HARRY POTTER AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Part II: Conflict and Warfare

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In what ways does the magical world of Harry Potter mirror the political and international world of muggles? Answering such a question is one way to explore those things that we take for granted as normal in our muggle world of politics and international relations. In this chapter we explore the mirroring of international political and economic institutions in Harry Potter in order to argue that it underscores an important element of human conflict. At first glance it appears that Harry lives in a partially globalized world that is quite similar to our own. Magicals live in nation-states, identify with their countries of origin, have developed state structures that are similar to our own, and participate in rudimentary international institutions and cooperative activities. As with the muggle world, magicals also find themselves in frequent conflict, and warfare is a common occurrence throughout magical history.

Yet one important difference between the worlds of magicals and muggles is that nationalism and the nation-state plays no role in magical conflicts. This is very different from muggle international politics, in which conflict can usually be described according to the parameters of nation-states and national identity markers. Magicals certainly fight one another over identity markers, most notably “race” as it relates to blood purity issues. Yet in muggle international relations these same markers are inevitably linked to politics among nation-states, which are the dominant political organizations of modern global affairs. Human beings tend to self-organize themselves into conflict-oriented groups because resource utilization requires collective effort, which also entails demarcating group boundaries and differentiating group membership. Nationalism and the nation-state
have played a central role in defining and demarcating collectives in the modern international system, and so they play a major role in muggle conflict. Yet these elements are absent in the world of Harry Potter, which is essentially consistent with a liberal vision of international politics. In highlighting this absence from Harry Potter's world, our goal is also to highlight the seminal role that the nation-state plays in muggle affairs and international conflict.

**Muggle International Processes**

Magicals carry on their daily lives within the parameters of the muggle political and economic world, which is a world divided into individual nation-states. Nation-states usually have a defined territory with carefully marked boundaries, and a population that sees itself as distinct from the populations in other nation-states (on the basis of a variety of cultural identity markers discussed later). Nation-states also have governments that make decisions for their particular populations, so that choices regarding political structures, leadership, and policies are made within the territorial boundaries of nation-states.

Yet nation-states are also interconnected, because most participate in a global capitalist-market system in which goods and services are traded across their borders. Nation-state governments coordinate a great deal of their economic activities so that trade can be relatively "free" from encumbrances. To assist in this process, and to address other transnational problem areas that cut across nation-state boundaries, nation-states have established a variety of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Health Organization (WHO), to name only a few. These have been supplemented over time by nongovernmental organizations established by private citizens or professional organizations.

International relations scholars often refer to the modern, global, political and economic system as "Westphalian," in reference to the treaties signed in Westphalia in 1648 that ended Europe's Thirty Year's War and signaled what international relations scholars often refer to as the "birth" of the nation-state. Historically, human beings organized their political, economic, and social affairs in a variety of institutional ways, such as tribes, kinship groups, or city-leagues. Empires are actually the more common institutional variant throughout human history. Yet after the seventeenth century, the nation-state gradually displaced all other institutional competitors. Today the nation-state is the globe's dominant political unit.
Mirroring Nationalism and the State

On the surface there are a number of ways in which the magical world of Harry Potter replicates or mirrors existing nation-states and hence this modern Westphalian world. Magicals share distinct nationalities and identities linked to particular sporting teams, languages, and educational systems. The nationalities referenced are ones with which we are already familiar. The Quidditch World Championship brings sports teams from Ireland and Bulgaria to England, as well as contingents of witches and wizards from around the world. Ludo Bagman complains that he is unable to communicate with the Bulgarian representatives given their foreign language. Different nation-states in this magical world have their own educational institutions, such as Beauxbatons or Durmstrang. And magical governing structures, with missions similar to that of muggle governments, are apparently replicated within nation-state borders around the globe.

As a representative of these governing structures, the Ministry of Magic in Great Britain exists alongside the governing structure developed by muggles within Britain’s borders. The head of the Ministry, the Minister of Magic, has contact with the leader of the muggles’ government, the British prime minister, as situations warrant. But the main job of this Ministry is, as initially described by Hagrid, “to keep it from the Muggles that there’s still witches an’ wizards up an’ down the country,” otherwise “everyone’d be wantin’ magic solutions to their problems.” Many of the Ministry’s departments and the tasks they undertake are directed at hiding the wizarding world as a result. Wizards from the Ministry are regularly wiping muggle memories clean of magical encounters. The Ministry maintains departments for accidental magic reversals, magical law enforcement, magical catastrophes, improper use of magic, magical transportation, and a committee for muggle-worthy excuses.

Yet as Harry’s story unfolds, it becomes clear that regulation to prevent muggle detection is not the Ministry’s only responsibility. The Ministry also regulates intramagical behavior in ways that are similar to the regulation of muggle populations by their respective national governments. The Ministry’s Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, for example, regulates the conduct of goblins and uppity house elves, and it enforces the Code of Wand Use that “no non-human creature is permitted to carry or use a wand.” The Ministry also requires that Animagi be registered, and, according to Myrtle the ghost, the Ministry can regulate the behavior of ghosts by preventing them from haunting particular victims. In a similar fashion,
muggle governments may establish different conduct rules (and rights) for different subgroups within their territories (Indian tribes are accorded a different legal status by the American state, for example).

Muggle governments also regulate the possession and use of particular types of weapons within their population. They are particularly careful to regulate the use of dangerous substances (such as weapons-grade plutonium or cyanide), just as the Ministry of Magic does with regard to Hermione’s use of a time turner or Snape’s use of the truth potion Veritaserum. Muggle governments might regulate and monitor communications across phone lines or the internet, just as the Ministry’s Floo Regulation Panel monitors the use of fireplaces within the magical world, as well as ensuring that muggle and magical fireplaces are not connected. And the Ministry requires wizards to pass a test and obtain a license in order to apparate, just as muggles are required to obtain driver’s licenses from their governments before operating an automobile.

