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# “There is only power”: Surveying the Structures and Operations of Power in the Magical World of Harry Potter

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“There is only power”: Surveying the Structures and Operations of Power in the  
Magical World of *Harry Potter*

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction.....3

Blood Status: cultural difference or biological destiny? .....15

Magic as Inherent Difference and Power.....27

Power in Numbers: Collective Force in the Wizarding World.....32

Institutions – the Power of Governance, Wealth, and Education.....39

Conclusion.....53

Bibliography.....59

## Introduction

A woman at a pro-life rally in Washington, D.C. uses Harry Potter to voice her own opinion with a sign that reads “If Lily Potter had an abortion, then who would stop Voldemort?” Another individual rallies at the Supreme Court with a “Don’t Mess with Dumbledore’s Rights” banner. The cultural phenomenon of Harry Potter has, within two decades, become so pervasive in society that people now use the seven novels as tools to make sense of our own social and cultural concerns. As a central narrative in contemporary times, *Harry Potter* reflects many of the power dynamics of Western society. They exemplify many of the ideological and sociopolitical struggles we face today. Just as the novels reflect those struggles, they have also become a way to understand and negotiate power dynamics in the real world.

Humans are, above all else, narrative beings; narratives are “constitutive of every sphere of human activity, from identity and relationship development, to the socialization of individuals into institutions and cultures...” (*Routledge* 76). We understand the world through narrative frameworks, which we internalize in part through the narratives presented in novels. As arguably the most popular narrative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the seven *Harry Potter* novels, *the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1997), *the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and *the Deathly Hallows* (2007), have undoubtedly had an impact on the ways in which tens of millions of readers see themselves and others (Lebrecht). It becomes exponentially more crucial, then, to understand this narrative that has been globally internalized, due in particular to its extensive representations of political power.

The novels themselves developed over a period of ten globally tumultuous years in the real world. The events between 1997 and 2007, including the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the dawn of the War on Terror, undoubtedly impacted the development of *Harry Potter*, if not shifted the mindset of readers in the wake of these events. In either case, the historic context in which the novels came to being surely affected normative interpretations of the narrative.

For anyone unfamiliar with the *Harry Potter* series, the major plot focuses around a young Harry Potter who over the course of his adolescence finds himself at the center of a major ideological and political conflict within the Wizarding world. Within a few short years of entering the world of magic, he quickly learns that Wizarding society is just as complicated as Muggle society. Called “The Boy Who Lived”, Harry is first famous for the downfall of the greatest dark wizard, Voldemort. But over the course of his years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, he quickly learns that Voldemort is anything but dead. With the help of his friends, Harry defeats Voldemort in both his first and second year, while at the same time becoming more acquainted with how the Wizarding world works. In year two Harry finds out that many in the Wizarding world are prejudiced against witches and wizard born to “Muggles” or non-magic humans, favoring instead those of pureblood descent. He also encounters the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Magic and meets the Minister, Cornelius Fudge, on several occasions. Even before entering the magical world, Harry is told about Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, who may very well be the greatest wizard of the day. Over the years, Harry and Dumbledore become close confidants as they fight together against the Dark Lord.

With the return of Voldemort in the *Goblet* Harry becomes plunged into a battle for power. Dumbledore recruits members for the Order of the Phoenix as they seek to repel the forces of the Death Eaters, followers of Voldemort who strive to eradicate Muggle-borns and gain political power. Moreover, Harry finds himself entrenched with the Ministry, which first prosecutes him for use of underage magic, then turn to him as a propaganda tool for the fight against Voldemort. He refuses, focusing instead on lessons with Dumbledore to divulge the past of the Dark Lord in hopes to uncover a way to defeat him. Though the Headmaster dies at the end of year six, Harry and his mates, Ron and Hermione, venture off to destroy Voldemort and his Horcuxes (mementos containing parts of his soul). The Ministry, in the meantime, falls to the dark forces which institute laws sanctioning the persecution of Muggle-borns and alter the curriculum at Hogwarts to teach the new ideologies against Muggles and Muggle-borns. By the end Harry, along with fellow Order members and citizens against the regime, triumph in a hard-fought

battle. The war ends with the resolution that normalcy will return to the Wizarding world, though whether Blood Status ideologies will disappear is a naïve hope at best.

Given the extent of the social and political struggles in the novels, both a literary and cultural studies imperative exists to analyze these struggles in terms of the power dynamics they convey. Critic Suman Gupta gives three key reasons for a serious social and political analysis: the economic success of the novels has led them to be intertwined with financial matters, so that “reader’s engagement rebounds back into financial and market discourses” (15, 21); the dramatic extent to which *Harry Potter* has “transcended cultural boundaries” to be adapted around the world with ease (17); and the extent to which the novels have been institutionally challenged or banned, a reflection on how different ideological positions wish “to negate or silence oppositional perspectives, or... *construct* certain subject and objects in their own terms” (18, 21). For Gupta and for me, the novels’ involvement in significant social and political concerns necessitates a serious cultural and political analysis of these texts. However, I would add one more observation that Gupta does not mention.

I’ve already mentioned this observation, but it is worth repeating alongside Gupta’s. The degree to which readers have internalized the novels has led to conscious as well as unconscious interpretations of events happening outside of the texts through the narrative framework of *Harry Potter*. J.K. Rowling introduced us to the Wizarding world nineteen years ago, meaning the novels are now moving from multiple generations of original readers to their second generation of new readers. That’s at least two generations who do not know what it is like to live in a world without Harry Potter and his friends. For such readers immersed in the world of the novels, films, and popular culture spawned by the text, from a young age these novels play a meaningful part in shaping the way political struggles and power dynamics are conceptualized. To examine what understandings of political struggles and power dynamics are potentially being internalized and perpetuated by readers, this essay builds upon work of Gupta and others to analyze how power is conceptualized within the novel, critically analyzing ideological individual, and institutional power dynamics.

Power within the Harry Potter world is conceptualized and institutionalized in various manners, in some ways mimicking ideologies and structures found in the real world. Power in the series can be utilized in ideologies, put into practice by individuals or collectives, and structured into social institutions where power may be legitimated and exercised. This paper will focus on these three applications of power: ideologies, interpersonal/collective actions, and institutional implementation. These loci of power may not cover every facet of power operations in the novels, but they do offer an effective categorization for comprehensive critiques of power dynamics at the varying levels of society.

By addressing these key locations and operations of power, this essay builds on previous work on *Harry Potter* conducted within political science and cultural studies. As already mentioned, Gupta has done extensive research into the texts of *Harry Potter*, focusing on textual issues such as the themes of blood, desire, and slavery in the texts. Bethany Barratt's book *The Politics of Harry Potter* gives a compelling glance into many of the political and social issues of the Wizarding world. She grapples with Blood Status and draws close links between Voldemort's actions and those of Hitler in Nazi Germany. She also briefly examines types of power in relation to the question of their legitimacy, and ties them to textual evidence from the novels. However, her approach eventually limits her fully connecting all the types of power to see how they compete or collaborate with one another, regardless of legitimacy. From the political science perspective as well, Dedria Bryfonski's *Political Issues in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series* has striking analyses on the role of the Ministry of Magic as well as cultural critiques on terrorism and diversity as portrayed in the novels. The second part of Elizabeth Heilman's *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* offers sociological perspectives on the texts' cultural representations, including those of schools, women, teachers, and monsters.

This essay integrates and extends these previous analyses by approaching *Harry Potter* with a deeper focus on power operations throughout the Wizarding world, relying on political and cultural theory to address how power is invoked and maintained in the texts. Political science Professor Phillip Shively boils politics down to two concerns, the making of common decisions and the exercise of power (4-5). And if what Shira Wolosky says is true, that the "most prominent allegory in Harry Potter...is a

political one,” then political science should also be concerned with power and political systems not only found in the real world, but also in culturally-pervasive novels as well (Barratt, 4). While others, such as Barratt in *The Politics of Harry Potter* and the authors of several essays in Giselle’s *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*, have shaped their arguments around identifying real-world corollaries for political themes in the texts, I use political theories of power as a critical framework for textual analysis so that the operations of power in the novels can be understood first in their own right. This essay then can also serve as an example of the usefulness of political theory in textual studies, particularly in relation to children’s or young adult literatures which are often “analyzed in terms of the connection—whether that be historical or psychological—to the supposed ‘intended’ reader”, and mimetic readings which tend to disregard more rigorous theoretical criticisms (Daniels,78). Through a more rigorous approach, *Harry Potter* can be analyzed for its own political and cultural constructions, which can then inform a more rigorous study of how these literary constructions inform our ideas of power, and can become a method of reflecting on political issues we face in the real world. And in the recent political climate, the parallels between the political issues in the Wizarding and the real world have become ever more eerie.

In the last several years, the rise of far-right nationalist movements across America and Western Europe has had stark similarities to the ideologies invoked by the dark forces in *Harry Potter*. Two examples are sufficiently poignant to get the message across. Katrina Pierson, current spokeswoman for the Donald Trump campaign, had tweeted in 2012 “Perfect Obama’s dad born in Africa, Mitt Romney’s dad born in Mexico. Any pure breeds left? #CNNDebate”. This past January J.K. Rowling brought attention to Pierson’s tweet by responding simply “Death Eaters walk among us”. Pierson’s invocation of staunch nationalism parallels the efforts of the Death Eaters to implement an ideology based on blood purity. The world of Rowling’s novels was then used as a tool to illuminate the motives and goals of Trump and his followers.

In Rowling’s home country, the United Kingdom has also faced the rise of nationalist groups. The political party “Britain First” was founded in 2011, which is a far-right nationalist group opposed to immigration and that, according to the BBC, “wants Islam to be banned and says it would hang its



enemies if in power” (“Meet Britain First”). If we go on the name alone, “Britain First” has a program that resembles the ideology in the novels critiqued by Kingsley Shacklebolt, who says “it’s one short step from ‘Wizards first’ to ‘Purebloods first’ and then to ‘Death Eaters’” (*Deathly Hallows*, 440). Through *Harry Potter*, real world events achieve a nuance that allows for critical reflection and responses, like those of far-right nationalist movements, including their political and social ramifications. Those ramifications develop at different locations in society, from the government to the individual, which correlate to different types of power.

In the Wizarding world, various locations of emerge in ideologies, individual and collective actions, and institution operations. Blood Status has the power of ideology; it can be invoked by individuals and groups as an implicit source of social power. At the individual level we see power exercised in its most naked form, the capacity to perform magic. Individuals utilize magic as a method to gain power over others, by forcing them to obey through sheer will. Collective groups play a crucial role towards the end of the series. The Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix represent two opposing collective groups, powerful but not in wholly legitimate ways, who demonstrate what can be gained when individuals act together. The institutions of the Wizarding world, most prominently the Ministry of Magic, Gringotts, and Hogwarts all function as establishments of power, each with different operations and different motives, but whose systemic nature produces and reinforces belief systems, while each is also – to some extent – able to enforce its power.

Each of these levels of power thus needs to be studied on its own, but because each invites a different view of how power operates, it is also important to analyze the congruencies and incompatibilities between them. Looking only from the perspective of the institution, we likely get an interpretation of the Wizarding world from a more structuralist or Marxist perspective, in which subjects are *produced* by the hierarchical power structures in which they reside (male/female; Pureblood/Muggle-born; rich/poor). From that perspective, these are structures which we cannot escape and which determine who we are. For the Wizarding world, it means that institutions and ideological structures are crucial in determining the ‘self’ of witches and wizards. On the other hand, from the perspective of the individual

each witch and wizard is able to determine his/her life through individual agency. They are capable of making their own decisions and reshaping social structures. These two perspectives and understandings they produce are always in tension with one another; neither lens is right or wrong, but must be considered simultaneously with the other. The *Harry Potter* novels must then be addressed through both lenses to understand the varying and complex ways at which power manifests and functions.

Power itself is often an ethereal concept, contested at times between theorists; before approaching the books, the question “what is power?” should first be addressed. In his compilation of 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists who address this question, Steven Lukes initiates the conversation by suggesting “that to have power is to be able to make a difference in the world” (5). This is a very simple place to start, one that offers plenty of ground for interpretation and development. One of the first theorists on the subject, Bertrand Russell, has a very similar opinion: “Power may be defined as the production of intended effects” (19). Power conceived this way is focused on intent – the intent of the individual, organization, etc. It also shifts the scheme of power away from the ability to cause effects to the action of causing effects. Lukes’ suggestion means that someone has power if they are capable of making a difference; whether or not they actualize that ability does not matter. Russell’s conception of power originates at the moment of action, regardless of prior ability. Yet for both of them, power can be conceived as originating at the individual. Power is the ability of one person to control to some degree the actions of another person.

Of course, power isn’t simply an individual attribute. In the context of political science, Robert Dahl focuses on “shaping and sharing of power” (37). Power isn’t simply one person’s influence over the other; it can be diffused in various ways throughout a society. To analyze this diffusion requires a shift in model: “the analysis of power is often concerned, therefore, with the identification of elites and leadership, the discovery of the ways in which power is allocated to different strata, relations among leaders and between leaders and non-leaders” (Dahl, 37). Nico Poulantzas reaffirms the stratification of power as well when he defines power as “the capacity of a social class to realize its specific objective interests” (144). Under both definitions power is a much more social phenomenon, where power

becomes distributed and negotiated throughout society. In this case, however, power derives from divisions within society (the formation of different strata or classes), shifting power from one individual acting against another to a broader social context.

