

Harry Potter and the Quest for Justice

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“Are you planning to follow a career in
Magical Law, Miss Granger?” asked Scrimgeour.
“No, I’m not,” retorted Hermione. “I’m hoping to do some good in the world!”
- J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

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Since its inception in 1997, the *Harry Potter* series has bestowed its universal readers with crucial life models some may employ throughout their existence; demonstrating the series is more than just a handful of books, it is a way of life. J. K. Rowling’s unparalleled literary and multi-media hit chronicles a young boy’s new and unique life in the wizarding world, all while supplying fans with an abundance of ethical implications that may be extracted from these mediums and employed in quotidian affairs. This cultural composition explores the nature of wizarding justice and its deployment within the *Harry Potter* series and cross-examines how the cultural behaviors encompassing justice, or a lack thereof, have greatly altered the wizarding world since the First Wizarding War in 1970. Famously affirmed by Remus Lupin in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, “Accepting that Voldemort’s back would mean trouble like the Ministry hasn’t had to cope with for nearly fourteen years,” a steadfast blindness to the injustice that gradually crippled the magicked realm for nearly four decades (Rowling, p. 94). Although many attribute the novels to revealing the tale of a young boy fighting his way through the wizarding and Muggle domains, the series has a copious relationship with national law and government concepts, allowing for plentiful academic research across these sectors. How different would the wizarding world be if its government directly faced its fears and established widespread transitional justice mechanisms after both Wizarding Wars? Withal, could such justice mechanisms have prevented the post-traumatic stress of the wizarding people, or would

the implementation of justice be a moot point after such bloodshed and tyranny? Whilst J. K. Rowling molded these wizarding complications around factual matters, she displays them in a manner that ultimately enlightens the audience on such chronicled concerns and strives to promote a political perspective on human rights by showcasing the immense struggles surrounding such governmental troubles. Moreover, by asking these questions through the fictional lens of the *Harry Potter* series, global readers of all ages have the freedom to ingest these real-world themes and employ them through their daily routines. For this reason, the *Harry Potter* series becomes a vessel for morality when readers are faced with injustice; spellbinding the fandom through unique enlightenment via the chapters of this global phenomenon.

Chiefly governed by the unprincipled Ministry of Magic, which was established alongside the high court of wizarding law (the Wizengamot) in 1707, the wizarding world has a dark history with character corruptness and cravings for executive power, crafting the perfect potions brew for intense upheaval. While both organizations “maintain order and enforce laws and regulations,” such implementations of the law and overarching wizarding society are under the control of the Minister for Magic (VanderArk & Drasnin, 2021). Those who hold the high position of Minister for Magic throughout the *Harry Potter* series are notorious for making poor decisions in response to the terror displayed within the books, as Professor Albus Dumbledore, an upstander for justice, urgently declared to Minister Cornelius Fudge in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, “You are blinded by the love of the office you hold, Cornelius!” (Rowling, 2000). Indeed, it was because of this great ignorance that the wizarding realm had experienced two junctures of intense genocide and warfare at the hands of Lord Voldemort, the most murderous wizard in the history of their realm. Innumerable witches, wizards, and Muggles died by the

dominance of Lord Voldemort's wand, while countless others suffered physically and emotionally at the hands of his intentional Unforgivable Curses (which alter a person's welfare evermore). While the Ministry of Magic had full knowledge of these atrocities, the government's ignorance and fear of a Second Wizarding War prompted them to abruptly neglect their past bloodshed; abandoning the wizarding community and their emotional needs after such haunting turmoil. "Denial is a prerequisite of mass violence and genocide," writes Hinton (2002) in *The Anthropology of Genocide*, as the author contests warfare and genocides "evolve" over time due to "political disorganization" or "social upheaval," (p. 368-371). As expected, those who deemed themselves executive within the wizarding community valued their puissance over purpose, thrusting their people into a conflict-ridden state for decades.

Barton (2006), author of *Harry Potter and the Half-Crazed Bureaucracy*, initiates his Michigan Law Review article by questioning,

"What would you think of a government that engaged in this list of tyrannical activities: tortured children for lying; designed its prison specifically to suck all the life and hope out of the inmates; placed citizens in that prison without a hearing; ordered the death penalty without a trial; allowed the powerful, rich, or famous to control policy; selectively prosecuted crimes; conducted criminal trials without defense council; used truth serum to force confessions; maintained constant surveillance over all citizens; offered no elections and no democratic lawmaking process; and controlled the press? You might assume that the above list is the work of some despotic central African nation, but it is actually the product of the Ministry of Magic in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series," (p. 1524).