The Ministry’s powers are apparently relatively far-reaching as a result, which is consistent with the powers and responsibilities of most muggle governments found around the world. The Ministry can, for example, direct educational institutions and expel students from school if they do not abide by Ministry laws, such as the Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry. The Ministry has a wizard high court, the Wizengamot, which tries individuals and can fine or punish them. It maintains a prison, Askaban, where the worst offenders of magical laws can be incarcerated. And, as with many muggle governments, the Ministry has the authority to order and carry out executions. A Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures oversees executions of magical creatures. Magical humans who are condemned to death by the Ministry’s court system are executed by the Dementors who guard Askaban. Although some muggle governments have purposefully eschewed the death penalty in response to human rights concerns, many muggle governments retain the right to make corporal punishment decisions for their particular populations. Given the Ministry’s wide-ranging responsibilities, it is no wonder that there is a desire among the politically ambitious, such as Percy Weasley, to climb its ranks and become the Minister of Magic.

**Mirroring Capitalist Economics and International Cooperation**

In mirroring the muggle world, magicals also have a capitalist-market system with characteristics that are similar to the capitalist-market systems of
most modern muggle nation-states. The magical economic system provides goods and services in exchange for magical currency. The students of Hogwarts must purchase school supplies in Diagon Alley, which is the magical equivalent of a muggle shopping mall, and the Weasley twins’ long-standing ambition is to open a joke shop where they can sell their wares. The background of the best-selling author, Gilderoy Lockhart, and the annual purchasing of schoolbooks suggest that there are magical publishers who operate as muggle publishers do, by supplying books for purchase and profit in a market catering to the magical community. To support the magical capitalist-market system, the magical community has its own wizard banking system, Gringotts, which is run by goblins and has international interests.

Why magicals cannot simply conjure the items they need at will is unclear, as is the magical desire to replicate these historically specific forms of muggle economic exchange. The sign above Ollivander’s indicates that they have been “makers of fine wands since 382 B.C.” This means they have experienced a wide variety of economic exchange forms that have also varied historically in their relationship to the dominant political institutions of any period. Yet magicals seem intent upon closely mirroring the political, economic, and social expectations of the present muggle world. This is most obvious in the magical expectation that humans must work for wages and benefits, and a career path must be chosen in the fifth year of study. These expectations are entirely bound to the present capitalist-market system and have no counterparts in other historical periods (medieval peasants did not have a career with wages and benefits, nor would a Roman merchant have known what such terms meant).

Magicals also share the muggle expectation that those with lower-paying jobs will have lower standards of living. This results in a hierarchy of classes which Tammy Turner-Vorbeck notes could be examined from a neo-Marxist lens. Constant references to the Weasley family’s relative poverty are often linked to Mr. Weasley’s job in the Ministry’s relatively unimportant Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office. When the Malfoys taunt the Weasleys, it is often related to Mr. Weasley’s job. Lucius refers to Mr. Weasley’s need to be “paid overtime,” for example, or his inability to pay for good Quidditch Cup seats. Similarly, Professor Lupin’s shabby appearance is frequently attributed to his inability to find steady employment, made particularly acute after the Ministry passes “Anti-Werewolf Legislation” that denies werewolves access to jobs in the magical community. The Malfoys, on the other hand, represent a class of aristocrats who do not appear to need to work.
As with the muggle world, the magical capitalist-market system extends beyond nation-state borders. There is international trade between the separate national communities of magicals. As with the governing structures of the muggle world, the Ministry of Magic is intimately involved with international cooperative efforts to regulate and harmonize trade across distinct national political units. Percy Weasley’s first job in the Ministry’s Department for International Magical Cooperation has him negotiating with his institutional counterparts in other nation-states to harmonize trading standards. This mirrors similar muggle efforts in Europe and the WTO. There is a need to standardize cauldron thickness, he asserts, because “foreign imports” often leak, and “unless some sort of international law is imposed” the British market will be flooded with poor quality, dangerous products. And as with muggle trade, particular magical items have been deemed too dangerous to import freely and have resulted in a collective ban across national magical communities, such as flying carpets.

The existence of magical international organizations, international laws and agreements, and cross-national sporting events encouraged by departments of international cooperation are a final way in which muggle activity is mirrored in the magical world. There is an International Federation of Warlocks, which has been holding conventions since 1289, an international court of wizards, and an International Confederation and Code of Wizarding Secrecy. The Quidditch World Championship attracts wizards from all over the world who must simultaneously be kept hidden from muggles. In order to host the Cup, the Ministry works with the International Association of Quidditch, an intergovernmental organization that allows the Ministry to coordinate with its counterparts elsewhere and establish portkeys across five continents. Percy’s Department of International Magical Cooperation is also in charge of organizing and overseeing security for the Triwizard Tournament. This international event is similar to muggle Olympics and foreign student exchange programs, because it is a “way of establishing ties between young witches and wizards of different nationalities.”

Conflict, Power, and the State in the Muggle and Magical Worlds
Magical politics and economics occurs within the established realm of muggle international relations, yet an interesting exception to this magical mirroring may be found in conflict and the role that governing institutions play in it. Obviously, violent conflict and warfare occur in both worlds.
Muggle history is replete with examples of warfare among different groups and nations of people. Not surprisingly, the study of warfare is of ongoing interest to international relations scholars, particularly among realists, who tend to focus on issues of power and violence. Similarly, there are many references throughout the Potter series to wizards waging wars among themselves, as with the case of Voldemort and his Death Eaters, or against other magical creatures, such as giants, goblins, and trolls. The reasons for conflict in the magical world are also all too human, involving the specific goal of racial purity and oppression that have their counterparts in the Westphalian system and world politics in general. Xenophobia, or the intense hatred of another group of people on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, and other attributes, played an important role in World War II. And xenophobia remains a basic feature of contemporary international politics, as violence in Yugoslavia and Rwanda–Burundi in the 1990s reminds us.