Hannah Arendt positions power not as parts of society against each other, but as society working together as a whole. For her, “power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (64). Arendt asserts a major distinction in conceptualizing power: for her, power corresponds with cooperation, not, as other theorists like Russell conceptualize it, as the ability to dominate. Individuals or groups who rule by domination use “violence” not “power” to achieve and maintain their rule. In the context of institutions, particularly the State, anyone in that apparatus who is said to be ‘in power’ has actually been “empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name” (Arendt, 64). Governments are empowered by the people, which is the major consideration in determining a government’s legitimacy. Most importantly, Arendt proposes that power does not lie in the action of that group, but rather in the “initial getting together” (68). When individuals get together, they become a source of power. The moment they disperse, the power dissipates.

Regardless of where power originates, the individual, the congregation, or somewhere in between, if power is considered as the ability to change or preserve the status quo, then its form must also be defined according to how it changes or preserves the status quo. John Galbraith calls these forms “instruments” of power and reduces them down to three: condign power, compensatory power, and conditioned power (213). Condign power imposes submission by introducing alternatives that are “sufficiently unpleasant or painful” so that all but the desired outcome is abandoned (Galbraith, 213). This is closely related to the idea of punishment. A certain action has a sufficient punishment or negative outcome, so that no individual would act in that way. Individuals and groups are thereby limited or determined in their actions.

The opposite of condign power is what Galbraith calls compensatory power through which submission is gained “by the offer of affirmative reward” (213). Economic compensation is typically the

associated with compensatory power, but it is not the only kind. Other kinds might be affection of knowledge.

Finally, conditioned power is not achieved through a positive or negative outcome; rather, it is exercised in the changing of belief. Galbraith associates conditioned power with education, persuasion, or “the social commitment to what seems natural, proper or right” which causes submission to another or others. However, “the submission reflects the preferred course; the fact of submission is not recognized” (Galbraith, 214). This type of power is closely reflected in Bertrand Russell’s “traditional power”. Russell calls traditional power “the force of habit” (21). Individuals are accustomed or taught to submit to an authority; it requires no other form of persuasion.

Russell offers another type of power, which is important to identify. Compensatory, condign, and conditioned power are all methods of gaining power through acceptance. The individual (or group) has accepted that they must submit to another person or institution’s power, either because they may face negative repercussions, are given positive compensation, or accept that power by custom or habit. When acceptance of power fails, the power of coercion can be implemented. Russell identifies this belonging particularly to the military, but it could be applied to any situation where individuals are forced to perform a particular task through direct physical compulsion (20).

Each theorist brings a different critical lens for analysis; even if they cannot all be reconciled into one idea of power (notably Arendt stands apart), each is needed because they are all evident at some point in the series. These various theoretical approaches uncover the complicated, and oftentimes contradictory, operations of power in the complex world of *Harry Potter*. Perceived at the social level, power clearly circulates in an ideological system that privileges some individuals above others. Ideologies in themselves are systems of belief for understanding the world. Arendt articulates ideologies as “systems of explanation of life and world that claim to explain everything, past and future, without further concurrence with actual experience” (*Essays*, 349-350). These life explanations, or “isms”, become ideologies “only when [they pretend] to explain the whole course of history” (*Essays*, 349). They position the world and history through one particular struggle, be it class struggle, race struggle, etc.

In the Wizarding world, ideology takes the form of a belief system called Blood Status. Blood Status stresses the importance of blood purity within the Wizarding world. It makes varying levels of social statuses amongst witches and wizards wherein those with ‘pure’ blood gain social superiority over Muggle-borns, and what could be described as “racial” supremacy over Muggles. The Blood Status ideology, when invoked by strict adherents, sees the world as a struggle between Muggles and wizards. Through cultural and biological differences, Muggles are marked as inferior. In turn, any witches and wizards descended from Muggles become subject to discrimination. Blood Status itself may not be power, but its invocation enables some in the magical community to benefit themselves at the expense of others. Add in that many individuals in the Ministry of Magic abide, to some degree, by the belief that purebloods are better and Blood Status becomes the basis of a strong power system.

Magic, though associated with individual ability, can function as a condign or coercive power. Voldemort is evidence of the belief that those who have profound magical power can and should use it to their own ends. For the Dark Lord, his rule is completely legitimate because, as Barratt points out, “those that rule because they can see this rule as completely legitimate, because only the powerful can compel...total obedience” (11). Magic does not need to be so aggressive but it is an essentially individual trait, and as I will point out further on, it allows those especially gifted witches and wizards more agency within the Wizarding community.

Collective power makes its appearance in the Order of the Phoenix and Voldemort’s Death Eaters. The latter is likely detested by most *Harry Potter* readers, but they do offer a particularly strong case for the power of collective action. They marry their cause with blood purity – “we will cut away the canker that infects us” – and through a ruthless exercise of their power they eventually crush the Ministry. Not a happy picture, but Rowling definitely see the potential of the power of collective activism. The Order, under Dumbledore’s command, combats the Death Eaters and proves that continued social resistance to tyranny has the power to defeat it, even if their fate rests on an adolescent boy.

The institutions of the Wizarding world, the Ministry of Magic, Gringotts, and Hogwarts, are capable of deploying certain types of power in the most legitimate and pervasive ways. By all accounts

the Ministry has the deepest hand in institutional power. Headed by the Minister of Magic and comprised of seven Departments, the Ministry has the legitimate claim to governance. It is often and rightly criticized, as critic Benjamin Barton does, as a “corrupt, self-perpetuating bureaucracy” (52). The Ministry has no legislative branch or any sign of elections. The bureaucrats are often self-interested and at times antagonistic to the plot. That said, it does maintain the power to enact laws and use force when its authority is offended. Through the *Daily Prophet* various Ministers are able to influence public opinion and maintain their power through coercive control. Regardless of what kind of critique Rowling is trying to make about government, the Ministry’s ability to institutionalize power cannot be neglected.

Hogwarts and Gringotts make up the other primary institutions. Though each institute exercises a different power – Hogwarts, the power of belief and education, Gringotts, the power of wealth and money – they operate in similar fashions. They have a power over specific realms or aspects of the Wizarding world, which they desire to maintain. Hogwarts educates students; more importantly, its representatives impress upon their pupils moral codes, particularly on the use of magic. For those who do not follow the rules of Hogwarts, punishments are in place through detentions or loss of House points; House points are also used to reward certain behaviors. The power exercised at Hogwarts can thus be condign, compensatory, and/or conditioned. The school is also given a fair bit of autonomy. Professors can largely teach as they like and the Headmaster oversees the general realms of magic that will be taught. In a parallel fashion, Gringotts maintains the institution of wealth. Money itself is valuable because it has the power to purchase new items, but also because of its power to influence other parts of society. Gringotts legitimizes the value of money, and protects that power. With strong vaults, magical enchantments, and even dragons Gringotts makes clear that it has a purpose in the Wizarding world and no one will breach it.

Discussions of power are almost always accompanied by discussions of legitimacy as a means to assign some form of value to the ways in which power is wielded. With that in mind, each section also briefly discusses the legitimacy of power at the varying locations in society. These discussions incorporate different theoretical frameworks for understanding legitimacy which are used as a foundation,

but the use of political theory alone can be too abstract to account for narrative sensibilities. The novels themselves suggest their own interpretations of legitimacy through the portrayal of inter-character and group power struggles. After all, the cruelty demonstrated by characters like Dolores Umbridge and the villainous desires of the Death Eaters suggest that these are illegitimate uses/abuses of power. These narrative suggestions reflect and inform our own normative understandings of legitimacy, and thus must also be considered.

The culmination of all these power dynamics, in which power locations align or conflict at different moments through the novels, exemplifies how the fantasy world of *Harry Potter* grapples with power representations. These representations exhibit contradictions throughout the series; the texts are simultaneously pulled in different directions in portraying such issues as democratic ideals and the tension between the power to create change and the power to maintain tradition. By using collectives to achieve success, the novels suggest democratic notions; at the same time, the novels rally behind Harry Potter as the sole individual who can defeat the Dark Lord, placing him above the rest as special or unique, which undercuts the novels' suggested democratic lessons.

Moreover, the competing power dynamics illustrate a desire to maintain neo-feudal fantasy conflicting with a desire for collective revolution. The Wizarding world is very much a romanticized, fantastical world: students study at a wondrous upper class school; chores are done (at times by invisible "slave" labor) with the flick of a wand; an ornate bank run by goblins secures wealth through magical means; wealthy, pseudo-aristocratic families living in mansions – the places and events described in *Harry Potter* paint the magical world as a childhood neo-feudal fantasy which we all crave to visit. As the magical world is engulfed in civil war, the people and groups labeled as "good" towards which readers are expected to be sympathetic, fight to maintain this fantastical world, to maintain the traditions of the past. Their victory results in a return to the status quo, as exemplified in the seventh novel's epilogue. Any changes as a result of their victory are cosmetic. The bureaucracy of the Ministry remains; implicit beliefs in Blood Status live on. Despite the desire of some protagonist characters to create social and political change, they appear to either inevitably fail or give up. In fact, collective revolution is

exemplified in Voldemort and the Death Eaters, who use their power to install a xenophobic dystopia. Yet their action also harkens to old tradition, when blood purity was better respected. They do not want to move forward, but regress backward. These contradictions pull across the novels, incapable of resolution.

In this irresolution, the texts open up an invitation to critique both the novels and real world operations. *Harry Potter* offers readers an opportunity to engage in critical thinking, to ponder over these contradictions in power dynamics. The questions readers ask themselves may not be in these terms, but readers nevertheless confront some of these basic concepts. Why has nothing changed at the end? Why can Dumbledore break the law? Why do witches and wizards allow the Death Eaters to take over? As readers are invited to critique the novels, they are also encouraged to reevaluate their own world, to look for the same issues and contradictions in the real world. The imperfections in the Wizarding world are suddenly exemplified in the real world; and as readers consider and critique the social and political problems in *Harry Potter*, they become informed of those problems in the real world. Thus, using *Harry Potter* as their vehicle for critique, readers use the novels to voice their own opinions. As protesters hold signs invoking issues in *Harry Potter*, and journalists or even Twitter users invoke ideas from the novels to make a point, they become beaming examples of the great impact these novels have had on our own political and social understandings.

### **Blood Status: cultural difference or biological destiny?**

Anyone familiar with the *Harry Potter* novels will know that Blood Status is a highly contentious yet popular belief system in the Wizarding world. There certainly are varying degrees of belief, from an inclination towards purebloods to the more extreme versions of enforcement of pureblood supremacy over half-bloods, “Mudbloods” or Muggle-borns, and Muggles. In many ways the status of how pure a witch or wizard’s blood is can be classified not just as a belief, but as an ideology structured so thoroughly throughout the magical society that it is nearly impossible to escape. In fact, it could be argued that it is the driving force for most of the plot due to its crucial role as justification for the actions of Voldemort and his cohort of Death Eaters. Not only is it a form of justification for his extreme agenda, it



has an almost hegemonic dominance in how witches and wizards generally make sense of the difference between themselves and Muggles, the non-magic folk. As such it acts as a method for distributing power throughout society. But before getting too deep into how it operates in relation to power, it would be best to first analyze how Blood Status is defined and conceptualized.

While a clear difference exists between those who can perform magic and those who cannot, blood status is a method of creating hierarchy based on magical or Muggle lineage. Witches and wizards can be pureblood, half-blood, or Muggle-born. To be pureblood requires that a family has all been magical, both on your paternal and maternal side. They are ‘pure’ in the sense that they do not have any Muggle relations. Half-bloods are witches and wizards who have one magical parent and one Muggle parent. They are not necessarily ‘pure’ but half-bloods can claim they have some magical ancestry which has been passed on to them. Muggle-borns are witches and wizards who have non-magical parents. Muggle-born is generally viewed as the lowest status for a witch or wizard, and often times those who strongly believe in the Blood Status system will slur Muggle-borns as Mudbloods. Though not an advocate of the belief system, Ron Weasley, one of Harry’s closest friends, describes it as meaning “dirty blood, see. Common blood.” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 116).

As Ron points out, Muggle-born witches and wizards are often assumed to have a general but distinct inferiority compared to purebloods and half-bloods, who were born in the Wizarding world. Arguments about the source of that difference typically oscillate between two schools of thought, and sometimes both are invoked simultaneously. Salazar Slytherin, one of the four founders of Hogwarts and identified as the genesis of the systemic discrimination against Muggle-borns, “believed that magical learning should be kept in all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 150). Such an argument can be read in two ways. The distrust for Muggle-borns can be read as originating from their different cultures: they do not know what it means to be Wizard so they cannot be trusted with instruction in magic. The other way, which is the more radical approach, is that Muggle-borns are naturally more untrustworthy, that an inherent difference exists in ‘blood’ that makes them biologically inferior. In this case, Slytherin is invoking both so that the

distrust he wants to sow rests both in cultural and biological difference. In doing so he establishes the roots of a hegemony in which the inferiority of Muggle-born witches and wizards is not a norm imposed by the ruling class but is perceived as biologically inherent and/or culturally inevitable.

