Alienation in *Harry Potter***Ayman Khaled Hussein**

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Abstract

This is a thematic study of *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) concerning the theme of alienation. Joanne Rowling is a British novelist famous for writing her best-known fantasy book series, *Harry Potter* (1997-2007). This study argues that Rowling employs fantastical elements in *Harry Potter* to present symbolic and real-life themes that summon the postcolonial discourse of alienation. In addition, the study aims to raise the role of fantasy in serving Humanity and the dignity of people and understanding the conflicts among the members of society. Moreover, this study investigates how racial discrimination and postcolonialism work against the Humanity of heroes and their companions in their community. Therefore, that relationship causes a realistic commentary on real-life situations. The theoretical platform deployed in this study is a postcolonial perspective that purports to grasp the striking overlaps between the theme of alienation and the insights of the racial and social postcolonial discourse. The findings achieved in this paper prove the juxtaposition between alienation on the one hand and racial and social discrimination on the other hand. The researcher seeks to demonstrate that *Harry Potter* reflects the suffering and alienation of characters.

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1. Introduction

As a virtual tunnel in the world of literature, fantasy essentially probes into a deeper understanding of people's lives and highlights their problems. Fantasy creates magical aspects and includes supernatural creatures such as talking animals, elves, and vampires; protagonists and their friends have supernatural powers. The creatures that Rowling uses in *Harry Potter* own magical potentials in a fabulous setting.

Fantasy connects with the human psychological reality, including various human aspects such as sentiments, thoughts, dreams, and imagination. Fantasy is the railroad to understand the desires, feelings, and problems of people. In fantasy, the actual world and the standard features of certain characters and heroes try to understand the nature of the human being. Its events tackle people's suffering and analyze their causes by using fantastical events and aspects to reflect reality in society. Hence, fantasy works include lots of cases that reflect human morals. Some fantasy novels probe into various subjects such as racial discrimination, inferiority, suffering, and alienation.

To study fantasy, one should analyze the elements of the story that form a genre in literary works. For instance, the aspects of fantasy in *Harry Potter* are outstanding and appealing. The *Harry Potter* series promotes the effective use of imagination. Besides, the *Harry Potter* series emphasizes literary and commercial success all over the world.

Fantasy, which contains supernatural phenomena, depicts the struggle as magical to analyze and comprehend real life where people suffer. The main characters have many barriers, so they identify these challenges and encounter them with lots of patience and suffering. However, these characters also adopt hardworking attempts and virtues to reveal. Therefore, these fantasy works resist challenges noticeably.

In *Harry Potter*, readers can see how the magical world of fantasy and its aspects play a pivotal role in standing against racial and social discrimination, inequality, and evil. Moreover, fiction presents various themes: oppression, death, survival, adventures, alienation, love, and power.

2. Significance of the Study

This study aims to declare the role of fantasy works in presenting real-life and thematic messages to understand the lives of characters and creatures who suffer from racial and postcolonial conflicts. Thus, the study explores how fantasy works probe into the influence of postcolonial societies on characters' humanity. Many writers believe that humanity is precious to characters who like to live with respect and peace.

The research evaluates the role of fantastical works for social benefits to fight the tyrannies and the postcolonial aspects of alienation in real societies. This study will be an ignition for other researchers to recognize the impact of postcolonial societies on characters.

Hopefully, the thematic morals in fantasy works - like the conflict between good and evil in *Harry Potter* - might be implanted in the new generations who can stand against the unfair and cultural concepts which negatively touch humanity. Moreover, the new generations can choose their friends wisely to overcome trouble and challenges successfully. The research proves how the heroes and their companions in the two novels try to serve Humanity and display how they successfully face the problem of alienation.

3. Fantasy

Fantasy is a type of literature that includes magical aspects and events. Mythology and folklore frequently play a significant role in fantasy. For Jackson (2003), fantasy is a very appealing subject and free from the chains of more realistic texts since they disconnect from the relations of time, space, and character. In fantasy, readers go to the realm of no borders.

Concerning the high value of fantasy, many critics express their appreciation of imagination that creates a vast realm of fantastical elements and reflects what is going on in real societies. Therefore, several writers use fiction to expose events, challenges, and themes that real people experience in their life. Accordingly, aspects of fantasy are more exciting and adventurous than the real ones.