Racial purity is not the only reason for conflict in the muggle world, however, and it is here that interesting differences between the two worlds begin to emerge. Differences over political ideology or economics, and over control of territory or resources, can also lead to violent conflict among muggles. Such conflicts can either be internal to nation–states, as is the case of civil wars, or between nation–states, as is the case of international wars. Warfare in the magical world, on the other hand, seems almost solely connected to issues of racial purity among wizards and the oppression or containment of other magical creatures. The Death Eater’s obsession with blood purity is as old as Salazar Slytherin’s participation in the creation of Hogwarts, and it seems to have been the central division among wizards and witches since that time. In wizard relations with other magics, there are references to historical goblin rebellions against wizard rule, and Ministry Aurors were responsible for killing giants during Voldemort’s original reign of terror. As Dumbledore notes, the “Fountain of Magical Brethren” in the atrium of the Ministry of Magic was a misnomer since “wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long.” What the fountain actually celebrated was not a common magical heritage, but the triumph of wizards and witches over other magical creatures such as centaurs, goblins, and house elves.

These magical conflicts are not easy to categorize according to the parameters of muggle international relations. The conflict with Voldemort might be characterized as a civil war among wizards, with one of its epicenters being Great Britain, since Hogwarts is an important site of resistance and is located there. Prior conflicts between wizards and goblins or
giants might also be characterized as a form of magical civil war, in that all parties involved share a common characteristic of being magical and are fighting over who will have sovereign control over whatever shared territory they might occupy. But we could also characterize magical conflict as international instead, since other magicals are not specific to Great Britain, and prior magical conflicts, as well as the present conflict with Voldemort, have both worldwide dimensions and ramifications for all magical creatures as well as muggles. In addition, various sides in these conflicts have sought alliance partners in foreign countries, which is a characteristic of international warfare. Ultimately it may be more appropriate to characterize magical warfare as transnational, which means that it does not occur along standard Westphalian lines. In other words, it is not strictly or even primarily inside the nation-state, nor is it strictly or even primarily between nation-states. Rather it occurs outside of, beyond, or in spite of standard international political categories.

The Role of the State in Muggle Conflict

Alternatively, our muggle world of territorially bounded nation-states shapes the scope and conduct of muggle war to a large extent. Certainly muggles have crosscutting identities, just as the identity of being a wizard or witch cuts across nation-state boundaries, and many liberal scholars argue that national identity and its loyalty to the state is declining. Yet the nation-state itself remains a primary point of identification for its population in the Westphalian system, and realists are quick to point out that transnational identities that cut across nation-states are not the primary fault-lines for international conflicts in the modern era. As Franke Wilmer puts it, "the state today makes claims on individuals on the basis of their identity as citizens which trump all other claims, past and present, based on all other group identities." The possible exception to this is international terrorism, which can involve transnational identities and may attempt to operate transnationally outside and against the nation-state system. But it is important to remember that not all terrorism is global in scope, nor are transnational identities always involved. In addition, terrorists must still find safe havens within nation-states in order to operate, because every inch of the habitable globe belongs to some nation-state.

In the case of civil wars, such wars often bleed into neighboring states or, depending on a variety of factors, have international ramifications. Yet the existence of nation-states can also prevent civil conflicts from spreading, because what is being fought over is control of specified territory,
which is bounded by the protected territory of neighboring nation-states. If the internal conflict spills across those borders (whether in actual fighting or an outpouring of refugees), then neighbors might directly intervene in the conflict. When such spillage does not occur, however, neighboring nation-states are just as likely to let the conflict run its course without interference. This had advantages after Europe’s Thirty Years’ War in the seventeenth century, since it meant that different political and economic units would not interfere in one another’s affairs on the basis of transnational identities or interests. But it also means that genocides during civil wars are common to the Westphalian era, since transnational identities and political conflicts are not shared across boundaries and so other nation-states do not intervene to end them. In both instances, of modern international war and civil war, it is still possible to conceptualize warfare according to parameters that relate to the attributes of the nation-state, and hence the very foundation of the modern international system.

The ability of a nation-state’s government to make decisions for its population without the interference of other governments and populations is referred to as “sovereignty,” and it is a topic much discussed and analyzed by international relations scholars. Sovereignty does not mean that nation-states are isolated from one another, or disinterested in one another’s political and economic affairs, or do not try to sway and affect one another’s political and economic policies. Because there is an entwining or “interdependence” among nation-states in particular transnational issue areas (such as environmental degradation or capitalist-market economics), the policies enacted by one nation-state can have serious ramifications for the environmental or economic health of its neighbors or trading partners. The nature of such transnational problems is not amenable to either a violent or unilateral solution. There is a great deal of effort among nation-states to coordinate policies to one degree or another as a result.

The final decision as to whether to cooperate still rests with the governing structures unique to each nation-state, however, and much of the international cooperation that occurs today is coordinated by and between the governments of these nation-states. Sovereignty is often defined as a legal right to noninterference. As such, it is the legal basis for most international treaties. Yet this definition can be confusing since, as with any right, it can be violated by those who have relatively greater power. I have the right not to be murdered, and yet this right can easily be violated by a criminal with a gun. In a similar vein, nation-states have the right to sovereignty within their own borders, yet neighboring nation-states with relatively greater power may attack and occupy them. Who guarantees a right
is just as important as the content of the right itself, which is why nation-states often obsess over one another’s relative power and go to great lengths to correct perceived imbalances.29

In the absence of a higher authority over nation-states, the nation-state both guarantees and violates the rights of their own populations and those of other nation-states. In other words, in the anarchic environment of international politics, nation-states can only enjoy the right of sovereignty within their own borders if they can also guarantee it themselves and with respect to other nation-states.30 Unfortunately, the governments and leaders of many nation-states have taken this basic truism of the modern era to mean that they must conquer and subjugate their own populations, as well as those of neighboring nation-states, in order to ensure their own national sovereignty. The outcome is tantamount to an “organized hypocrisy,” according to Stephen Krasner, because nation-state governments spend a great deal of time talking about the importance of sovereignty while simultaneously violating one another’s sovereignty when they believe it is in their own interests to do so.31 It is probably more appropriate to think of nation-state sovereignty less as a solid legal wall and more as a “mental horizon” that shapes the decisions and actions of leaders, governments, and populations.32 It justifies one’s own actions, even when those actions violate the general principle that all nation-states should have the right to sovereignty within their own borders. As a result, invasion has been a common practice among nation-states, as recent examples of Iraq’s 1989 invasion of Kuwait or the United States’ 2003 invasion of Iraq illustrate.