Barton's comparison of a repressive African nation to Rowling's magicked imaginary allow for academic discussions encompassing the wizarding world's absence of post-conflict reconstruction or reconciliation attempts in response to real-world genocides and the ethics obtained from such atrocities. "The wizarding world is every bit as complicated as the Muggle world," writes Barratt (2012), as the author suggests the *Harry Potter* series encapsulates, "a continual conflict between those who most value power and those who most value justice," (p. 2). However, while the Ministry of Magic continually defends their application of justice in light of their community's carnage, readers have genuine cause to question the Ministry's collective definition of "justice," just as the wizarding populace had for nearly a century. Through this intention, it is imperative to appraise transitional justice measures before one can argue these mechanisms may have aided the greater wizarding community during the First and Second Wizarding Wars.

The process of transitional justice, which surfaced in the Muggle realm between the 1980s and 1990s, begins with focused examinations into mass human cruelty; including but not limited to, genocide, crimes against humanity, and warfare (United Nations, 2010). The overarching goal of transitional justice is to heal post-conflict nations via public hearings, victim statements, and historical records to "assist social recovery," and "unearth previously silenced stories of victims" to encourage restorative justice methods by means of repairing the connection among all parties in conflict (Androff, 2012). While such procedures have successfully worked in Muggle societies (notably, South Africa's technique to managing their nation's timeworn apartheid matters significantly aided the global evolution of transitional justice) the wizarding

world purposely shunned any concept of reconciliation for its crumbled government and traumatized people, without true reasoning behind their staunch decision.

Although the Ministry of Magic held frequent Wizengamot trials against rogue witches, wizards, and other magical beings, their aged approach was exclusive to retributive justice measures; scarcely seeking the truth and valuing the power of the court over an individual's right to democratic fairness. Conversely, while transitional justice reconstruction practices appraise how to heal and unify the divisions of a post-atrocity society, the Ministry of Magic was resolute on their choice to permit such abuse — seemingly allowing their civilization to freely battle one another for decades. In a moment of comic relief through the chaos displayed in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Uncle Vernon, Harry Potter's Muggle uncle, spats at the Ministry of Magic and bellows, "*Ministry of Magic? People like you in government? Oh this explains everything, everything, no wonder why the country's going to the dogs...*" (Rowling, p. 29). While this may be a jocose moment in the novel, this quote displays the majority consensus of wizarding folk and their opinion on the Ministry's inability to recognize their reality and successfully govern during times of great war and distress. Indeed, the International Center for Transitional Justice (2021) opposes such insensible actions similar to the Ministry of Magic's and says, "Ignoring mass abuses is an easy way out but it destroys the values on which any decent society can be built," (p. 1). As a consequence of the Ministry's incomprehension and exclusion of justice mechanisms, the wizarding world plummeted into the First Wizarding War and magical culture was forevermore tarnished.

The original reign of Lord Voldemort and his unwavering followers, known as the Death Eaters, materialized in 1970. Oppugnant to the Ministry of Magic, Lord Voldemort sought

unyielding power within the wizarding realm, creating an army of loyal acolytes who violently “served him and brought terror to both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds,” (Harry Potter Fandom, First Wizarding War, 2021). Exceedingly desperate for total authority, Voldemort launched the magicked world into its First Wizarding War by initiating a full assault against the Ministry of Magic and the entire United Kingdom wizarding community. Voldemort’s objective was direct: to rid the wizarding world of all witches and wizards who were not pure-blood by killing those with tainted genetics or those who were associated with them (a pure-blooded individual is someone who wholly has magical blood, whereas a half-blood or Muggle-born person has a percentage of non-magical blood running through their veins).

In an interesting literary twist, Lord Voldemort himself was a half-blooded wizard, yet, he refused to acknowledge his genetic culture and pursued an existence opposite his reality. Due to his personal denial, unimaginable slaying occurred through his wand and commands, as Voldemort and his Death Eaters triumphantly toppled the Ministry of Magic and continued their inexorable bloodshed for eleven years. Alas, Voldemort had mastered his killing abilities and evolved his powers into unstoppable genocide dominance. Doves were murdered by the Killing Curse (“Avada Kedavra”) while others were kept in captivity and tortured both physically and mentally via the Cruciatus Curse (one of three Unforgivable Curses that eternally alter a person’s welfare or soul). Although the Ministry of Magic tried to immobilize Voldemort’s rage, a multitude of Death Eaters had secretly infiltrated the Ministry, resulting in profound communal distrust for the government its justice mechanisms.

Sirius Black, Harry Potter's pure-blooded godfather who fought against Lord Voldemort's genocidal rampage, attempted to describe the horror endured by those who lived through the First Wizarding War, as he says to Harry during a truthful moment,

“Imagine that Voldemort's powerful now. You don't know who his supporters are, you don't know who's working for him and who isn't; you know he can control people so that they do terrible things without being able to stop themselves. You're scared for yourself, your family, and your friends. Every week, news comes of more deaths, more disappearances, more torturing... the Ministry of Magic's in disarray, they don't know what to do, they're trying to keep everything hidden from the Muggles, but meanwhile, Muggles are dying too. Terror everywhere... panic... confusion... that's how it used to be,” (Rowling, 2000).