With more detail, fantasy brings fables, folktales, and myths into contemporary social relevance. Thus, readers receive the natural world blended with the realm of the fantastical elements. Many thinkers think of the power of imagination which leads readers to go beyond flesh and blood. They even believe there are outer creatures in our vision. Some are waiting for aliens, and some are planning to challenge them when they arrive as they might threaten our natural world. Beth Webb (2007) asserts the leading role of imagination in real life to all ages and its symbols by saying:

Fantasy is vital for the human mind. It begins as the psychological process by which a child learns to fill the gaps between knowledge, reality, and experience and becomes a vital adult coping mechanism...Psychoanalysis and counseling have their place, but the most important tool we as humans have to tackle reality is the creation of metaphor - the allegorical story. (pp.1-2)

Attractively, the *Harry Potter* series has become very remarkable in the field of novels and films worldwide. Similarly, Speer (2017) praises the grandeur of this fantasy work and believes that it is appealing in children's fiction. For Baines (2020), the *Harry Potter* books with their movies, characters, and writer have been esteemed internationally, admired by hundreds of millions of readers, and considered the top in the world of fantasy.

4. Postcolonial literature

Postcolonial literature started after many colonies had been fighting their way to independence in the mid-twentieth century. Many classic postcolonial texts define this movement and deal with the themes of alienation, racism, cruelty, and social discrimination.

Furthermore, postcolonialism explores the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority of a colonized nation. As a result, many authors criticize and oppose postcolonial aspects; several writers charge the subjects of postcolonialism in their literary works. Another dramatic aspect is the battle between the colonized and the colonizers that critics and writers write about when they handle postcolonialism, referring to the history of colonialism worldwide.

Applying the postcolonial study in *Harry Potter* demonstrates the significance of this approach in the given text to real-life situations. As fantasy works include postcolonial aspects, they present the thematic morals which people should not forget in their own life. Fabrizi (2016) believes that fantasy can be relevant to real-life matters and offer valuable topics to students, such as the conflict between good and evil, heroism, and the individual's humanity in society. *Harry Potter* books address these issues persuasively and attractively. Fabrizi (2016) says

Fantasy has a great deal to offer the critical reader in terms of complication and significance. One of the most interesting aspects of fantasy literature is that it tends to ask the “big” questions of life, forcing students to consider such topics as the nature of good and evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism, and the quality of one’s character, the role of the individual in society, and the importance of cultural diversity. (p.1)

Henceforth, postcolonial literature often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country. Many literary theories and critics deal with postcolonial literature, such as Stuart Hall, W. E. B. D Bois, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Young (2016) comments on postcolonialism by saying:

Postcolonialism is neither western nor non-western... [rather it is] a dialectical product of [the] interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from the long-running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism. (p.68)

5. The Theme of Alienation

Alienation is not a lenient matter; on the contrary, it is threatening and hostile to characters in modern literary works. Psychological and social features of alienation are common in literary works. Besides, many critics, writers, and theorists, such as Fanon, Seema, Marx, and Hegel, deal with this theme to understand the social problems of characters in their societies. Reading about characters who suffer from being alienated is common in American and European literary works. For example, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Meursault in *The Stranger* (1946) are well-known characters who suffer from alienation in their societies. The alienated characters suffer for no human reason. On the contrary, their humanity is negatively influenced.

5.1 Alienation and Seeman

Many critics try to define and study this concept. Alienation happens due to social and behavioral reactions. Seeman (1959) explains the features of alienation and specifies six features of alienation. First is the powerlessness that describes individuals who become powerless to form their life progression. Second is the feature of meaninglessness; it means individuals do not get any meaning from things they are involved in, nor do they get any purpose equally like others. The third feature is social isolation, which happens when individuals feel disconnected from their society and other people, so they do not share the values and practices in the community. For Seeman, the fourth feature of alienation is self-estrangement which means the alienated individuals reject any interest in things that exist in society. Fifth, it is about normlessness, a state where typical social norms are no longer practical to guide one's behavior when living in the community. Last is cultural estrangement which means the opinions and thoughts of individuals are different from what other people think and stay unaccepted or alienated, so they cannot contribute in any way to what exists in society.

6. Humanity

Humanity is about respecting others. For lots of people and countries, humanity is a crucial concept. Thus, humans must help others, make the world a healthier place, and take care of helping people in need. Understanding the human race is Humanity which is all about life. Humankind also defines some of the essential qualities that make us human beings. Helping others is merely human.