The nation-state is also pertinent to how war, as an organized, collective activity, is waged in the modern era. Muggle warfare has always involved complex battlefield planning and strategies, which must include the movement of large numbers of people, weapons, equipment, and other materials. Even more complex planning and coordination is involved in waging war in the modern era, due to technology advances and large population growths. Such coordination only comes about with the intervention of leadership and collective governing structures. In other words, a nation-state’s population does not suddenly rise up in a fit of passion to attack its neighbors. Instead, waging war involves encouragement and coordination by a nation-state’s governing institutions and its leaders. The result is that “those who make the momentous decision to lead a state into war do not themselves do the fighting on the battlefield,” and “those who actually engage in battle are likely to have had little or nothing to do with the actual decision to fight.”33 Because “war is a mat-
ter of political decision, which can be the result of rational as well as ir-

rational processes," muggle governments always figure prominently in the
activity of warfare.

International wars in the Westphalian system are waged between pop-
ulations whose activity is coordinated by their respective governments and
directed at both the population and government of their enemies. The close
identification of populations/nations and governments/states is one of the
reasons why modern warfare can be so deadly for muggle civilians and
noncombatants. The nation-state’s governing institutions are also seminal
to civil wars, because the immediate goal of the factions that are fighting
one another is typically the seizure of state power. Regardless of the spe-
cific causes of the fighting, whether it is for racial purity, resource control,
or economic ideology, the goal of each side in a civil war is to gain con-
trol over or create a government in order to impose their preferences
within the nation-state’s boundaries. Warfare in the muggle world has al-
ways been a collective endeavor, then, and in modern times it has required
and depended upon the state in order to be waged. The state is ruthlessly
efficient at it, too. As Bruce Falconer notes, “the rise of the modern bu-
reaucratic state . . . simplified the task of identifying and tracking target
groups and provided an institutional cloak behind which executioners
could hide.”

The state as a whole remains a relatively powerful instrument in the
muggle world. This also makes it extremely dangerous, which is something
that international relations scholars of all theoretical stripes generally agree
upon. Obviously terrorists acting alone or in small groups are capable of
killing relatively large numbers in short periods of time, as the Oklahoma
City bombings or the airplane hijackings of 9/11 demonstrate. But terror-
ist death tolls since the nineteenth century, which can be measured in the
thousands, pale in comparison to the casualties achieved by states in that
same period of time. Rudolph Rummel has compiled statistics on state-
sponsored killings, or democide, and compared them to battlefield deaths. He estimates that between 1900 and 1987 democide was responsible for
170 million deaths as compared to 34.4 million battlefield deaths from both
international and civil wars combined. In other words, more people died
at the hands of their states in the twentieth century than they did in ter-
rorist attacks, international wars, and civil wars combined. The state can be
ruthlessly efficient at genocide in either international or civil wars. It can
also produce massive lethal results that individuals working alone or in small
groups simply cannot achieve.
The Absence of the State in Magical Conflict

Alternatively, the nation-state does not play a central role, either as the coordinator of mass conflict or the goal of it, in the conflicts of Harry Potter. The Ministry of Magic does not appear to figure prominently in accounts of prior magical wars, nor is the desire to gain control over it a motivation in the conflict with Voldemort and the Death Eaters. Certainly Voldemort has sought to destroy the Ministry’s ability to thwart him, but he and his followers do not appear bent on either controlling existing governing institutions or creating their own in its place. Given that the state is such a powerful and dangerous entity in the world of muggles, it is all the more curious that Voldemort and the Death Eaters do not seek to create or control such an institution. The answer to this curiosity may lie in the observation that, unlike muggles, magicals do not seem to need political governing structures and institutions in order to obtain their preferences, particularly if those preferences involve violent conflict.

Voldemort appears to have no interest in taking over the Ministry of Magic and becoming simply a malignant state official. Voldemort wants to, variously, eliminate mud-bloods, kill Harry Potter, and “become the greatest sorcerer in the world.” By the fourth novel we learn that one of Voldemort’s ultimate objectives reflects his pseudonym: to “conquer death” and pursue “immortality.” As he claims in Order of the Phoenix, “there is nothing worse than death.” His goals, at least as we understand them through the Half-Blood Prince, have little to do with seizing control of the organs of the state. Certainly one of Voldemort’s ongoing desires is to kill mud-bloods and achieve blood purity, which is what he has in common with the Death Eaters. Yet hereto these goals do not appear to require magical governing institutions in order to be pursued or obtained. Certainly the Ministry might serve as a bulwark against blood purity activities, but it is constantly thwarted and undermined by the magical abilities of individual wizards and witches.

For all its powers of oversight and regulation, then, the Ministry of Magic is not a particularly powerful entity within the magical community itself, and when compared to the relatively greater powers of the muggle state. While there are apparently no institutional political competitors to the Ministry (with the possible exception of Hogwarts), the Ministry’s powers are checked by the magical power of particular individual wizards, such as Dumbledore or Voldemort. It is no surprise, then, that none of the major characters seeks to lead the Ministry, and those who do, such as Cornelius Fudge or Percy, are buffoons with relatively little magical power. The Ministry is necessary for the maintenance of law and order, but it is a mere
shadow image of the muggle state it is meant to reflect. It is not a location or site of power in its own wizarding world. Power is instead the wand used at times jointly and simultaneously by Death Eaters or members of the Order of the Phoenix, but more often by individuals battling one another. In fact, collective conflict in the wizarding world usually involves individuals fighting one-on-one with their wands. It resembles multiple, simultaneous duels rather than the sort of complex coordination required for muggle conflicts.