As a member of what can be considered the ruling class, Salazar Slytherin established a hegemonic ideology in the Wizarding world, through which pureblood dominance goes largely unquestioned. Antonio Gramsci describes hegemony as a “*condition in process* in which a dominant class... does not merely *rule* a society but *leads* it through the exercise of intellectual and moral leadership” (Storey, 82). The intellectual leadership of the ruling class formulates ideology that becomes universalized in a society so that it does not seem like an ideology but rather like the natural order of things. In this way, Slytherin becomes an ‘organic intellectual’ or an individual whose task it is to “shape and to organize the reform of moral and intellectual life” (Storey, 83). He conceptualizes the difference between purebloods and Muggle-borns, then devises an ideology around it. His position as being a member of the dominant class strengthens his ideology of Blood Status, which eventually pervades the magical community. While not every individual will take it to such an extreme as Slytherin, almost every member of society has instilled in them the hegemonic notion that a distinct and meaningful difference exists between purebloods and Muggle-borns.

Most of the Wizarding community marks differences in culture between the Muggle and Magical worlds. For most in the magical world, this perception of a fundamental difference in culture translates to a certain amount of discrimination against Muggle-borns because they were not raised to understand the magical culture and customs. Draco Malfoy identifies that Muggle-borns don’t fit in properly: “They’re not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 78). Draco affirms that because Muggle-borns were raised differently, they shouldn’t be brought into the magical world. Through this argument, proponents of blood purity identify the difference in cultures and then create meaning out of that difference to imply that Muggle-borns will never fit in so they should simply stay out. More or less, Muggle-borns are believed to be incapable of ever fully acculturating into the Magical society.

The assumption of cultural difference manifests differently across the Magical community. For some in the Wizarding community the Muggle world holds a certain amount of fascination. Arthur Weasley, Ron's father and an employee at the Ministry of Magic, is constantly intrigued by the gadgets and customs of the Muggle world; he is curious because he doesn't quite understand how Muggles live without magic. Though well-intentioned, Arthur's fascination with the Muggle world in some ways parallels the double-edged imperial ideology of Orientalism. Indeed, Barratt comments that "this kind of fascination of the exoticism often directed toward subjugated peoples under colonialism" (66). For most of the magical community, though, the Muggle world is met not with curiosity but with more open of skepticism and suspicion. Muggle-borns are subject to that suspicion due to their close proximity to the non-magical culture. They are not wholly acculturated to the ways of the Wizarding world, so they may be considered untrustworthy. This point of view is represented in Draco's comment. Even if not every witch or wizard would wish to act on this belief to expel Muggle-borns from their community, they generally characterize Muggles as an "alien" oddity.

It is hard to deny that there are differences in culture between the Muggle and Magical world, but some witches and wizards have attributed or correlated these differences to a more fundamental difference in biology. Here the term 'Blood Status' invokes the concept that individuals' characters are inherently determined by a biological element. Under this reasoning, individuals like the Malfoys correlate blood purity to magical ability. If an individual has ancestors who are witches and wizards, then biologically they should be more naturally gifted and thus inherently better. They mark the difference in parentage and ascribe meaning to it. For purebloods, like the Malfoys, this meaning forms a hierarchy and a means to justify their belief in the supremacy of purebloods.

To understand Blood Status as a biological concept, theories on race can be deployed to uncover the subtle mechanisms that uphold it. Considering the term 'Blood Status' so clearly attempts to mark fundamental biological differences between humans, or in this case witches and wizards, theories on race prove especially helpful due to the long-seeded racial ideology of dividing humans based on visible and assumedly blood-level differences. John Storey insists that "'race' is a cultural and historical category, a

way of making *difference* signify between people” (171). By saying difference is signified, Storey means that a visible difference is identified between people, which then is given a certain significance or meaning. The significance, though, is created and placed upon the difference, not something that is intrinsic to it. In terms of Blood Status, the purity of someone’s blood is seen as a difference which is then given a significance or meaning. Now, how significant that difference is assumed to be depends to a great extent on the individual in relation to his or her cultural location.

For the more severe adherents to Blood Status ideology, as mentioned earlier, blood purity becomes a method of generating and enforcing a social hierarchy in which Muggle-borns are inferior. The Malfoys, who for the first few novels represent the more radical views on Blood Status, “prided themselves on being purebloods; in other words, they considered anyone of Muggle descent, like Hermione, second-class” (*Goblet of Fire*, 102). Not only are Muggle-borns considered second class, but being Muggle-born is seen as an infection in an individual that in turn infects society, a biological trait that cannot be altered in its victims and instead must then be eradicated. Voldemort explains his motives when he declares that “we shall cut away the canker that infects us until only those of the true blood remain” (*Deathly Hallows*, 11). In the context of racial ideology, the language that Voldemort invokes here bears a striking resemblance to that used to justify Aryan supremacy and eugenics.<sup>1</sup> Though not everyone takes Blood Status ideology to such a radical extreme, in the general public there is a perception that Muggle-borns just aren’t as good as other witches and wizards. Horace Slughorn, in his return to Hogwarts as Potions Master in the sixth novel, talks to Harry about his mother, Lily; “Your mother was Muggle-born, of course. Couldn’t believe it when I found out. Thought she must have been pureblood, she was so good” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 70). Horace’s statement represents the less radical opinions of Muggle-borns that are nonetheless based in Blood Status ideology. According to such an assumption, they may not be a canker to society but they are perceived on a hierarchical scale where they just don’t rank as high as those with magical parentage.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed examination of the historical context behind these themes, see Bethany Barratt’s novel *The Politics of Harry Potter* where she discusses the similarities between the Death Eaters ideological arguments and those of Nazism and Hitler.

Horace's comment also opens the door to understanding the justification and rationalization for this hierarchical structure. There is a need for the ruling class, here the purebloods, to justify their privilege so that the rest of society accepts their implicit authority without contestation. As Gaetano Mosca put it, "Ruling classes do not justify their power exclusively by *de facto* possession of it, but try to find a moral and legal basis for it, representing it as the logical and necessary consequence of doctrines and beliefs that are generally recognized and accepted" (Lanski, 247). To justify power, pureblood ideology uses magic as its rationalization. Consider Horace's words again, "Thought she must have been pureblood, she was so good". Blood Status correlates blood purity to magical ability, in which purebloods are expected to perform better than Muggle-borns. They are naturally more gifted. In a magical society, if purebloods can claim that they are naturally superior at magic, then they have a means to justify their possession of social superiority.

In order to have a sense of legitimacy, Blood Status must garner a certain amount of acceptance, not just among purebloods but also by everyone in the community. Legitimacy can derive from what John Galbraith calls "conditioned power," a power which people have been encouraged or acculturated to accept. So the acceptance of Blood Status ideology and the assumption behind it – that Blood Status directly correlates to magical ability – is crucial for it to have power; however, when acceptance fails compulsion can also be used, as will be discussed later.

Justifying social superiority by binding it to a biological trait that is assumed to produce essential differences is not a new method for establishing hegemony created by this fictional ideology. In fact, it is a very old method and in the real world it is used to justify racism and the structures of white privilege. Racism, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a "belief that one's own racial or ethnic group is superior" and that "different racial or ethnic groups possess specific characteristics, abilities, or qualities, which can be compared and evaluated" (*OED*). Under the ideology of Blood Status, where abilities and characteristics are directly attributed to biological factors, each group thereby classified can be considered a different ethnic group. Muggle-borns and purebloods are believed to be two distinct, biologically different groups which can be effectively compared and evaluated. Racism also justifies itself by linking

assumed biological difference to cultural difference, just as that first Blood Status school of thought assumes that Muggle-borns do not belong due to cultural differences. Racism also involves the belief “that other such groups represent a threat to one’s cultural identity” (*OED*), so any time someone says or implies that Muggle-borns are ‘different’ or have lacking magical ability, they are invoking the same belief processes involved in racism, regardless of their intent or willful practice of discrimination against Muggle-borns. But those who might take it a step further, who use Blood Status to discriminate and act against this group, make the same leap from racism to racial discrimination.

These two different bases for Muggle-born discrimination – “blood” and culture – are not independent of each other. Each of them is continually invoked, often as a means to reinforce the other. When one argument fails, the other can be engaged to supplement that failing. Consider: Muggle-borns are different because they have been acculturated into the Muggle world, not the Wizarding world, which is a reason to consider them as an alien threat. According to this reasoning, if the Muggle-borns have been acculturated to the Wizarding world, then they should be equal. But then biological reasons are deployed to say that they can never fully integrate because the cultural differences originate from a more fundamental difference in biology, namely magical ability. Muggle-borns’ magical ability is believed to be diminished compared to that of purebloods because of their Muggle parentage. But even if Muggle-borns do have the same magical ability as a pureblood, they were raised in a different culture and by different parents, so they just can never fully fit in. So Muggle-borns are caught in a double-bind, deprived of the agency to escape these systems of discrimination.

The best way to understand the structure and power of Blood Status ideology in its most pure form is through the reforms made by the Ministry of Magic after Voldemort and his Death Eaters seize power. The seventh novel, *Deathly Hallows*, sees the rise of a new Ministry governed by the doctrine of radicalized Blood Status ideology, which has institutionalized the annihilation of Muggle-borns. Upon seizure of the Ministry, the *Daily Prophet* reports that new studies by the Department of Mysteries have shown that “magic can only be passed from person to person when Wizards reproduce. Where no proven Wizarding ancestry exists, therefore, the so-called Muggle-born is likely to have obtained magical power

by theft or force” (*Deathly Hallows*, 209). Blood purity is now directly connected to magical ability. Only those with magical parentage can actually perform magic; anyone else is a fraud. As Nancy Reagin points out, just as ‘Aryan’ Germans “persuaded much of the nation that *they* belonged to this fictional community, which consisted only of Christian German of ethnic German ancestry” so too have purebloods now persuaded witches and wizards that only those who have the right magical ancestry can be a part of the Wizarding community (Reagin, 142).

In order to enforce this new policy, the Ministry creates the Muggle-born Registration Commission, tasked with rooting out the Muggle-borns whom they accuse of having stolen wands from legitimate witches and wizards. In practice, the Ministry is setting new criteria for who is allowed acceptance into the Wizarding world. While previously it was anyone who could perform magic, it is now only those who have magical lineage. Magic becomes explicitly correlated to biology, setting up the possibility of political domination and Muggle subjugation. Muggle-borns, like Hermione, are deemed criminal Muggles who must be punished and expelled from the Wizarding world. Suddenly Blood Status radicalizes from a method of discrimination to an institutionally-enforced method of “genetic” classification, in which Muggle-borns become outlaws and inferior species that must be tried and condemned. Through coercive and conditioned power, the Ministry compels the magical community to accept a new social order. In the atrium of this Death Eater Ministry, a new statue represents that new order.

Replacing the Fountain of Magical Brethren, the new statue is a physical representation of the new world order this corrupted Ministry wishes to implement. The scene and sculpture are described thus:

It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and a wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones, looking down at the Ministry workers toppling out of fireplaces below them. Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words MAGIC IS MIGHT... Harry looked more closely and realized what he thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children,

all with stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards.

“Muggles,” whispered Hermione. “In their rightful place” (*Deathly Hallows* 242).

Under this new ideology enforced by the Death Eater regime, witches and wizards have a natural supremacy over Muggles that justifies magical individuals subjugating them. They are elevated above the rest because they alone can perform magic. The engraving ‘magic is might’ is a reinvention of the old adage ‘might is right’ whereby the magic folk have a natural born right to subjugate the Muggles, who are represented as a naked and barbaric people. It is a distinct hierarchy based on that fundamental difference, the ability to perform magic. To justify seizure of power, the ideology has to eliminate the gray space of Muggle-born witches and wizards. Either you are entirely a witch or wizard, being born and raised in the community, or you are not. Muggle-borns thus pose a legitimate threat to the new order the Death Eaters wish to establish. By eliminating Muggle-borns, the Death Eater regime eliminates any of the slippery contradictions that might undermine their seizure of power.

These aggregate actions of the Death Eaters to create a world which reflects their own beliefs closely fit Arendt’s description of ideology. Blood Status reduces the world to blood purity, or a biological struggle between two groups, wizards/witches and Muggles. Ideologies, according to Arendt, must also “explain everything, past and future”, criterion Blood Status also fits (*Essays*, 354). Death Eaters believe that they were wrongfully forced into hiding by Muggles, but it is inevitable that witches and wizards will eventually rise and rule. Their biological superiority renders any other resolution impossible; in other words, the struggle between Muggles and wizards has a predestined end, which now individuals must live out. Through this claim of an inevitable future, Death Eaters recreate the world to mirror their belief, regardless of whether existing reality actually leads to that conclusion. Whether the Death Eater regime is completely totalitarian or not, their actions reflect Arendt’s description of totalitarianism: “totalitarianism has concluded from this that we can fabricate truth insofar as we can fabricate reality...in other words, it is the underlying conviction of any totalitarian transformation of ideology into reality that it will become true whether it is true or not” (*Essays* 354). Much like totalitarian



regimes, the Death Eaters search to recreate the world, to “fabricate reality” so that the world embodies their ideology. Blood Status does not just explain the difference between wizards and Muggles; it also explains the struggles of the world and, when enacted, has the power to alter reality.

