Voldemort brutally murdered his living Muggle relatives, enveloping the fact that he is a half-blood. Perhaps, then, Voldemort's followers who always accompany him, are not aware of his questionable background. On the contrary he is chosen only to see the fact that he is a descendant of the great Salazar Slytherin, co-founder of Hogwarts and supporter of a pure-blood society.

Voldemort further very bluntly acknowledges the necessity of his father's death, saying "...and I killed my father, and see how useful he has proved himself, in death." (GoF 646) That is, Voldemort murdered his father and grandparents; therefore, he has relinquished his Muggle blood by committing their murders. As proof of his new status, Tom Riddle changes his original name and uses the pseudonym Lord Voldemort, solidifying his status among pure-blood wizards. Thus, the world of pure-bloods demonstrates the wizarding aristocracy; the half-bloods are next in the pecking order; and at the root of social hierarchy are the Muggle-born witches and wizards- infamously addressed to as mud-bloods by the evil Draco Malfoy, and including the incomparable Hermione, the cleverest witch of her age. Some of other central characters are "mixed" or part of mixed relationships: Harry's mother is a muggle-born witch, Hagrid is half-giant half-human, Lupin, a werewolf, marries Tonks, from the "Pure-blood" Black family. By the end Harry, Hermione and Ron reject racist and discriminatory ideas about "pure-blood wizards" and stand for the rights of muggle-born witches and wizards and Muggles as a whole, but also for the equality of other magical creatures like elves, goblins, and centaur and werewolves.

In the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, the criteria of judging a person is not his merits or morals but is that if one is pure-blood or not pure-blood., whether he or she can be granted any sort of high-level status in the wizarding world. At the top of the distorted system are the pure bloods, families who descend from long line of witches and wizards. Next are the half-bloods and mixed breeds. These are the wizards and witches who have one parent that is witch or wizard and other is either, Muggle-born or another species. Further below this are the completely Muggle-born witch or wizard and the squib. Hermione is such as example of Muggle parents.

The most interesting fact is that we find the height of discrimination reaching at its peak when according to the new laws people received payment from Ministry for catching and bringing in Muggle-born on the run," they're everywhere, gangs trying to earn gold by rounding up Muggle-born and blood traitors, there's a reward from Ministry for everyone captured."(OoP 123) To oppose the ideologies of high status Pureblood wizards was a crime and such families are called blood traitors. It is an offence to sympathize with muggle-born. They were severely punished for this crime.

Thus Rowling's complex world portrays, among the best of people in modern society have built-in prejudices for a nationality, culture and race. In the modern culture, racial discrimination still exist which increases inequality. Rowling's many characters are prejudiced and display discrimination at various places. Death Eater's discrimination towards Mud bloods or muggle-born wizards and witches is the most detestable thing. In the very first book *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*, Draco Malfoy is introduced in a way that sends message of hate. He is too prejudiced about his lineage that he shows discrimination towards Mud bloods. He asks Harry if his parents were wizards and says," I really don't think they should let Mud bloods in, do you?"(PS 11)

Draco being Voldemort's supporter and raised in pure-blood family thinks himself being superior and hates all other fellows. The tendency of some wizards to place a premium on pure-blood and treating muggles as second class citizens is an obvious parallel to our own society's history of oppression of blacks and obsession about interracial sex and marriage. The hint of this racialism can be seen when Draco Malfoy in the first book speaks for the muggle-born wizards:

I really don't think they should let the other sort (muggle-born) in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. (GoF 89)

Thus, the simultaneous power and danger of racial and genetic politics is one of the most important political issue in *Harry Potter* series. However, *Harry Potter* regards the metaphorical racial logics of the series very differently than it does their literal counterparts. The series presents racial constructs almost exclusively. Judgments and actions based on magical racial categorizations are painted as growing primarily from ignorance and arrogance. Of all of Harry's classmates, only Hermione, possessed of the keenest sense of justice of all the Hogwarts students, is aware of the baselessness surrounding wizarding treatment of other magical society, concealing that wizards have abused fellows for too long.

However, after the deep study it is clear that racial or ethnic problems seem to be universal, existing all over the world. Apparently, wherever there is a minority, there is a racial or ethnic problem. The nature and amount of racial problems around the world, however vary from one society to another. While race is based on popularity perceived physical traits, ethnicity is based on cultural characteristics. Minority is a racial or ethnic group that is victimized by prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a certain category of people. Social segregation – the spatial separation of the minorities from the dominant group because they are believed to be inferiors and are compelled to live not only separately but in inferior conditions. Thus, the ideas of racial, social segregation and power are used in their rudimentary form and although community and society may differ by definition. Such works illuminate a specific point of view, historically and psychologically.

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