The real “powers” of the wizarding world are individuals such as Voldemort, Dumbledore, and Harry, who have followers but do not seem to need them when encountering one another. Thus power in the magical world ultimately derives from the individual’s own innate capacities. It does not appear to derive from the pooling of those capabilities into institutional governing structures as it does in the muggle world. Even when pooling does occur, as when the Death Eaters appear after the Quidditch World Cup to torment the muggle camp owners, such activity does not require complex coordination. Nor can collective pooling stand up against the powers of particular, individual wizards, which is underscored by Dumbledore’s appearance in the Ministry in the fifth novel, which effectively ends the fight between the Death Eaters and members of the Order. The state is simply not as necessary for accomplishing large-scale collective violence among magicals as it is for nonmagicals. It is instead individuals who determine outcomes and represent the real power to achieve, unmake, protect, and kill in Harry Potter’s world. As a result, the world of Harry Potter is very liberal in an international relations theoretical sense. It associates power with individuals rather than with collectives or their governing structures. It does not assume, as realist international relations scholars do, that collectives and conflict necessarily go hand in hand.

The Social Construction of Identity Difference in the Muggle and Magical Worlds

The absence of the state in the magical conflicts of Harry Potter would not be so notable if it were not for the presence of socially constructed identity differences in that same world. Intimately connected with the muggle need for governing institutions to accomplish collective goals is the need to identify group boundaries in the muggle world. Who participates in collective decisions, who reaps the benefits of collective action, and on whose behalf governing institutions will act are basic questions of muggle politics. National membership is a boundary that determines who will and will not
receive the full benefits of citizenship, such as education, access to health
care, the right to vote, or a passport. Less benignly, it is also a boundary that
determines against whom it is acceptable to use collective violence. Where
such boundaries come from is a matter of social construction.43 That is,
they are determined by the social construction of shared characteristics
among group members. The most obvious characteristics include a com-
mon language, religion, political or economic ideology, culture, history,
racial characteristics, and blood lineage.

A great deal of conflict in muggle affairs revolves around what qualities
unite a collective, because the delineation of collective identity involves ex-
clusion. As Iver Neumann puts it succinctly, “there is no inclusion without
exclusion.”44 The elements necessary to claim a common identity and
membership in a group also determine who should be excluded because
they lack those characteristics. This can lead to marginalization, exclusion,
or forced assimilation within collectives. In asking “what is the basis for
group solidarity within the state,” Franke Wilmer notes that “the creation
of real states has been an enormously violent process,” because “state-
making conquers the ‘Others’ within imagined boundaries.”45 Differences
over shared characteristics and the exclusions they entail can pull nation-
states apart, particularly when subgroups within a collective demand purity
of an identity marker, whether it is of blood, race, religion, ethnicity, or
language. And the juxtaposition of one’s own national collective “self”
against that of “other” national collectives often serves as the justification
for intercollective violence. Hence how collective identity is socially con-
structed is a subject of inquiry for both liberal and realist international re-
lations scholars, with the former focusing on the role of identity in
cooperation and the latter focusing on its role in violence.

While the imposition of a collective identity is often a violent process,
violece is not innate to the content of any particular identity marker or
configuration. A notion of racial or ethnic difference does not necessarily
mean intolerance or lead inevitably to policies of violence and the oppres-
sion or slaughter of others who are different. It is perfectly possible to es-
chew identity difference or accept it as mere difference and nothing else.
But socially constructed identity difference, as a fundamental feature of hu-
man collectives, is frequently used by leaders and states as triggers for col-
lective violence against other collectives who do not share the same socially
constructed identity. The exploration of group identity boundaries, and
the triggers that lead to violence or the conditions that promote tolerance,
are an important part of international relations scholarship.46 Under the
right conditions, the notion of “blood” purity, as a significant but ulti-
mately socially constructed identity marker, can become the source of intracollective intolerance and violence among muggles.

The Social Construction of Magical Collective Identity
This dynamic of socially constructed intolerance and violence can be seen at work in the magical world of Harry Potter. Much of the conflict in the magical world revolves around the fact that wizards and witches have supposedly been regularly fraternizing with muggles at the most basic level of sex and marriage. The result is that much of the magical community has a muggle in the family tree. "Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway," Ron asserts, because "if we hadn't married muggles we'd've died out." Sirius makes similar assertions. This genetic mixing provides the basis for the "pure blood" claims of the Death Eaters (although not for Voldemort himself), who have not fraternized with muggles and so can claim that they have not been "tainted" with muggle genetic material. Both claims, that there is a need to procreate with muggles and to maintain a standard of "pure blood," are problematic, just as they would be in the muggle world. It is possible for two muggles to spontaneously give birth to wizards and witches, as is the case with Hermione and with Harry's mother, Lily. Thus the claim that human magics needed to intermarry with human muggles to continue producing human magics is erroneous. Both Hermione and Lily are also accused of being mud-bloods by Death Eaters, but if their parents were muggles then there was no magical blood to begin and it is unclear how their blood could be "muddied" in any biological or physiological sense.