It should also be considered that this is not the only approach to negotiating the differences between the magical and the Muggle world. There also exists another approach that does not structure that difference as a hierarchical one. Exhibited by a number of characters, particularly Dumbledore and the Weasleys, this alternative conception of cultural differences between the two societies does not attach deeper meaning to them. Instead, adherents to this alternative view appear to acknowledge the differences, particularly the ability to produce magic, but they do not make that difference signify Wizarding supremacy. Mr. Weasley is fascinated by the Muggle world. He does not see Muggles as inferior, but more as a curiosity because he cannot imagine life without magic. They are not lesser; they are just different. Though Dumbledore struggled with understanding the role magic gave him in his adolescence, having written in a letter “Yes, we have been given power and yes, that power gives us the right to rule,” he eventually changes to become known as the “champion of commoners, of Mudbloods and Muggles” (*Deathly Hallows*, 357; *Goblet of Fire*, 648). By the time the narrative begins, Blood Status has no meaning for Dumbledore or his allies. They acknowledge the difference between people, that some people are born from Muggles, but that does not carry any other meaning. This contrasting approach to understanding the difference between the societies and between individuals in the Wizarding world is a minority view, but it allows for the two societies to live in harmony and for its adherents to challenge the hierarchy based on Blood Status.

While not everyone in the magical community explicitly or consciously believes in the hierarchy created by Blood Status, from the first novel, it is institutionalized far enough into the governance of the Magical World that it does have power. Until the Death Eaters seize power, that institutionalization is more implicit: in no way does the Ministry of Magic explicitly favor purebloods or create policies to continue their dominance. The grey space of Muggle-born witches and wizards is allowed to exist. Yet the ideology permeates far enough into the Ministry to give purebloods recognition and tacitly accepted

privilege in the community. This institutionalization of Blood Status ideology is evident in the actions of Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic.

As the legitimate face and the acting figurehead of the Wizarding government for the first five novels, Fudge demonstrates how much power even an implicit belief in Blood Status can exercise. Initially amicable and aloof, by the fifth novel Fudge becomes a paranoid man who affirms the importance of Blood Status, and its favorability in the Ministry. There are several scenes in the novels where we see Lucius Malfoy together with Fudge. It appears that the Minister has close connections with the Malfoys, and when Harry says that Lucius was in the graveyard the night of Voldemort's return, Fudge won't hear a word of it: "Malfoy was cleared!...A very old family – donations to excellent causes" (*Goblet of Fire*, 406). This scene makes clear that Fudge favors 'very old' families and better yet, ones like the Malfoys, who have money. A little later in the scene, Dumbledore chastises Fudge, exclaiming "You place too much importance, and you always have, on the so-called purity of blood!" (*Goblet of Fire*, 708).

Fudge's personal belief in Blood Status manifests in how he operates as Minister and how it becomes institutionalized throughout the Ministry. In the same scene as above, after Fudge leaves Molly Weasley says "We know what Fudge is. It's Arthur's fondness for Muggles that has held him back at the Ministry all these years. Fudge thinks he lacks proper Wizarding pride" (4, 711). Fudge isn't afraid to make decisions based on his Blood Status assumptions; he holds back Arthur Weasley, a pureblood, simply because Arthur is fond of Muggles and does not assume that he is superior to them. Fudge might not be actively malicious towards Muggle-borns, but he is at the very least suspicious of them. And whether it is Fudge's doing or not, none of the Ministry employees, particularly those close to him or heads of departments, are Muggle-borns. In fact, they all seem to be decently pureblood. Dolores Umbridge is his undersecretary; Rufus Scrimgeour (prior to becoming Minister in *Half-Blood Prince*) was head of the Auror Office; Barty Crouch was once head of Magical Law Enforcement, and then moved to head the Department of International Magical Cooperation; and the Department of Magical Games and Sports is run by Ludovic Bagman. At best the only individual who may not be pureblood is

Bagman. While this may not affect how the departments are run in obvious ways, it certainly demonstrates some form of privilege and discriminatory power within the governing body of the Wizarding world.

So far this analysis has focused on understanding the construction of Blood Status ideology, both how it is conceived and how it is implemented in different ways throughout the Wizarding world. But there remains the question of the legitimacy of the claim that Blood Status adherents (perhaps better called ‘purists’ here) use to rationalize their beliefs. Blood Status from the biological perspective rationalizes itself by claiming purebloods are biologically better witches and wizard. However, no proof actually exists that magic follows any of the rules purists would attribute to it. Every witch and wizard has approximately the same amount of magical ability. Muggle-borns, like Hermione Granger and Lily Potter, demonstrate that they are capable of performing magic just as well, and at times better, than some from the most pure families. Great wizards like Dumbledore or Voldemort can come from any background. Voldemort himself is half-blood while Dumbledore is pureblood. And if magic were to follow strict biological rules, then Muggles could not have magical offspring, nor could magical parents have Muggle children, which are called Squibs. If magic were to accumulate through the generations, as if it enhanced through the generations, then Squibs should not exist. No matter how persistent purists are in trying to map blood and magic onto each other, they inevitably fail.

The contradiction between the ideological claims and reality would seem to reinforce the notion that differences between people and cultures do not necessitate or justify a hierarchy of one group or one person over another. If anything, it proves that purebloods and Muggle-borns are different only in a cultural context, not in a biological one. To attribute differences that go blood-deep is to invent a new, false meaning. Overall the novels suggest through the heroes, including the Weasleys and Dumbledore, that “blood” is not a legitimate method for classifying individuals or claiming power over others.

## **Magic as Inherent Difference and Power**

Magic, unlike “blood”, represents a different and much more real biological phenomenon that accords power throughout the Wizarding world. Individual magic naturally confers on witches and wizards certain amounts of agency. When magic becomes so powerful in an individual, it allows him or her to manipulate systems, making magic a structure of power.

Magic is thus a complex and multifaceted entity that cannot be understood solely as something that someone either does or does not have. Instead, magic must be understood in a multitude of contexts, including what it can accomplish and how it is utilized by witches and wizards in each context. Firstly it does not function as an ideological structure as Blood Status does. Magic is not a belief system and social hierarchy based on imagined differences. It is a physical phenomenon and its impact is tangible and immediate. This distinction is elementary, but crucial because its tangibility, its direct contact with the material world, is how it functions. If, as Russell asserts, “power may be defined as the production of intended effects”, then magic can be understood as the method by which power is produced. A witch or wizard can use magic to produce intended, material effects (Russell, 19). Russell also defines two types of power, “power over human beings and power over dead matter or non-human forms of life” (19). Magic produces both types of power: power over humans and power over the natural world.

Consistently through the series, magic is utilized as a tool for achieving power and dominance over humans. There are the relatively harmless spells, like *petrificus totalus* (the body-bind spell) or *confundo* (a spell that creates confusion), that are used directly against an individual to impact or influence them in some way. In fact, a plethora of these types of spells and charms exist, all used in direct contact with the human body to create some form of intended effect. These spells act with a low degree of coercive power, and they do little to no bodily harm. Additionally, there are more hostile spells, the worst being the Unforgivable Curses: the Imperius Curse, the Cruciatius Curse, and the Killing Curse. These spells are the furthest extreme of domination over another, giving direct and complete control over his or her actions, including the power of torture and death. Because they encompass the most extreme forms of power over an individual without their consent, “the use of any one of them on a fellow human being is

enough to earn a life sentence in Azkaban” (*Goblet of Fire*, 217). Azkaban is the Wizarding prison, a large, dreary castle that sits on an island; its guards are Dementors, caped, hooded figures who drain their inmates of any happy thoughts. For most of the series, the dominant social codes suggest that no person should be allowed to wield such a dangerous amount of power over an individual without his or her consent.

Because power and magic are so often linked, it will be useful here to describe a new way of distinguishing between them based on acts of individual agency and social forces. Magic is certainly a potent force; when it relates directly to an individual who wields it the layman’s term would be to say that he or she is “powerful”. However, it is more useful to reconceptualize this under alternative descriptions of power made by Hannah Arendt. Arendt asserts that power is not simply the ability for one person to influence another; rather, “power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual...” (Arendt, 63). Power in this way can only be located in those decisions on which humans act collectively, or when someone has been empowered to act on behalf of a group of individuals.

From this perspective, power cannot reside in one person; similarly, magic endowed in one person does not make them inherently “powerful”. Instead, magic needs a new qualifier to describe its effects, and Arendt offers a wonderful one: “*Strength* unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity; it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its character, which may prove itself in relation to other things or persons, but is essentially independent of them” (64). Magic endows witches and wizards with strength. It is a completely individual quality, in that every individual has control over his or her own magic. Even if many wizards are producing a desired outcome by using magic, it is still an independent property residing in each individual separately. For future reference, rather than saying an individual is magically “powerful”, I will refer to them as magically “strong” or having “strength”.

It is also important to consider that magical strength does not always correlate to knowledge in magic. Hermione, for example, is often described as being the “smartest witch of her age”. Her “smarts”

allow her to practice new forms of magic to increase her “strength”; however, once others learn to perform the same spells they are all equally “strong”. Similarly, the professors of Hogwarts routinely demonstrate their thorough knowledge of particular realms of magic, which aids them in producing complex spells or making difficult potions, but it does not mean that their knowledge makes their spells or potions “stronger”. Neither Hermione nor the professors will ever be able to produce magic as “strong” as that of Albus Dumbledore or Lord Voldemort; only these two great wizards have immensely, inherently “strong” magic.

These two individuals demonstrate the radical importance magical strength has in the structures of the Magical community. Let us look first at Dumbledore, considered by many in the community as the greatest wizard in the world. He is known for his defeat over the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, and his discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood, as well as his exceptional skills and knowledge in magic. Dobby the house elf says Dumbledore’s “power rivals those of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at the height of his strength” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 17). When Tom Riddle steps out of the diary in *the Chamber of Secrets* and describes himself as the greatest sorcerer in the world, Harry retorts “Sorry to disappoint you and all that but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. Everyone says so,” (2,314). Dumbledore is even strong enough to evade the Ministry of Magic in the fifth novel. When Dolores Umbridge comments that the Ministry will track him down soon enough, the visiting O.W.L.s examiner Professor Marchbanks expresses her skepticism: “I doubt it... not if Dumbledore doesn’t want to be found! I should know. . . Examined him personally in Transfiguration and Charms when he did N.E.W.T.s... Did things with a wand I’d never seen before” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 711). His magical strength, coupled with his knowledge, makes him greatly admired within the magical community, and has awarded him many positions of prominence.

Currently the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Dumbledore has been offered a number of significant positions of authority in the Wizarding World. Dumbledore was offered, apparently numerous times, the position of Minister of Magic but turned it down. Besides Headmaster, he has held the offices of the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of

Wizards. He also holds the Order of Merlin, First Class. Barratt is in many ways correct when she asserts that “it is through wisdom, not power” that he receives these accolades (16); Dumbledore is, as she points out, the archetype for Plato’s philosopher-king, which gives him a great amount of respect in the community. However, it is not respect or wisdom that allows Dumbledore to escape the authority of the Ministry; it is his brute magical strength.

In the fifth novel, *the Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore is confronted by the Minister and several of his deputies to be taken in the alleged offence of forming a student army. The accusation itself is false: Cornelius Fudge is paranoid that Dumbledore is gunning for his position. Nonetheless, Fudge is the Minister of Magic, giving him an executive position that no other wizard could so boldly defy. But Dumbledore has other plans: “I have absolutely no intention of being sent to Azkaban. I could break out, of course – but what a waste of time, and frankly, I can think of a whole host of other things I would rather be doing” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 620). With a brilliant display of his magical strength, Dumbledore escapes Fudge and his cohort, and disappears into hiding where no one can track him down. In this passage, not only does Dumbledore escape the law, but he himself admits that he is powerful enough to escape the society’s strongest prison, which is both the symbol and source of the government’s condign power. It is as if the legal system and the governing body of the Magical world do not pertain to Dumbledore. He is so magically strong that he is able to do as he pleases, without regard to the law. Thankfully, Dumbledore does not take advantage of this. He soon returns, more or less informing Fudge that he will return to his position as Headmaster as he works to fight against Voldemort.

Voldemort is the other example of what extreme magical strength can achieve. Driven by his desire for domination, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is capable of overthrowing the entire Ministry of Magic, if only temporarily. He hijacks the Ministry and uses his Death Eaters to implement new policies. He reforms Hogwarts. Then he takes a back seat as the ultimate authoritarian figure over his new regime. So incredible is his magical ability, it pushes the wand maker Ollivander to say “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 85). In fact, it is likely he would have achieved his goals far sooner had it not been for Dumbledore, who appears to be the only individual with

enough magical strength to hold him at bay. Voldemort's achievements are incredible, considering that through his magic he destabilizes the Ministry, the legitimate wielder of power, as it is bestowed upon it by the people. Voldemort's strength doesn't just break the laws of government, it can bend the laws of nature as he searches for immortality through the use of Horcruxes, a complex and dark form of magic that allows him to place a piece of his own soul into a non-living vessel.