In 1980, one year before the First War ceased, Voldemort was alerted of a prophecy that declared “The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches, born as the seventh month dies...” that baby being Harry Potter (Rowling, 2003). One year later, on Halloween night in 1981, Voldemort attempted to kill the infant that was Harry Potter, however, his Avada Kedavra curse rebounded off Harry and back onto Voldemort. From that moment on, the First Wizarding War had abruptly ended being that Voldemort's physical body was predominantly destroyed, soaring him into immediate hiding to heal from his killing curse wounds. Although the war was over and much was still uncertain for the public, the remanence of the Ministry swiftly mobilized their efforts to omit the past eleven years of tyranny and began anew; dubbing Lord Voldemort as “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named” and placing damaging judgment on those who willfully spoke of their collective suffering.

Albeit the Ministry attempted to enforce justice mechanisms against some of Voldemort's Death Eaters, the trials held were anything but honorable, as either extreme retributive measures were enabled or the guilty were never charged due to their prominent status within the community. Moreover, for the innumerable persons who had greatly suffered by wartime, the magical government made no effort to heal the national wounds employing transitional justice measures, akin to hearing victim testimonies or providing aid to those who lost everything. Forthright, the magical government abandoned its people when assistance was dire.

Andrews (2003) discusses post-conflict trauma and what is possible for a nation if truth-seeking efforts are enabled, and contests these efforts are "vital means of establishing a link between a nation's traumatic past and its future," (p. 63). Regrettably, the wizarding world's executors refused to admit their conquering and tried to rewrite their national record, seemingly erasing their traumatic past regardless of its effect on their people. While Andrews contests grasping the truth will help "establish a new grand national narrative, embodying a journey out of darkness into light," the Ministry (and more specifically, the Minister for Magic) chose to banish the shadows and feign only the brightest of national narratives. Forasmuch pain was lingering after eleven years of terror and death, the twofold lack of justice against the guilty and reconciliation for the victims sadly created a forced aura of hushed psychology for all. Allen (1999) considers how communal sensitivity to extreme injustice may be tackled and argues the importance behind "*ongoing reflection and critical appropriation of the past*" for such measures "may alert us to the presence and likely effects of injustice" in future matters (p. 337).

In hindsight, the wizarding world could have significantly benefitted from reflection, reconciliation, or national remembrance conversations during their first post-atrocity phase. Such

efforts may have evaded the second coming of the Dark Lord by employing future defense strategies against witches or wizards who crave utmost power. Moreover, the community's trust may have redeveloped if their actualities were allowed to be heard, handled, and healed so the victims may progress and become flourishing members of society again — unafraid to utter someone's name or speak of their harrowing past. Popovski (2012) affirms, "Justice means dealing with the evil in a civil way, and facing inhumane acts with a humane approach," which begs the following question if the Ministry's submissive behaviors allowed a killer to overthrow the government and ensue mass bloodletting, why follow suit and extend the disablement of its people by forbidding restorative justice? Because the Ministry declined to acknowledge their foregone and peacefully delegate transitional justice operations, the state was left unsecured and vulnerable for yet another war. Deets (2002) compares the *Harry Potter* novels to terrorism and goes on to say, "[Terror] is used both to sow fear and to throw the government into disarray, making it easier to take over," (p. 742). And take over is exactly what the Dark Lord did. Lord Voldemort cunningly recognized this ongoing governmental flaw and knew the wizarding world was still weakened from past carnage, thus, forcefully commencing what would be the Second Wizarding War.

"The Ministry has fallen. They are coming..." was the precise moment in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* where the wizarding community was informed the Second Wizarding War had unexpectedly begun in 1998 (p. 110). Mere seconds after the warning, terror ensued around Harry Potter and his friends as the Death Eaters had appeared and the "panicked crowd" began dodging curses "whether a protective charm or something more sinister, [Harry] did not know" (Rowling, 2007). The terse alarm had immediately triggered the wizarding community, as

innumerable community members went into hiding for fear of being maimed or captured for torture once more. This time, the turnaround for the Second Wizarding War was quick and left only two options for wizarding community members. The first, choose to fight alongside Harry Potter or Lord Voldemort in the battles to come, or the second, conceal oneself and stay unmapped for the foreseeable future until one side ultimately wins. Regardless of one's choice, either option was not ideal, as J. K. Rowling's online archive, *Pottermore*, states, "Harry Potter was not the only one who suffered through some extremely harrowing times during the stories," (Rowling, 2017). Harry had a keen understanding of the emotional damage following the First Wizarding War as Chevalier contests, "After Voldemort's return, [Harry] realizes that the law has little commitment to true justice," and argues Harry had to take action upon himself, unlike the Ministry, and fight to demolish Voldemort once and for all (p. 407).