Squibs such as Filch and Mrs. Figg represent an alternative situation in which offspring of a witch and wizard have no magical powers. It is unclear why such individuals are not simply called muggles, but the point is that pure bloodlines are no guarantee of magical ability. Nor are they a guarantee of relatively exceptional magical power. Hermione's apparently tainted blood does not prevent her from having exceptional magical powers or Neville's pure blood from having relatively less magical ability. The same is true for Harry as well as for Voldemort who, despite his obsession with pure blood, is actually a mud-blood himself and yet one of the most powerful wizards of his age. Magical abilities associated with blood ties do not even need a direct parental linkage in the wizarding world in order to become manifest. Harry enjoys protection from Voldemort due to his mother's sacrifice and his genetic relationship to Aunt Petunia, whose "blood became your refuge," Dumbledore tells Harry. Yet Voldemort is
actually able to steal this protection to some extent, by using Harry's blood to resurrect himself.⁵²

Thus there is no correlation between the purity of one's blood and one's magical abilities. Nor does it appear that either the mixing or purity of blood makes a difference as to whether you have magical powers in the first place. If magical abilities are rooted in biological, physiological, or genetic differences, they appear to occur at random and do not need the social engineering of either genetic mixing or separation to continue. This makes the pureblood mania of the Malfoys and Blacks, with the latter's pureblood family tapestry, all the more ridiculous.⁵³ Yet it is simultaneously consistent with our own world of human collectives, who obsess over blood purity by tracing it back across many generations and using percentages of blood purity as cues to citizenship rights. As J. K. Rowling herself notes, "the Nazis used precisely the same warped logic as the Death Eaters" with regard to blood distinctions, and there are parallels between Voldemort's obsession with blood purity and Hitler's obsession with a pure Aryan race.⁵⁴

**Why Not Oppress Muggles Instead?**

What is interesting about Rowling's reliance on blood purity as a source of conflict in Harry's world, however, is that it deflects attention from the more obvious potential conflict that exists in that world between magicals and muggles. Based on innate abilities, one can readily identify which individuals are magical, and hence part of the magical collective "self," and which are not, and hence part of the nonmagical "other." Why, then, haven't all magicals seized upon what is apparently a tangible genetic difference with an alternative collective (rather than socially constructing a difference within their own collective) and united to oppress muggles? After all, if magical humans develop collective identity markers and configurations to delimit who they are versus who they are not, just as muggle humans do, then it's not clear why the difference between magical ability and muggle inability would not serve as an obvious collective identity marker to justify the political and economic domination of muggles.

We are led to believe that most magicals want muggle coexistence and hide themselves so they will not be bothered by constant requests or demands for magical assistance in muggle affairs. This implies that exposed magicals would be forced to do muggle biddings, but magicals certainly do not fear muggles, as Harry's essay on "Witch Burning in the Fourteenth
Century Was Completely Pointless—Discuss” indicates. The fact that Mr. Weasley’s job entails ongoing efforts to stop or clean up after various magical acts of “muggle-baiting” suggests that magicals do not have a very high regard for muggles. When magicals use the term muggle it is not meant as a compliment, and the term is similar to the derogatory word, nigger, used by bigots to describe African Americans. Even among magicals who profess a fondness for muggles, there is an effort to disassociate from them. When Ron Weasley admits that there is a muggle in the family tree, he also notes, “but we never talk about him.” Mr. Weasley’s constant afterthought to “bless them,” because muggles are completely unaware that their behavior is shaped by magicals, is highly paternalistic. And thewizarding treatment of house elves, goblins, and giants, as well as the Ministry’s “Fountain of Magical Brethren,” underscores a pattern of wizarding domination that makes the absence of systematic muggle oppression all the stranger.

The extent to which there is no overt conflict between muggles and magicals may simply be a literary device to preserve the fantasy that any child could be swept up in a magical world at a moment’s notice. After all, the essence of Harry’s appeal to the young adolescents who constitute Rowling’s principal audience is obvious. Harry is a skinny loser with thick glasses. As a despised stepchild in direct competition with a physically stronger and favored natural son, his position in the highly regimented social world of the Dursley family is hopelessly inferior. For him, life is an unbroken string of humiliations that reinforce his essential powerlessness. All of this changes, however, when he learns another world exists; one in which, far from being obscure and insignificant, he possesses a measure of honored and even heroic fame. And most importantly, he possesses power. The very marks of his inferiority at home are in the magical world of the badges of his special superiority. Harry represents a fantasy of escape from a well-ordered social world, in which he feels marginalized and insignificant, to a world of unrestrained individual power. Voldemort is a much darker version of the same fantasy: a powerful individual who threatens to plunge a nascent and fragile social order back into Hobbian anarchy. Both are orphans and as such represent the ultimate fantasy of individualism, in which there is no debt owed to or constraints from a collective, such as the family, and power may be wielded as the individual alone sees fit.

These themes can be highlighted by comparing the Harry Potter series to another “fantasy” series, the Marvel comic book series the X-Men, which mirrors the power and constraints of human collectives in a way that
Harry Potter's world does not. At first glance the similarities between the two series are remarkable. In both cases, our world of human limitations and frailties exists alongside a world of human beings with extraordinary powers. Which human beings are born with and develop such powers is a mystery in both series. Both also contain powerful individuals, such as Dumbledore and Professor Xavier, who want peaceful coexistence with "regular" humans and are pitted against other powerful individuals, such as Voldemort and Magneto, who would victimize or oppress them instead.

Our ability to sympathize with both positions, to both restrain and wield power, is explicitly encouraged in the X-Men series. We can all too readily identify with both the fear of unchecked power and the glorious possibility that we might possess power unknown. Similarly, Harry's regular return to the Dursleys, as though he were awakening from a self-gratifying dream, underscores the tensions between checked and unchecked individual power. Even if Harry continues to chafe under the conditions of life during the summer, he has the satisfaction of knowing that the Dursleys' contempt has been replaced by fear once his magical powers are acknowledged.61

In the case of the X-Men, however, both types of humans are well aware of one another and this serves as the thematic catalyst for the entire series. Those born with extraordinary powers are referred to as "mutants." They are born into a world where regular humans dominate political, economic, and social structures but also fear the mutant's potentially destabilizing power. Unlike muggles and magics, regular humans in the X-Men series do have some capacity to control mutants, and mutants are regularly rounded up and contained. In order to escape this oppression, mutants must band together. Professor Xavier is a leader among mutants who encourages peaceful coexistence and the use of mutant power to protect and serve all humankind. Magneto is Xavier's opposite, who refuses to accept his inferior and hunted status, instead leading mutants who would use their powers to dominate and oppress. Thus the conflict in X-Men involves the relationship between two sets of collectives, mutant humans and regular humans, who have crosscutting allegiances.