These two characters, Dumbledore and Voldemort, represent the two archetypal roles a person with significant magical strength can play in the Wizarding World. He or she can perform wondrous magic, advance into different leadership positions, and aid the magical community while observing the legitimacy of the Ministry (even if the laws aren't always personally followed), as exemplified by Dumbledore. Or he or she can use their gift to combat that legitimate social and political structure, to use their strength as a method to overthrow the system and institute a structure of authoritarianism, as demonstrated by Voldemort. Either way, magical strength has granted these individuals a rare position in society that grants them a distinct amount of agency not granted to other witches or wizards. They are agents of their own destiny, not deterred by the laws that would otherwise restrain the desires of other Wizarding citizens.

Extraordinary magical strength thus increases an individual's overall agency in society, which gives them a unique position with a certain amount of privilege. Dumbledore is given a certain amount of power due to the different offices he holds. Both he and Voldemort can resist capture and defy the law. These privileges can be considered to give them power, insofar as they allow them to inflict intended change upon the world and individuals. Magic is not itself power, but the unique social positions that profound magical strength awards should be considered positions of power.

Such a position of power is singular, which is to say that it only pertains to the person that holds the position. Both Voldemort and Dumbledore have an increased measure of agency in their decisions and actions. That ability resides only in the individual who has an extraordinary amount of magical strength. An individual's agency cannot be increased by invoking someone else's magical strength, as they are still restrained by the laws and norms of society. Dumbledore claims that he could escape Azkaban if he really



wanted to do so, yet he cannot break out Hagrid who is unjustly imprisoned in the second novel. As Arendt asserts, strength is an individual quality, it “designates something in the singular” (Arendt, 64). So if Dumbledore and Voldemort generate a certain amount of power based on their magical strength, that power can only be assumed by themselves. Even for these two exceptional individuals, in order to rouse any type of social change they must still rely on the source of power Arendt describes, which comes from the organization of people working together.

### **Power in Numbers: Collective Force in the Wizarding World**

Throughout the novels, witches and wizards are constantly seen working together to achieve some intended consequence. By working together, they can unite to garner a power stronger than any sole individual. At the rise of Lord Voldemort, Dumbledore himself gives a call to action to a somber Great Hall filled with students and Wizarding officials: “I say to you all, once again – in light of Lord Voldemort’s return, we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided. Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust” (*Goblet of Fire*, 723). The Headmaster highlights the great strength working together as a united force has against fighting evil. Strength in friendship and trust has the only chance to fight evil. What Dumbledore also highlights is the power in numbers; regardless of intent, working collectively can achieve great social change.

Echoing Dumbledore’s own words, some political theory has conceptualized power as originating with groups rather than individuals. Hannah Arendt states that “power is never the property of an individual; it belongs and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together” (64). As individuals “act in concert” they generate power, which also dissipates as soon as they disband (Arendt, 64). As mentioned in the introduction, power then derives from human cooperation, not from the ability to control the actions of others. For the witches and wizards of Harry Potter’s world, this means that when they act together toward one goal, they start a process by which power can be legitimized and social

change can be initiated. This process of getting together is most easily represented in two of the most active forces in the novels: the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters.

These two forces divide the central characters as they gather together as a measure to increase their own overall agency. The two groups battle for political control, wishing to recreate the structures of institutional power in the Magical community. Voldemort and the Death Eaters fight for an authoritarian state, increasing the role of Blood Status in defining people and giving Voldemort absolute power over everyone. On the other side, the Order of the Phoenix is identified as the counter-force, working for good. They also fight for a different Magical order, one in which Blood Status has no meaning and magical non-human species have more rights and respect.

The Order and the Death Eaters actively assemble as a means to increase their overall agency to implement social change. Gathered together by Voldemort, the Death Eaters combat the Ministry in their efforts to establish a new world order where the Muggle world is subjugated to witches and wizards. They don't have the most benign intentions, yet it can be said that by congregating together, they stand a far better chance of acting on those intentions than they would by acting alone. More impressive is Voldemort's willingness to act with other people. He is often described as a lone agent, preferring to operate alone and shying away from companionship. Yet he identifies that in order to achieve his goals, he cannot act alone. Only with a formidable force, with enough individuals acting together, can they affect any sort of change. It is a reaffirmation that social change, whether good or bad, can only occur with numbers. And sometimes, to stop social change an equal number of people are needed.

Made up of outcasts and misfits, the Order of the Phoenix gathers with some of the same reasoning as do the Death Eaters. By joining forces, these individuals make an implicit statement that they will not tolerate the hostile takeover of an authoritarian regime. Dumbledore's recognition of the need for unity against the Dark Lord is actualized as he assembles members from across the magical community. In joining together, they also become an organization that is capable of achieving a greater measure of agency than if the members acted alone. In what might be considered a measure of self preservation, the

members of the Order fight against a group that would harshly punish and persecute them if the Death Eaters were to succeed.

While these forces have characteristics of what Arendt defines as power in that they are individuals acting in concert, neither group's power can be considered wholly legitimate. Yes, these individuals have gotten together, but they are not empowered by the magical community to act for the whole. Legitimate authority rests only in places where its recognition is unquestioned "by those who are asked to obey" (Arendt, 65). Robert Dahl explains that legitimacy lies in the administration that "successfully upholds a claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" (39). Together, these criteria for determining legitimacy show that neither the Order of the Phoenix or the Death Eaters collectively exercise legitimate power. The only institution that can be conceived as a legitimate authority is the Ministry, which is empowered by the people and is acknowledged by all. So while the Order and the Death Eaters might be considered as organizations using collective power to impact society, they lack the required qualifications to consider that power fully legitimate.

In their pursuit to overthrow the Ministry the Death Eaters turn to methods of domination by force to achieve their ends. To rule by force through techniques of domination undermines their claims of legitimacy through collective action. Arendt calls this type of authority "violence" rather than "power", suggesting that in order for a small group or for individuals to maintain their rule they must act violently against the populace so they are not overthrown. Thus violence "is by nature instrumental" meaning it must rely on instruments (i.e. weapons) to maintain their control (Arendt, 68). For the Death Eaters, these instruments come in the form of their wands. With their instruments they confront and temporarily overthrow the power of the Ministry of Magic.

In a more normative sense, the Death Eaters' desires to dominate both the Wizarding and the Muggle worlds suggest that this form of power is illegitimate. At a glance, they are a group of individuals "acting in concert" but their goals and techniques uncover the true nature of this violent group. They do not use lawful procedures to affect change; they use methods of torture and violence to achieve their ends.

Voldemort and his followers use violence to challenge the powers that be and instill terror into the populace. Their exploits against other witches and wizards are cringe-worthy to say the least. No reader could ever interpret the will to dominate as a source of legitimate power. The Death Eaters are usurpers seeking to steal back authority that was never rightfully theirs. Yet violence is a very powerful force. The Ministry is incapable of defending itself indefinitely. Arendt admits “violence can destroy power” (71). In such a course of events, instrumental force must be used to fend off those who would supplant legitimate authority.

Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix are the counter to the efforts of Voldemort and the Death Eaters; the Order acts alongside the Ministry as a force of resistance until the Ministry falls to the Death Eaters. However, the Order is not under the control of the Ministry. Hermione explains that in the new Order “Dumbledore’s in charge, he founded it. It’s the people who fought against You-Know-Who last time” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 67). Those people come from a wide-range of backgrounds. There are Muggle-borns, half-giants, werewolves, animagi, and purebloods who are typically labeled as “blood traitors” by Voldemort’s supporters.

From theoretical a perspective, it is difficult to claim that the Order is a legitimate power source. As Arendt asserts, legitimate power can only be derived when people act in concert and anyone ‘in power’ has been empowered by the people “to act in their name” (64). The group symbolizes the good that can be done when humans cooperate; coupled with their lack of ambition to dominate the Wizarding or Muggle world, the Order’s reluctance to use violence in their actions. That said, there remains limits to considering the Order a ‘legitimate’ authority. None of the Order members have been called to act in the name of the people, nor do they answer to the legitimately “empowered” Ministry of Magic. To the contrary, Order members admit that they answer solely to its leader and founder, Dumbledore. Harry gets in an argument in the *Half-Blood Prince* about Severus Snape’s role in possibly aiding Draco Malfoy. Remus Lupin suddenly bursts out “It isn’t our business. It’s Dumbledore’s business. Dumbledore trusts Severus and that ought to be good enough for all of us” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 332). Lupin’s undying

loyalty to Dumbledore, exhibited in other members as well, may be an admirable trait but it also invalidates the legitimacy of the Order.

While theoretical perspectives call into question the Order's overall legitimacy, the novels suggest that legitimacy is a much more relative concept, fluctuating between collectives and institutions at varying moments in the plot. As legitimate institutions begin to act aggressively unjust or irrational, collectives that combat such institutions can gain legitimacy by engaging in civil disobedience, making legitimacy a much more messy concept. From *Sorcerer's Stone* to *Goblet of Fire*, the Ministry is the sole legitimate institution of governance, despite its subtle institutionalism of Blood Status. But somewhere between the fourth novel and the last, aspects of legitimacy transfer from the Ministry to the Order. In *Hallows* the Ministry becomes governed by an amoral and illegitimate force, which corrupts the government's own claim to legitimacy. The Death Eaters use the institutional legitimacy of the Ministry to initiate legally-enforced discrimination of Muggle-borns, but it's these very methods of discrimination – capturing Muggle-borns on the run, holding horrible trials to prove guilt, and even hunting Muggles for sport – which suggests the Ministry is no longer legitimate. The Ministry is now focused on domination rather than governance. As members continue to fight against the Ministry, despite the death of Dumbledore, their civil disobedience to protect Muggle-borns and fight the regime suggests that their cause is just and legitimate. Yet it begs the question, at what moment exactly did the exchange of legitimacy occur? The novels are relatively unclear on that point.

In novels prior to the takeover by Voldemort and the Death Eaters, Order members exercise civil disobedience against a Ministry which is still legitimate. Harry and fellow students create Dumbledore's Army, a secret group who practices Defense Against the Dark Arts after Umbridge eliminates any practicing of magic in her class. Dumbledore escapes Cornelius Fudge's attempts to arrest him once the club is found out. Once the Ministry recognizes the return of Voldemort and Rufus Scrimgeour becomes the new Minister in *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry still refuses to help the Minister by "popping in and out of the Ministry" to show his support (345). The Order even sets up its own guard detail in the Department of Mysteries to protect the prophecy about Harry and Voldemort, a measure taken without consultation with

or approval from the Ministry. All these moments of civil disobedience could suggest the degradation of the Ministry's legitimacy while simultaneously approving the Order as legitimate. Yet it is unclear at which particular moment the civil disobedience performed by the Order becomes fully legitimate and the Ministry has lost its legitimacy. But legitimacy, as Voldemort demonstrates, is not a requirement to enact social and political change.

Despite the extensive use of force that he and the Death Eaters use to topple the Ministry, Voldemort realizes that the best method to achieve his ends is not solely through violence. Edmund Burke famously asserted that “the use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again; and a nation is not governed which is perpetually to be conquered” (*Select Works*, 141). Gerhard Lenski builds on Burke's assumptions, recognizing that “the establishment of a new social order can never be fully attained until most members of society freely accept it as their own” (245). Recognizing this dilemma, Voldemort and the Death Eaters do not destroy the Ministry; instead, they infiltrate and usurp its already established authority. The Ministry already has what Bertrand Russell calls ‘traditional power’. Russell states that “traditional power has on its side the force of habit; it does not have to justify itself at every moment, nor to prove continually that no opposition is strong enough to overthrow it” (21). Furthermore, by taking over the Ministry, Voldemort can rely on the Law, which Russell says is the coercive power of the State (20). As Lupin says, “the Death Eaters have got the full might of the Ministry on their side now. They've got the power to perform brutal spells without fear of identification or arrest” (*Deathly Hallows*, 206). Under the guise of the Ministry they can utilize the authority of the government to transform their will into law, providing themselves with a legal – though not necessarily legitimate – basis for their actions.

After the coup, the Ministry itself remains relatively unchanged: all the departments and offices still exist and it appears that it is business-as-usual. Beneath this façade, however, the true change of power is evident. All high-ranking offices are held by Death Eaters who remain subservient to Voldemort. They institute reforms to recondition citizens toward new beliefs, including that Harry Potter is dangerous, that Muggle-borns are criminals, and that Muggles must be subdued. Yet even if the Ministry

remains in some form, Voldemort has become the unofficial authoritarian leader, a puppet master. One might wonder why he doesn't just proclaim himself as Minister, but Lupin tells us "He doesn't need to... Effectively he *is* the Minister, but why should he sit behind a desk at the Ministry? His puppet Thicknesse is taking care of everyday business, leaving Voldemort free to extend his power beyond the Ministry" (*Deathly Hallows*, 208). Voldemort sees the opportunity of maintaining the Ministry: it already carries a certain amount of trust and positive public sentiment. Yet it remains in all aspects his regime, a power structure pervaded by his own authority that will be received without question and without resistance.