As a consequence of this scenario, more community members chose not to fight in the Second Wizarding War than the First, as the books allude to 70 witches, wizards, Muggles, and other fantastical beings opting to valiantly combat one another in what was known as the great Battle of Hogwarts (additionally, many of those who chose to fight were school-aged children at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry) (VanderArk & Drasnin, 2021). Only after the severe warfare, the absolute destruction of the Hogwarts school-grounds, and shocking character deaths, did Harry Potter reign supreme and kill Lord Voldemort for good. "They moved Voldemort's body and laid it in a chamber off the Hall, away from the bodies of Fred, Tonks, Lupin, Colin Creevey, and fifty others who had died fighting him," wrote J. K. Rowling toward the end of the series finale (Rowling, 2007, p. 512). Although the death of Voldemort and countless Death Eaters concluded the Second Wizarding War, many were still living in fear from

the previous years as the United Kingdom's wizarding society had to, once again, recover from another brutal siege.

At the battle's end, jubilation is noted as an immediate aftermath of the victorious fight, yet, there's no mention of the physical or emotional repercussions on the wizarding community after the Second Wizarding War. As noted in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* epilogue ("Nineteen Years Later") Rowling's only hint of the realm's emotional post-atrocity state is, "The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well," (p. 520). Still, the question remains as to *how* the wizarding world advanced to a place of wellness, and it is not farfetched to assume *all* were not well. This presumption is in direct response to the wizarding world's original handling (or lack thereof) after the First Wizarding War, and *Harry Potter* enthusiasts are well-versed in understanding the magicked realm scarcely alters their way of living. Given the little information at hand via the primary source that is the *Harry Potter* novels, this author hopes the Ministry of Magic and the high court of Wizengamot collectively adapted transitional justice measures to effectively heal a nation that had undergone numerous decades of mass violence and murder. Only then could the magical world truly move forward with peace, dignity, and truth at the core of their restored society.

Notwithstanding that the fandom may never be granted these cultural-specific inquires on behalf of post-conflict wizarding wellness, the moral implications scattered throughout the seven novels allow fans to learn from these faults and implement better choices in their daily lives.

"The entire plot is driven by ethnic tensions, questions about social responsibility, and fights over political power," writes Deets, as the author believes Rowling's imaginary can ground real-world discussions on issues of justice and peace (p. 742). Much consideration as to how the *Harry*

Potter series enables readers to act has been conducted in light of Rowling's ethical tale and character development within the books (including the eight feature films). Readers and viewers have the luxury to extract their version of wisdom and cultural awareness via Rowling's imagination and consider how they would react or participate through the lens of injustice mechanisms that dominate the series. Driscoll (2013) examines the ubiquity of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon and argues the series offers an "opportunity to examine awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead, inviting conversations about fairness and justice," to the fandom and beyond (p. 266). Assuredly, one ethical exemplar stands out when reflecting upon the First and Second Wizarding War — all lives hold value. Dignity, respect, physical and emotional freedom particularly matter, especially after times of great sorrow. "In the moral universe of *Harry Potter*, actions speak louder than politics," writes Helgesen (2010), offering readers the chance to comprehend the value behind real development in the face of inequity. The *Harry Potter* series may outwardly distinguish itself as a work of fiction, however, it's all a part of one world that's inspired by our own, demonstrating the series has become a guide for perseverance for fans across our globe.

At last, the *Harry Potter* series establishes bravery and fairness are the answer to life's most difficult circumstances when faced with the multi-faceted concerns encompassing injustice realities. Yet, the broader picture permits readers to extrapolate such themes from the series and explore how they may act differently when faced with similar scenarios. While the wizarding world lived in denial for decades and forwent healing measures for its society, the lessons learned from such faulty actions may aid fans in their own lives and enable them to find transitional mechanisms that work for them or their culture utilizing J. K. Rowling's magical

tropes. By enacting such morals and placing them in historical or modern-day milieus, *Harry Potter* readers have the potential to adapt these vital values and utilize them in their own cultures by promoting equality for all. Although J. K. Rowling chose to present these authentic warfare motifs in the form of the wizarding world, her motives behind enlightening the readership on such relevant matters have resonated with audiences for over twenty years. Forasmuch as the legacy of *Harry Potter* remains, Rowling's literary contribution rewards the reader with the opportunity to know that while we all have both good and bad within us, it is how we act upon such virtues that truly separate us at our core.

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