The Harry Potter characters, on the other hand, do not have crosscutting allegiances and their goals relate largely to one another but not to nonmagical humans. In other words, the conflict between Dumbledore and Voldemort is over how to socially construct the magical collective, not its relationship to that of the nonmagical collective. Nonmagicals can certainly be victims of Voldemort and his Death Eaters, but they are usually bystanders and not the intended targets, who are instead other magicals.
who have failed to live up to the Death Eaters’ standards of collective iden-
tity difference. Obviously the Potter series is a fantasy that most of us can
enjoy because it allows us to retain the normalcy of our daily lives while
acting out the very thing that is not possible in that life—an individual who
does not need human collectives in order to wield power. It is the ultimate
fantasy of liberal philosophy. But this very attribute is also what makes the
need for collective identity within the magical world of Harry Potter so
inexplicable from a realist theoretical perspective. In a world in which
power is innate to individuals and governing structures are not necessary
for the achievement of collective goals, the relevance of collective identity
markers should be less important as well. It should not matter who is or is
not a member of the magical collective if the pooling of individual re-
sources is not necessary for achieving larger collective goals. There should
be relatively little cause for collective conflict among wizards and witches
themselves as a result.

Concluding Remarks
That Rowling does not have a logically consistent understanding of ei-
ther human genetics or human conflict is not the point. In fact, the ab-
sence of tangible genetic distinctions within the magical world is
consistent with our own world, in which differences between groups of
humans are socially constructed and not innate. There is nothing natu-
ral or transhistorical about any of the standard identity markers or spe-
cific configurations of them relied upon by humans in constructing their
collectives. _Homo sapiens_ constitute a single species, there is no single
“true” religion, ethnicity is always a combination of historical myths and
truths, and languages evolve like anything else. Human beings cling
dearly to the fiction that these collective identity markers and configu-
rations are stable and real, because doing so gives their lives purpose and
meaning. Yet identity is always fluid and indeterminate in its content
and boundaries. It always involves an imaginary sense of collective “self”
in juxtaposition to an imaginary collective “other.” The construction of
such markers ultimately involves the determination of who is a member
of one’s collective and who is not. Ethnic or racial hatred needs no ac-
tual genetic grounding to produce collective violence and genocide,
only the collective belief that such differences exist and matter. Hence
the social construction of identity and its linkage to self-other in Harry
Potter mirrors the way in which the goals of racial oppression and blood
purity continue to plague our own world.
Yet the important linkage between identity and collective political structures, and hence to resource control and power, is missing in the world of Harry Potter, as it is in most liberal international relations scholarship. In the muggle world it is identity “that secures the social cohesiveness necessary to create and maintain the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion among those who identify themselves as ‘members’ of the social group or ‘citizens’ of the state.”\(^{62}\) When nationalism, ethnic identity, and racial bloodlines are at issue in muggle conflict, the touted identity characteristics often parallel the nation-state as the main political/economic and collective unit of the modern era. This is one of the central insights of realist scholarship. In other words, muggles with xenophobic tendencies who seek to obtain pure blood forms of nationalism usually pursue their goals via the state, by seizing the reins of power that the state embodies, by directing it toward these particular aims, and by using it to mobilize the population and a configuration of identity markers to violent collective ends. Hence the seizure or control of the state is the means whereby muggle collectives can obtain goals such as racial purification and oppression that involve violence en mass. Even if identity formation is irrational and internally inconsistent, then, realism argues that it still has a rational external motivation in the muggle world: It makes collective action possible in a world where collective action is necessary.

Alternatively, the Harry Potter story involves a nation that is pulling itself apart on the basis of identity politics and the delineation of collective boundaries. Yet neither the Death Eaters nor those who would stop them need a state in order to realize their goals. This is because in the wizarding world collective action is not necessary, so its formation is all the more transparently absurd. The Potter series is a story of individuals who are free from the constraints of and responsibilities to collectives, and yet choose to differentiate themselves as collectives nonetheless. The delineation of collective characteristics among wizards and witches is very much a social fabrication. This tells us less about J. K. Rowling’s world of Harry Potter, of course, and more about our own simultaneous need for collective identity efforts that ultimately divide us. In the modern era, those divisions are manifest in territorially based nation-states that involve efforts within specified territories at delineating a collective identity of “self” that is juxtaposed to “other” nation-states and their collective identities. This Westphalian system is a historical construct and, as with any global system, will change and be replaced by other foundational concepts and governing structures over time.\(^{63}\) Yet the impetus to form collectives and so divide and differentiate ourselves in some way will remain a fundamental attribute of any future global governance system.
Notes

1. Considerable attention has been given to the question of how the nation-state came to dominate global politics. Many scholars argue that the nation-state displaced other institutional competitors because it was more efficient at raising revenues in order to wage war and/or participate in capitalist-market endeavors. See, for example, Desch 1996; Rasler 1989; Spruyt 1994; and Tilly 1975, 1990.

2. GF, 89.

3. The escape of prisoners from Azkaban is deemed such a situation, although in the case of Sirius Black’s escape, the Minister at the time, Cornelius Fudge, was also criticized by the International Federation of Warlocks for having done so (PA, 37–38; See also OP, 544).