If the Death Eaters can be identified with a governmental system, then the same can be said of the Order of the Phoenix. The Order had previously worked closely with the Ministry in combating the forces of the Dark Lord, but the Order is under the direct control of Dumbledore and desires a different resolution than does the Ministry. However, neither Dumbledore nor the Order desire any form of a hostile takeover. In fact, there is little sign that they would implement a systematic restructuring of the government at all. The Order is an organization that would install social reforms for the betterment of Wizarding outcasts and others on the margins of their society.

A force organized to fight against the Death Eaters, the Order simultaneously fights against Blood Status as an ideological structure, particularly wizards' misconception of the inferiority of Muggles. Kingsley Shacklebolt, a well-known Order member and Ministry official, states that "it's one short step from 'Wizards first' to 'Purebloods first' and then to 'Death Eaters'" (*Deathly Hallows*, 440). The Order is thus almost a counter-culture movement in response to Blood Status ideology as it pervades the new Ministry order under Voldemort. This resistance to Blood Status ideology can also be identified as the new policy of the Ministry after the downfall of Voldemort. Kingsley becomes the Minister of Magic once the Death Eaters are defeated; in this respect the, Order of the Phoenix can be said that it was able to implement social change. And if Kingsley governs with this more egalitarian prerogative, the Order can claim that while not taking over the Ministry for their own devices, it has become a major source of institutional transformation and confirms Galbraith's opinion that organizations are in modern times the most important source of power.

## **Institutions – the Power of Governance, Wealth, and Education**

If power derives from the coming together of people, then the institutions put in place by those people must be bound to concepts of power. The institution most associated with institutional power is the government or the State, which wields authority through conditioned obedience and public approval. Its power theoretically derives directly from the people and is typically linked to politics. This is not, however, the only source of institutional power. Thomas Lawrence explains that “institutions exist to the extent that they are powerful - the extent to which they affect the behaviors, beliefs and opportunities of individuals, groups, organizations and societies” (170). So any organization that has the ability to create an effect, particularly upon the beliefs and behaviors of individuals or groups can be identified as an institution. The more change an institution can affect and the more citizens obedient to it, the more power it has.

In the world of Harry Potter, there are three distinct institutions, each with varying degrees of power. The Ministry of Magic acts as the primary governmental institution. It is by far the dominant institution throughout the Wizarding world. Yet two other institutions exist, which can be defined by locations as well. Gringotts functions as the society’s economic institution, while Hogwarts operates as the academic institution. These two institutions play important roles in the magical world, but in a general sense their immediate effects are more localized than the broad reach of the Ministry.

Because power is about the ability to bring about or fend off change, it is not enough just to define the institution; the functionality of the institution must also be examined. The Ministry of Magic functions as the legitimate authority of the magical State. Its legitimacy derives from its generally unquestioned authority. Arendt states the hallmark of authority “is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed” (65). The citizens of the magical world recognize the Ministry as the sole source of governmental authority, either through active consent or habit. Perhaps a better indicator of the authority of the Ministry is its ability to organize itself around the use of power. Talcott Parsons explains that authority derives when “power as medium is organized and legitimized” through institutional code (113). That institutional code can be considered the coercive



power of law, which creates and organizes the Ministry's use of power. The law and the consent of the people give the Ministry the power to govern. When order is threatened in the society, it is the Ministry that has the right to use force to maintain order. Robert Dahl suggests that the administration which "successfully upholds a claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" can be called the "state" (39). The Ministry of Magic holds that monopoly. Through most of the novels, the Ministry passes laws and then has the legitimate claim to enforce those laws.<sup>2</sup>

As the legitimate governmental institution, the Ministry was founded with one primary function. After the passing of the "International Statute of Secrecy", the Ministry was charged with keeping magic hidden from the Muggle world (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 65). If the Ministry's authority is viewed only in relation to this particular function, its scope is relatively small. The Ministry passes laws that restrict the use of magic and it has the legitimate authority to enforce those laws. It also requires a judiciary function to try witches and wizards accused of breaking the law, established in the court of the Wizengamot, and a place to hold lawbreakers, established in the prison of Azkaban. In effect, the Ministry's restrictions act as a form of negative power, to limit the actions of individuals insofar as they threaten to expose magic.

This perspective of the Ministry, however, is insufficient because it does not encompass all the authority, explicit or implicit, exercised by the institution. By the time Harry visits the Ministry in *the Order*, the institution has so many varying functions in the Wizarding world that its scope is not limited to just concealing magic. Starting from the *Sorcerer's Stone*, each book sees an incremental increase in the functionality of the Ministry. Through the second and third book, the Ministry is not only concerned with hiding magic; it also engages intra-community law enforcement. Witches and wizards can perform acts that may not threaten the exposure of magic, but are illegal nonetheless. In the second novel, Hagrid is taken to the prison Azkaban on the possibility it was he that opened the Chamber of Secrets. In the third novel, the Ministry clamors to recapture the escaped convicted murderer Sirius Black. Both of these

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<sup>2</sup> It could be argued that the Order of the Phoenix threatens the monopoly over physical force; however, multiple times the Order is said to be working with the Ministry, signifying it has the Ministry's consent. Moreover, it cannot pass or enforce laws. It can only work to prevent Voldemort and the Death Eaters from usurping legitimate institutions and laws.

gentlemen are accused of performing magic against fellow witches and wizards to such a severe degree – murder – that they cannot be allowed to remain in society. This functionality of the Ministry may be closely related to its original function to conceal the magical community by actualizing negative power, but now the Ministry is not just concealer; it is the keeper of order.

The Ministry's functions extend further to authority over magical transport, regulation of magical creatures, magical games and sports, international magical relations, and even the study of complex and unknown magic. These functions go well beyond the original task that created the Ministry of Magic. Gone are the days when it was simply a legitimate source of physical power with the functions of concealing magic and maintaining order. It expands to have a hand in anything related to magic, and, in many cases, it almost represents a modern government bureaucracy. It regulates transportation, it essentially has a Department of State. The Committee on Experimental Charms is the approximate magical equivalent to the American Food and Drug Administration in regulating what is and is not safe for the use and consumption of citizens. Wizarding sports, particularly Quidditch, are organized by the Department of Magical Games and Sports. The Ministry even has a hand in education, as evident in the ministerial appointment of Dolores Umbridge as the Hogwarts High Inquisitor.

This wide expansion from the Ministry's original functions are legitimate in theory, but as the Ministry grows its bureaucratic structure, its general lack of oversight and accountability suggest that structural changes are needed for its legitimacy to continue. As the original legitimate seat of authority, the Ministry is allowed to expand its functions and in many cases this seems more helpful than harmless. Magical regulation is important for general safety, and with other Wizarding governments around the world, the Ministry ought to have a department that communicates and negotiates with those other governments. These examples could be framed as organic expansion from the Ministry's original task of protecting magic exposure. Studying new charms and spells informs the Ministry of harmful spells that might lead to exposure. Much like how our own State Department communicates with other governments on possible threats or about international criminal law, the Ministry of Magic would do well to talk to other governments in planning how to shield the Muggle world from the knowledge of magic and

working together to deal with criminal witches and wizards. These types of expansions are legitimate because they are based on socially agreed-upon roles of the Ministry.

Some departments cannot be considered logical expansions from the original function of the Ministry, but the novels suggest that they are publicly desired and have legitimacy in that way. The love witches and wizards have for Quidditch, demonstrated by the Quidditch teams at Hogwarts and in the fourth novel during the Quidditch World Cup, merits the need for the Department of Magical Games and Sports, especially its Quidditch office. When a public good is so universally enjoyed, the Ministry has a legitimate claim in creating a new department to regulate and govern it. In all the Quidditch scenes, no one ever complains about the Games and Sports Department. Witches and wizards respect that it has a helpful social function.

Some functions, however, are clear violations of the legitimate functions of the Ministry. The most severe violation is the attempts made by Minister Fudge to interfere with Hogwarts. With Fudge's appointment of Umbridge in the fifth novel as the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, and then Hogwarts High Inquisitor, the Ministry has overstepped in its authority. Barton describes Umbridge as an "uber-bureaucrat" who makes constant "references to Ministry protocol" (52). Barton's assessment, coupled with Umbridge's cruel enjoyment of divvying out punishment, illustrates that the Ministry has no right to interfere with the workings of Hogwarts. That is not a part of the Ministry's function and its violation cannot be legitimate.

By expanding its role into key aspects of the Wizarding world, the Ministry simultaneously strengthens its claim as the accepted legitimate source of power and its ability to compel individuals to follow the Ministry when acceptance may be questioned, thereby preserving its existence. The expansion of the Ministry into areas like transportation, education, spell experimentation, and sports – all areas not directly related to the prevention of magical revelation or law enforcement – give it a stronger position to influence the daily lives of witches and wizards. These are key areas where social consciousness can be shaped without the use of force. Persuasion is one of the key components of conditioned power, through which citizens submit to authority without recognizing or questioning their submission. By inserting itself

into these social areas, as well as into the information-shaping complex of the newspaper *the Daily Prophet*, the Ministry greatly influences opinion and strengthens the passive acceptance of the witches and wizards it governs.

When acceptance fails, however, the Ministry has already been endowed with enough authority that force can be used to ensure order. The departments of the Ministry, which are each capable of unilaterally passing laws, cannot rely solely on compliance to laws; it must also have the ability to enforce those laws or else they are meaningless. So each department can also invoke coercive power when acceptance fails. The Ministry deploys the Department of Magical Law Enforcement as the strongest arm of coercion. The Department itself is comprised of a number of different offices, each given a realm of law to enforce, such as the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office or the Improper Use of Magic Office. In theory, the Department ensures that magic is kept hidden from Muggles and is not used to harm other witches or wizards. Order is maintained by the use of necessary force when individuals have violated those laws. Unfortunately for many in the magical community, though, the general bureaucracy of the Ministry lends itself to external influence and manipulation.

Without any oversight or accountability to the general public, the bureaucratic structure of the Ministry allows officials and citizens to manipulate the system with little to no consequence. Ministry officials are able to use their authority to pursue their own vendettas and wealthy witches and wizards can use their money to gain influence or escape punishment.

This degree of manipulation, bordering on corruption, is evident several times across the novels. Prior to novels' opening, the police state that arose during the first rise of Voldemort suggests some degree of corruption. Barton points out that during this time the Ministry engaged in "overzealous persecutions and the suspension of civil rights" (48). The Department of Magical Law ran rampant to hunt down Death Eaters, often either breaking laws themselves in their effort or, as Barton suggests, having civil rights suspended. In an even more vivid illustration of the power of the Ministry and its corruptible nature, Minister Cornelius Fudge uses his position to prosecute Harry in the fifth novel, trying to get him kicked out of school, despite Harry having done nothing illegal. Fudge apparently refuses to

acknowledge the return of the Dark Lord, and becomes paranoid with the belief that “Dumbledore’s plotting to overthrow him” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 93). So he uses his position to threaten Harry with breaking his wand (i.e. taking away his magic) and he strips Dumbledore of his various positions or authority. Fudge ultimately fails in his efforts, though, as exceptions are written into the laws of the Statute of Secrecy for magical use in emergencies, and Arabella Figg is a witness to the events. Certainly the failure is important as Fudge could not completely overrule the law, but his exploitation of the situation demonstrates how easily the institution created to uphold the law can be manipulated to pursue personal vendettas when a bureaucracy has little to no oversight. Even witches and wizards outside of the Ministry are capable of manipulating the institution in their favor. The Malfoys’ wealth buys them a great amount of influence with Fudge. At lower branches of the Ministry money can buy off officials to drop or reduce charges.

This degree of corruption suggests the Ministry’s legitimacy is wanting. When individuals in and out of the Ministry can manipulate it to fulfill their desires, the Ministry no longer fully functions to govern justly or maintain social order. No one is accountable to the public nor is transparency a goal in such a bureaucratic system. Both Fudge and Scrimgeour appear to be more concerned about public appearance than justice – Fudge sends Hagrid to Azkaban to look like he is doing something about the attacks at Hogwarts in the second novel and under Scrimgeour innocent men, like the Knight Bus driver Stan Shunpike, are sentenced to Azkaban so the Ministry appears to be winning the war against Voldemort. How legitimate can a government be when it is so susceptible to manipulation and favors public appearance over justice? If there is one hint of integrity in the Ministry it is Harry’s trial scene where members of the Wizengamot, following the law, are able to overrule Fudge’s authority through the greatest symbol of democracy, a vote. This one glimpse of institutional justice, a counter to the constant scenes of corruption, further suggests that structural change is needed in the Ministry, one that highlights democracy and accountability over secrecy and bureaucracy.

In further evidence of the need for structural change, the Ministry is easily corrupted by Voldemort and the Death Eaters when they take it over. The bureaucratic functions essentially cut out

public input, allowing the Death Eaters to implement regulations on Blood Status with no serious threat of accountability. The Death Eater regime discredits any legitimacy in the Ministry as it is now run by immoral elites, yet the entire structure of the Ministry remains largely unchanged. The Ministry's bureaucracy already encourages corruption and manipulation. It is already primed for the Death Eaters, demonstrating just how great a need there is for structural shifts toward transparency and accountability – both democratic tenets.

With the Ministry having a hand in so many functions in the Wizarding society, particularly in areas that influence opinion, it also has the ability to institute other forms of power. As discussed earlier, Blood Status finds its way into the Ministry even though the institution does not exercise a prerogative to codify them. That said, as Blood Status has already become subtly institutionalized in the practices of the Ministry, as exemplified in the preference given to purebloods for high-ranking offices, the Ministry's implicit acceptance reinforces the validity of the Blood Status ideology. By favoring purebloods, Fudge and other Ministry workers project that Blood Status is a valid belief system. In doing so it expresses the tacit approval of the Ministry for witches and wizards to also accept Blood Status ideology. Thus, the Ministry has been shaped by Blood Status, and the ideology can then act on society through the Ministry. It is a cyclical effect, the Ministry influencing society and society influencing the Ministry, in a continuous pattern of validating and institutionalizing – if only passively – Blood Status.

As evidenced by Fudge praising the Malfoys for being an old family and donating generously, Blood Status and financial power intersect with political power. I've already discussed Blood Status in prior sections, but the power of wealth has been less examined. For witches and wizards, the compensatory power of wealth comes with a number of advantages: influencing officials, negating government enforcement of the law, purchasing the newest magical gadgets and instruments, and influencing the education system. Money becomes an important source of power as it intercedes with the Ministry's function to uphold the law. By compensating those in the Ministry, the wealthy can gain influence and titles or escape punishment. With wealth being a form of power it requires an institution to regulate the flow of money and to control who has and who does not have it. That institution is Gringotts.

Gringotts, the ‘wizard bank’, has a smaller but considerably influential role in its ability to control and regulate the power of money. The bank itself has an ornate architecture often associated with places of importance: “They reached a snowy white building that towered over the other little shops” with “burnished bronze doors” and a “vast marble hall” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 72-73). It holds the fortunes of Wizarding families deep underground in vaults, protected by all kinds of magic, some of which is quite sinister. There is an implicit understanding through all of this that money has importance for witches and wizards, that those who have a lot of it have another form of power they might use. But money has a different value for the Wizarding community than it does for the non-magical world.

For Muggles, including ourselves, money has a way of distinguishing individuals because it indicates a level of security and possible consumption. Indeed, Barratt explains “consumption is safe, since it allows [Muggles] to measure personal value by a set of standards that is continually reaffirmed by the advertising industry” (146). Thus material goods become ever more important in our consumerist society as success is measured in material gains. Goods are desired for their symbolic value; whether or not they’re truly useful is beside the point. So to have money, and lots of money, carries a symbolic value by symbolizing an individual’s capacity for consumption.

Money in the Wizarding world, however, acquires a different role which diminishes its significance as a symbol of material success. Explaining it plainly, Barratt says “while material status symbols exist, they seem to be sought less for their symbolic value than for their instrumental value. Put another way, commodities are not fetishized in and of themselves” (151). Indeed, this is observed throughout the novels and Barratt does a great job of highlighting it. The importance of money lies in its ability to acquire new instruments that serve a necessary function, which is typically assisting in magical practices. Perhaps a large part of the diminished symbolic significance of money comes from the noticeably non-industrialized nature of the Wizarding world. The society does not appear capitalist in any way – no one discusses free markets or demand and supply – but it’s not a Marxist society either. At best it could be described as a romanticized feudal society; indeed the description of Diagon Alley, the cobblestoned magical market filled with cauldrons, ink, quills, wands, and robes feels more from the

seventeenth century than today. It makes the magical world feel more like a fantasy, a truly magical place without some of the economic woes we face today. Yet no matter how romanticized, a large part of that feudal system is the class structure.

There remain distinct classes in the Wizarding world, with wealthy families who pass their fortunes through blood lines like the Malfoys compared to middle and lower class families, both ancient and new, who put little stock in blood. Plenty of middle class pureblood families are clear to prove that their family is pure, but it appears that it is the richest among the Wizarding families – the Malfoys, the Lestranges, the Blacks – who overemphasize the role blood plays in society and enjoy a corresponding level of social privilege. A large number of these families are also Death Eaters or supporters of Voldemort’s work, which from the perspective of economic class, suggests a strong critique against the aristocracy of past centuries and even against uber-rich families today assert an inherent difference between their elite class and the classes “below” them.

Despite this implicit critique, in the novels wealthy witches and wizards are able to use their money in at least one way similar to its function in the Muggle world: for both worlds, social and political influence can be acquired through wealth. The Malfoys are the clearest representation of wealth’s political and social influence. For example, they generously donate money to various causes, which is enough to give them the Minister’s ear. At the Quidditch World Cup in *The Goblet*, Fudge explains to Harry, Hermione, and the Weasleys that “Lucius has just given a *very* generous contribution to St. Mungo’s Hospital for Maladies and Injuries, Arthur. He’s here as my guest” (*Goblet of Fire*, 101); donate enough money and the Minister offers a special invitation to events. This likely also comes with the power to influence the Minister.

That power of influence is again clearly demonstrated in Fudge’s defense of Lucius on the night of Voldemort’s return, when Harry accuses Lucius of being in league with Voldemort. The scene was already discussed as a way to demonstrate the special influence purebloods have in the Ministry, but in the context of wealth it deserves repeating: “Malfoy was cleared! A very old family – *donations to excellent causes* –“ (*Goblet of Fire*, 706 [italics added]). Lucius’ donations have influenced the Minister



to defend him. If power is considered the ability to produce an effect, the ability for Lucius to donate money as a way to gain influence in the Ministry should be considered a source of power. In this situation, it also demonstrates that those in power have the ability to maintain and perpetuate their power. As the Malfoys donate their money to influence the Ministry, they are able to perpetuate their political influence. It also intersects with their claim to blood purity, so that those who are pureblood are able to perpetuate their political influence through compensatory power while also then perpetuating Blood Status beliefs by being a part of the social elite.

The Malfoys are not the only ones who exercise social and political influence through their wealth. While Arthur Weasley is bed-ridden at St. Mungo's Hospital in *The Order*, he expresses his disbelief that Willy Widdershin, a man accused of charming toilets to regurgitate after he was found at the scene of one that back-fired, was acquitted for the crime. Arthur's only conclusion is "I can only suppose gold changed hands –" (*Goblet of Fire*, 490). Sirius Black's grandfather was awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class, for 'Services to the Ministry'. Sirius scornfully interprets that "it means he gave them a load of gold" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 117). Wealth can be a tool to increase one's social standing, or influence the system enough to get them out of trouble. Wealthy witches and wizards are thus able to raise themselves above aspects of the law. The bureaucracy of the Ministry allows the wealthy to escape punishment without repercussions.

These two uses of wealth – purchasing useful gadgets and increasing political and social influence – are the reasons that Gringotts exists. As the sole institution in the realm of economics and wealth, it has been accorded power over those realms. It protects money, but at the same time it controls who has how much. Consider part of the warning etched above its doors: "For those who take but do not earn/ Must pay most dearly in their turn" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 72). Gringotts legitimizes its power to control and protect wealth by declaring its authority to punish those who violate its rules, and all who pass through its doors implicitly acknowledge that authority. Their mission is not simply to store fortunes but also to guard them and the social and political power they represent. They also go to great lengths to protect their claim for control.

Like the Ministry, which has the monopoly on the use force of to maintain social order, Gringotts has the monopoly on the use of force to maintain economic order. Magical enchantments protect vaults from being broken into by any but the rightful owner; if someone tries to actively break in, the goblins of Gringotts utilize other protections like the Thief's Downfall, which washes away any magical concealment, and terrifying dragons whose presence is life-threatening to any attempting to break in. Though its role in the Wizarding society is not as pronounced as the Ministry's, nor is wealth capable of achieving the same degree of agency as magic or creating the same degree of social change as collective force, Gringotts must have some power at stake if it will go to such lengths to protect it.

Wealth's influence is not confined only to the Ministry. Several times in the novels wealth has influence at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Britain's Wizarding school was designed to be an independent entity, and under Dumbledore it is where students could come to learn and control their magic while also being encouraged to think for themselves. It is ostensibly a meritocracy, where students succeed or fail based on their ability and perseverance. Yet money still creeps in to interrupt the operations of the school. In the first novel Harry's knack for Quidditch lands him a position on the Gryffindor team, making him the youngest seeker in a century. In the second novel Draco has become Slytherin's seeker; his appointment, however, is not based off skill. His father Lucius has generously purchased the best broom, the Nimbus 2001, for all the Slytherin players. Such a generous donation easily buys his son a position on the team. Yet this appears to be more an exception than the rule; professors typically do their best to ensure that students are applauded for merit, not for money.

Highlighting the power of the educational institution, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry by and large has a monopoly on the conditioning of young witches and wizards to the norms and mores of society. As discussed in the introduction, conditioned power, according to Galbraith, correlates to the changing of belief in which "persuasion, education, or the social commitment to what seems natural, proper, or right causes the individual to submit to the will of another or of others," (214). Through a system of rewards and punishments, Hogwarts professors teach the basic mechanics of magic, while at the same time conditioning students in more profound ideological and moral ways.

The most important office at Hogwarts is the headmaster, whose decision-making role in the operations of the school has impacts throughout the structure. First, he or she has power over the subjects and curriculum taught at school. Dumbledore decisively banned the teaching of the Dark Arts, particularly Horcruxes: “It’s a banned subject at Hogwarts, you know... Dumbledore’s particularly fierce about it...” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 499). Headmasters appear to be able to choose what subjects are taught at Hogwarts, selecting only those they see as useful or beneficial in education. By selecting the subjects, he or she limits the magical skills students learn while also having a role in determining the moral value attached to some types of magic. If a subject is banned, the headmaster has made a choice to condition students to believe a certain type of magic is immoral.

More often than not the professors are the face of Hogwarts authority. While Elizabeth Heilman criticizes the professors because “their behaviors, their dress and appearance, their subject they teach, and their instruction fit neatly into shallow and conventional stereotypes” this conventionality in their representation has little affect on their authority (104). Each professor is the authority over a certain branch of magic in the classroom and as such has the power to condition students about certain aspects of that branch, such as Transfiguration, Charms, or Potions. Moreover, through awarding or taking away House points and assigning detentions they condition students on issues of morality. This is exhibited frequently: Hermione continuously wins House points because it is good to achieve in the classroom; Harry and Ron receive detentions for staying out after dark; Harry curses Malfoy and must suffer detention for his wrongdoing. Professors attempt to condition students to perform well and act in ways deemed “good”.

Upon his rise to power, Voldemort recognizes just how influential that conditioning can be. He makes systematic changes to Hogwarts to recondition students into accepting the ideologies that he and the Death Eaters are trying to enforce. The Defense Against the Dark Arts class is changed to be only on the Dark Arts, and Muggle Studies now teaches that Muggles are basically animals. These changes reflect Lenski’s observation of the crucial role that rule by persuasion plays after revolution: “The purpose of the revolution is to destroy the old elite and their institutions, which prevent the fulfillment of

this dream. Once they are destroyed, an ideological elite strives to rule by persuasion” (Lenski, 245). Lenski’s theory is that the constant use of force is not enough to create a new social order. Persuasion, or education, must recondition citizens into the new order. The changes undertaken at Hogwarts reflect this point. When the Death Eaters take over, they must alter the institution of the school to educate students to be 1) subjugated by the new order and 2) conditioned into the new beliefs regarding the Dark Arts and Blood Status. By targeting the youth the Death Eaters target the part of the population most willing to accept the new regime because they know no alternative, or are conditioned to accept the new order through the authority granted the institution of Hogwarts and its representatives, the Headmaster and professors.

Thus the true power of Hogwarts is observed. In traditional times, Hogwarts has the power to train students in magic and teach them the proper contexts in which to use their magic. It also has the power to instill social morals into the youth. Even if it is not witnessed at all times, Hogwarts is, as Barratt explains, a “vehicle of indoctrination” (75). Through methods of rewards and punishments, Hogwarts conditions students to enter the magical world and normalizes them to the current truths recognized by society.

These three institutions, the Ministry, Gringotts, and Hogwarts, all exercise their authority through various ways within the Wizarding world to different effects, yet they do not exist in isolation. They are all impacted by each other, informing and changing how each institution exercises their power. The Ministry has the legal breadth to influence both Gringotts and Hogwarts. It conditions witches and wizards to believe certain ideas and uses condign power to ensure submission to laws (using coercive power when that fails) yet it is also influenced by the compensatory power of money, regulated by Gringotts. As a gatekeeper of social ideas, Hogwarts can impact the role of the Ministry. Through a number of indirect ways Gringotts influences Hogwarts as well: Gringotts assists in educating witches and wizards on the importance of money. Some students at Hogwarts take that lesson to heart and believe it relates to how they should perform at school. Yet some professors use their classroom as a place to eliminate the social privileges of wealth by using merit as the only basis to evaluate students. Each

institution thus uses some variation of conditioned, compensatory, and condign power to interact with and affect the other institutions, while also simultaneously being affected by the other institutions.