4. PS, 81.

5. GF, 98, 132, 449.

6. GF, 465.

7. GF, 517.

8. OP, 612.

9. GF, 45.

10. PS, 102.

11. Alternatively there is some discrepancy as to whether nonhuman magicals can expect wages and hence what their role is in the capitalist-market system. Hermione’s ongoing attempts to raise awareness of house elf servitude, and their right to expect wages and benefits instead, are met with incredulity by everyone, house elves included but with the exception of Dumbledore. Yet presumably Gringott goblins work for wages, and when the Fat Lady’s portrait is attacked, Dumbledore “hires” security trolls to guard her (PA, 269). The difference in treatment may derive from the less obsequious natures of goblins and trolls, but it is a mirror of the historical development of the muggle’s capitalist-market system which, as it developed in Europe and the Americas from the fourteenth century on, depended on the African slave trade to provide non-wage-earning labor. See, for example, Smith, Collins, Hopkins, and Muhammad 1988 and Wallerstein 1979.


13. CS, 77.


15. GF, 56.

16. GF, 91.

17. CS, 189.

18. GF, 425 and 482.

19. GF, 91.

20. GF, 187.

22. PA, 77 and GF, 234.

23. OP, 834.

24. See, for example, Hagrid and Madam Maxime’s travel to contact the remaining Giants (OP, 426–33), the foundation of the international confederation of wizards and troll-hunting (OP, 725–26), and the refusal of the centaurs to enter into an alliance with either side in the pureblood wizarding conflict (OP, 602–3, 756).

25. This argument may be found in Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Held 1996; Shapiro and Alker 1996; and Rosenau 1992.


28. These points are elaborated in works such as Keohane and Nye 1977; Rosecrance 1986; Zacher 1992; and Young 1989.

29. See, for example, Christensen and Snyder 1990; Ikenberry 2002; Schweller 1998; Vasquez and Elman 2003; Walt 1987; and Wohlforth 1993.

30. As a result, scholars often refer to the international system as one of “self-help,” as a means of explaining why all nation-states arm themselves, protect their borders, seek to balance the relative power of their neighbors, and often avoid cooperation with one another. As Waltz (1979, 105) argues, “in any self-help system, units worry about their survival, and the worry conditions their behavior.” Yet there is also considerable controversy over what a self-help, anarchic system actually means for the behavior of nation-states. See, for example, Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993; Holsti 1992; Keohane 1984; Onuf 1989; Ruggie 1998; and Wendt 1992.


33. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1997, 263.

34. Falconer 2003, 5.


36. CS, 396–98.

37. GF, 653, 656.

38. OP, 814.

39. Certainly many muggles have sought to lead states in order to both control events and obtain a sense of figurative immortality, that is, by shaping human political and economic affairs so that they may claim a place in human memory after their deaths. But Voldemort seeks to overcome death itself and to bend it to his will, as the very name “Death Eaters” suggests, and this is not a goal that leadership of either a muggle nation-state or the Ministry of Magic can attain.

41. OP, 805. When Dumbledore appears, Harry thinks “they were saved,” as if Dumbledore were a one-person cavalry, and Dumbledore effortlessly dispels a Death Eater who a regular member of the Order had not (OP, 805).

42. The difference between these two theoretical positions has been examined in a variety of texts, including Kegley 1995; Keohane 1990; and Zacher 1992.

43. The international relations literature on the social construction of identity is considerable, but a sampling of seminal pieces includes Hall 1999; Kublakova, Onuf, and Kowart 1998; and Wendt 1992.


47. Other essays that explore the social construction of identity and its relationship to blood purity in the Potter series include Anatol 2003 and Ostry 2003.

48. CS, 146.

49. OP, 113.

50. Harry’s muggle Aunt Marge is similarly obsessed with blood purity, asserting that “bad blood” is the cause for attributes such as weakness and underbreeding (PA, 27–28).

51. OP, 836.

52. GF, 657.

53. OP, 111–12.


55. PA, 1.

56. CS, 48.

57. PS, 123.

58. CS, 148 and GF, 96.

59. It also makes the wizarding ability to subjugate these alternative magical creatures questionable. House elves are assumed incapable of acting against the wishes of their masters and cannot leave their houses without permission. They are, as a result, treated like the “dregs of the magical world” under Voldemort (PS, 226), and Sirius Black’s treatment of his own house elf, Kreacher, as “a servant unworthy of much interest or notice” (OP, 834) is probably typical of wizards. Yet when Dobby is freed, he is capable of repelling an attack on Harry by his former master with the mere flick of his wrist (CS, 428–29), Winky has a “brand of magic” that is capable of binding wizards to them (GF, 687), and Kreacher proves perfectly capable of leaving Gimmald Place when the occasion suits him. Similarly, wizards have supposedly managed to drive giants into uninhabited wilderness, yet six wizards working collectively are unable to subdue Hagrid, who is only a half-giant (OP, 720–23). And then there are the goblins, who have rebelled against wizard control throughout history, and whom Hermione asserts are “quite capable of dealing with wizards” and are unlike house elves “who never stick up for themselves” (GF, 449). All of these examples raise the question of whether
wizards ever really had control over these magical creatures, or if this control was not simply a collective self-delusion, with the desertion of the Dementors from Azkaban, because “Voldemort can offer them much more scope for their powers and their pleasures,” being a case in point (OP, 707). The pivotal role of the goblins in the financial system of the wizarding world is also strange given the extent to which goblin rebellions have occurred in the past. It underscores either the extent to which mirrored institutions are probably relatively unimportant in the final analysis or the possibility that goblins have a great deal more power than wizards would like to acknowledge.

60. See the essay by Hall in this collection, as well as essays by Grimes 2003 and Nikolajeva 2003.

61. From this perspective, neither the X-Men nor the Harry Potter series are particularly pleasant fantasies. One might wonder, after all, what a child like Harry is likely to become? It is not far-fetched to suppose that he would inevitably grow into something like Magneto or Lord Voldemort, who would both concur with Quirrell that, “there is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it” (PS, 361). Both Magneto (in some versions of the X-Men storyline) and Voldemort represent the same fantasy as Harry, but they are versions in which all of the dark implications of unchecked individual power are made manifest.