While each of these institutions wields its power differently, they have one common thread: their power is exercised for the maintenance of tradition, to ensure that the Wizarding world does not undergo major or radical changes while social behaviors and ideas remain relatively static. The Ministry, partially based on the actions of its officials, uses its power to preserve society. The actions of Cornelius Fudge are all about maintaining the status quo: he ignores the return of the Dark Lord, the majority of his rule focuses on capturing bad guys who escape Azkaban more than directing the Ministry. Moreover, the Ministry embeds implicit aspects of Blood Status ideology in its everyday workings as well as discrimination against other magical creatures, keeping age-old prejudices alive without any reconsideration. In all things, the Ministry embodies Burke's conservative society, where "the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection" (*Ideals and Ideologies* 135). The Ministry's sole purpose is little about creating a better world or enacting social change – at every moment top officials reject attempts for change – but rather about keeping citizens from doing whatever they want. And in a society where citizens have magic at the fingertips to fulfill any of their desires, the Ministry plays a very important role.

Hogwarts for its part shows little change from its founding over four centuries ago. The Houses continue to divide the students, the professors educate and exercise discipline, the headmaster watches from above in his tower and central seat in the Great Hall over the institution and its pupils. Beyond the placement of the Whomping Willow on the grounds and the discontinued use of more severe punishments for detention, no hint exists to suggest Hogwarts does not operate now as it always has. Likewise, the professors exhibit the same conservative attitudes. As Heilman asserts, "Teachers at Hogwarts are preservationists; that is, they do not challenge or disrupt but reify the institution of school" (115). Even with socially progressive Dumbledore students are not taught updated ideas of Muggle-Magical relations or the equality of all magical creatures. After four hundred years students are taught to assimilate into the same society and accept the same ideas.

The power of wealth perpetuated and legitimated by Gringotts plays one of the greatest roles in maintaining tradition. Wealthy families, like the Malfoys, use their wealth to perpetuate their power in other realms of society. In the entire series, gold never becomes a way to create social change (i.e. encourage progressive ideas). It is always used by wealthy families to maintain old systems and beliefs, to ensure that the wealthy remain wealthy. In truth, the Wizarding world reflects many attributes of an aristocracy, a social system linked closely to ideas of maintaining tradition. Aristocracy, as Burke conceives it in the ideal, places men “to be in that state of habitual discipline in which the wiser, the more expert, and the more opulent conduct, and by conducting enlighten and protect, the weaker, the less knowing, the less provided with the goods of fortune” (*Ideals and Ideologies*, 139). Thus it is integral that the aristocrats, like the Malfoys, remain in their good fortune so they can guide and protect society, which means maintaining the traditions of the past, not breaking them. To this end Gringotts plays a crucial role, literally writing in stone that the divisions of fortune remain.

## **Conclusion**

It is hard to miss some of the power relations in *Harry Potter*. Some of them are incredibly overt – the Ministry’s regulatory and jurisprudential is demonstrated throughout the series, and especially in *the Order*; the power differential between students and professors is exemplified on more than one occasion. More subtle operations of power exist as well, which witches and wizards may not notice but nonetheless are still there. For instance, how the biases of the Ministry officials institutionalize forms of blood purity prejudice or how Gringotts exists less as a passive holder and a more as an active controller of money indicates its key institutional role in the magical world, even if few consider it. These power operations may be benign and/or unintended, but that does not mean they do not have political implications for witches and wizards, especially Harry and his comrades from whose perspective these dynamics are viewed and understood.

Those power operations also feature the dynamics within each type of power and between different types. I’ve conceived power in terms of three main types: ideology, individual/collective actions,

and institutional. Above we see different individuals or groups competing with each other, institutions using their authority over individuals, both individuals and groups invoking ideology as a source of power, and a number of other dynamics. It is not the purpose of this essay to discuss and describe each type of dynamic within *Harry Potter*; such a task would be a mighty challenge. Instead, I have highlighted ways to conceptualize power at different points to see how power operates from different perspectives in the Wizarding world with the use of theory to untangle deeper nuances. Power looks different from different perspectives; the individual looks different than the collective, which looks different from the institutional. Each perspective is necessary if we hope to understand how individuals carry out agency and make conscious choices while at the same time institutions can wield power with or without the individual's implied consent and without members of the institution consciously wielding it. From there, any reader can apply the critical framework of these categories to the texts to untangle the power dynamics of any given scene.

As a concluding remark on the novels, I find there is no definitive way to resolve all of the questions and tensions related to power as they are presented in the Wizarding world, and this too has implications for the cultures in which the novels were produced and continued to be consumed. Ideologically, *Blood Status* has a number of internal contradictions and ethical weaknesses that raise questions about its legitimacy, yet witches and wizards continue to maintain it, often through unconscious, everyday acts. Some individuals can use their magical power to evade the Ministry, raising questions about the legality if not the morality of acts committed outside its authority, even if by the heroes of the series. The Order of the Phoenix has a sense of righteousness about their cause, but they exercise their power in secret, and in some of the same ways as do the Death Eaters. The Ministry of Magic has the legitimate authority to draft laws and maintain order, but so often that power is impeded or manipulated by money. With just how corrupt the Ministry appears at times, it becomes difficult to determine the legitimacy of its exercise of power. Certainly Harry and Dumbledore don't believe the Ministry's authority is always legitimate or even something by which they should be bound, as they continually make decisions with little regard to their legality, performing some of the same tensions as

does Voldemort – between individuals with exceptional strength and institutions collectively invested with authority. Above all, across the series it is impossible to pinpoint precisely where power remains and is maintained. Ideologies, individuals, groups, and institutions lose and gain power so frequently that the only thing that can be said is that the power dynamics are ever shifting and unpredictable.

That said, from a broader perspective these power dynamics often operate in opposition to one another, in that the power to create social change, manifested in desires for revolutionary acts, is in tension with the power of preservation, manifested in desires to conserve traditional ways of life. These contradictions happen within and between locations of power. The majority of protagonists are more concerned with maintaining the status quo than with trying to create progressive change, such as decreasing social prejudices against Muggles or creating equality laws for magical creatures. Harry, through whose eyes we sympathize with the downtrodden, witnesses all of these wrongs in society, but he does little to actually change the situation. Dumbledore, the champion of Muggles, is little more than a voice of reason amongst his peers, not a social activist. Only Hermione takes up the helm to push for change, with her organization called the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.). Yet her organization is constantly mocked and ultimately fails to achieve anything.

Readers root for the Order of the Phoenix to win in the fight against the Death Eaters, but at a close look their victory does not affect a revolution. They fight to maintain the Wizarding world the way it is. Members of the Order do not discriminate against Muggle-borns nor desire to dominate Muggles, but as a whole their cause is nothing more than to stop Voldemort. Their victory results in a return to normalcy, a world nearly identical to the one seen in the first book. Kingsley Shacklebolt becomes the new Minister, but that is a cosmetic change; the bureaucracy of the Ministry does not show any evidence of change. It is just the same, just as susceptible to corruption as it was. And as the world cools down after the brief regime of the Death Eaters, an encounter with the Malfoys on Platform 9 ¾ show that the aristocracy and implicit beliefs in Blood Status still remain.

Yet social change does happen multiple times throughout the novels. The most notable comes at the takeover by the Death Eaters. Their desire for domination leads to a brief revolution of the governing



systems. This revolution is not a good one; it creates institutional persecution of an entire category of people in the Wizarding world. Other characters and groups, however, engage in minor revolts; the resistance against Umbridge during her stay at Hogwarts, the Order's willingness to engage in illegal actions, even Harry and Hermione's pursuit to set Sirius Black free. These all constitute the power to create social changes against, though ultimately within, the current systems. The final battle at Hogwarts is the counter-revolution against the new Death Eater regime and represents the greatest positive moment for social change. However, it appears that witches and wizards are more concerned with fighting against perceived wrongs than with fighting to promote righteous causes. At moments when normalcy regresses – Voldemort's pursuit for power, Fudge's abuse of power – good people will act to stop it. They are not concerned with social or political progression, however, only with preventing regression. At moments when normalcy is threatened, witches and wizards spring into action; when that normalcy is restored, very little action is taken further to progress issues of equality or democratic ideals.

Several scholars have interpreted the novels' contradictions in power as a failure to resolve the social and political problems they initially set up. As the narrative wrestles between the power of collective organization versus that of official institutions, Phillip Nel remarks that "Rowling seems more comfortable when power courses through unofficial networks, as if its activist spirit is more democratic than power entrenched in official channels," (Barratt, 85). Nel's critique is fair, but I believe a bit oversimplified. It is difficult to claim fully that the 'unofficial' network of the Death Eaters represents anything near a democracy. In comparison to a group intending to dominate the world with totalitarian attributes, the Ministry looks relatively democratic. The critique of ideologies based on blood or biology ultimately goes unresolved as well. As Elain Ostry points out, "The whole point of the race war is to defend the Muggle-born wizards. However, wizards universally look down upon Muggles, and being a wizard means joining an elite world" (Ostry, 93). The desire to be a part of the elite Wizarding world, a near fantasy for any reader, overwhelms the social critiques made through the novels' representation of Blood Status ideology. Rowling ultimately does not resolve these contradictions in the novels, where the

tensions in power cannot be concluded in a way that satiates our normative standards of legitimate power and our democratic ideals.

It is my opinion, however, that the unresolved contradictions in *Harry Potter* do not render them a failure in critiquing the dynamics of our own world. Gupta asserts that “it is arguably not the job of the fictional world to correct the unpalatable facts of our world but to reflect them and raise them to awareness, and certainly such ambiguities are amply manifested even amongst the well-meaning and more tolerant institutions and people of our world” (Gupta, 106) I agree with Gupta; it is not Rowling’s job to reconcile those tensions of the real world in her novels, but rather to bring them to the fore so that readers reconsider their own understandings of the world. Through the contradictions and power dynamics the books represent, *Harry Potter* invites readers to critique the Wizarding world, and potentially their own. They recognize when power is used illegitimately or when unjust situations remain unresolved. Their desire to be a part of the Wizarding world notwithstanding, no one familiar with the wrongs perpetrated by the Death Eaters for the cause of blood purity can reasonably consider it to be okay to separate individuals on the basis of such meaningless biological differences. The dissonance when issues remain unresolved resonates within readers to generate critical thinking about the novels and the real world. And though the contradictions go unresolved, the dynamics and ideas reflect and inform many issues in the real-world political atmosphere.

Concerning the implications in the political atmosphere, let’s reconsider the rise of the far-right nationalist movements discussed in the introduction. Katrina Pierson’s mention of ‘pure breeds’ in political campaigns cannot help but invoke some of the same ideological stances as does Blood Status in the novels. She is implying that ‘pure breeds’ would be any native-born Americans, those who do not have foreign ancestry. Though not a one-to-one comparison, the same ideological structure of Blood Status in *Harry Potter* can easily explain the nuances and contradictions in Pierson’s comment. Pierson is making an ethnic difference carry a constructed meaning defining what is and what is not ‘pure’. She, like the pure-blood enthusiasts in Rowling’s novels, falsely believes such a difference has any inherent meaning. No evidence exists to prove that anyone who is not ‘pure’ is in anyway inferior to those who are

100% Anglo-American citizens. When Rowling tweeted back that “Death Eaters walk among us” she resituated Pierson’s comments into the ideological struggle in the Wizarding world to achieve a greater impact. For those who have read *Harry Potter*, Rowling’s comments would have resonated deeply to inform them of the ideological processes behind Pierson’s comment and the racist underpinnings of the presidential campaign.

Similar implications are playing out in the United Kingdom. With the formation of the party Britain First, there is an underlying sense among some citizens that they must care only for themselves, that anyone ‘different’ (i.e. not a white UK citizen) cannot be allowed in. Britain First members may tout this belief as a sign of nationalistic integrity, asserting the need to care for their country first before being able to help others. But as Kingsley Shacklebolt says, “it’s one short step from ‘Wizards first’ to ‘Purebloods first’ and then to ‘Death Eaters’”. From this perspective, Britain First is just one step down a slippery slope. In fact, it may be several steps down as the group is known to invade mosques and provoke unrest against others they see as invaders. By placing “Britons” (narrowly and racially defined) first, they are implicitly saying that ethnic and racial “others” are less. Even if the far-right party does not say it explicitly, they have created a hierarchy as to whose lives are more important. Rowling’s text provides readers a narrative framework through which they can address the ideology invoked by Britain First, which aids in understanding it and in shaping their own beliefs in response to such ideology.

Beyond simply reflecting the political atmosphere, readers demonstrate that they have reconsidered their own understandings of power and politics encouraged by the novels. Readers have mobilized their beliefs, using *Harry Potter* as the vehicle to conceptualize them. Like the protesters mentioned at the beginning, readers now put into action the critical thinking that resulted from reading about the Boy Who Lived. If these novels can teach us anything, it is that an author does not need to resolve every political or moral issue in their novel. Like Rowling, they need only to be provocative and engaging to generate serious critical thinking.

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