The theme of Humanity is the core of respecting individuals, regardless of their color, age, sex, race, religion, social status, or belief. Humanity is helping others get what they need, and it means doing what can be achievable to help a person live safely with no difficulties. Humanity is to support others and forget our interests for a while. It is also extending love to people. It is not about food or drinks. It can be offering help for a boy or an older person (Chhatwani, 2014).

Humanity promotes shared understanding among all people, friendship, coordination, and peace. Therefore, many organizations have had many conventions for affording Humanity, concrete relief, and protection activities by the relief organizations.

In short, many writers focus on Humanity to display the need to stop any suffering that affects humans. But Humanity offers help and gives what individuals need in the world.

7. Alienated Harry Potter

Voldemort implants the seed of alienation in the life of Harry, for he kills the parents of Harry, leaving him alone without a tenderhearted family. The Dursleys are the first people who alienate Harry as they neglect, ignore, and undervalue him compared to Dudley. Harry is not given or treated equally as Dudley. For instance, his room is under the stairs where no one likes to live. He is annoyed and bullied by Dudley. Harry lives away from the people that love him. He does not have a father to talk to and receive gifts and care, nor does he have a mother

to show him her mother's care and warm-heartedness. Yet, Harry keeps thinking of them and senses the love that could have been.

The identity of Harry remains unknown at the beginning of the story. It is revealed a little bit before joining The Hogwarts School. Readers first meet him with no home, identity, or power. However, Harry pursues them at The Hogwarts School. Harry feels much lonely and estranged in the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. He moves nearer to the mirror, looking at himself and seeing what he is eager to find. He steps in front of it and is about to shout when he sees a whole crowd of people whom he is eager to join. He thinks about his dear family. That incredibly touches Harry and makes him feel happy, but it makes him feel sad.

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry, and he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness. (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 1997, pp.208-9).

8. The Muggles and Alienation

Another example is othering that exists clearly and makes the Muggles alienated, humiliated, and underestimated. Racial and social discrimination form the basis of the theme of alienation in the *Harry Potter* series.

One of the prevailing issues dealt with in the *Harry Potter* novels is racism. There is very clear othering of many groups in this series; however, the most prominent example by far is the Muggles. Any wizard in the novel who is not Muggle-born or raised by Muggle parents expresses racist tendencies towards Muggles. (Ollivier-Gooch, 2018, p.1)

The races in *Harry Potter* are pure and mixed, primitive and civilized, and superior and inferior. Wizards believe that they are at the top of the racial hierarchy due to their pure blood, and they consider their race as unique with a superpower. However, they despise other creatures and consider them inferior to their race. A massive statue of wizards and witches in the series indicates their dominance over other races and symbolizes racism in the *Harry Potter* series.

Now a gigantic statue of black stone dominated the scene. It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and a wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones. Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words MAGIC IS MIGHT... Harry looked more closely and realized that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards. (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007, pp. 241- 242)

Harry Potter is mainly about racism which makes the central issue in the series. There are the Muggles, non-magical people; their relatives are also non-magical. In addition, the series is about the half-blood wizards who have both magical and non-magical close relatives in their families. Our protagonist, Harry, is considered a half-blood. Rowling makes a point about race by concentrating on blood status and elf rights in her series so that readers can see her treatment of current and historical race relations (Lyubansky, 2006).

In fact, a vital distinction between races is in *Harry Potter*. The racial differences lead to miseries and tensions. It is another gap between the Purebloods and non-purebloods groups. For purebloods, they consider themselves superior to humans.

Issues of racism, felt by both human and non-human beings, is the most significant conflict represented in the series. As the series develops so too, do the themes of prejudice and inequality, and each successive book adds to and reveals the underlying racial ideologies that the protagonists find themselves in conflict with. (Walters, 2015, p. 1)

Voldemort believes that all magical families (purebloods) should be superior and dominant. Wizards refer to humans as “Muggles” who have no talent, ability, or power. Muggles are also considered inferior, for they are from Muggle parents. There is also “mudblood.” Hermione is a mudblood Voldemort hates and regards as “dirty blood.” On the other hand, what is unique about Harry is that he and his followers differ from Voldemort. Harry fights inequality and believes that all kinds of blood are equal (Klosterman, 2016).

Harry Potter is a commentary on the issues of race and ethnic otherness as well. Many readers can recognize different viewpoints regarding these issues. Being eleven years old, Harry does not know about other creatures and characters of the Wizarding World. Impressively, he does not underestimate others like Dobby, Hagrid, Hermione, and Ron; instead, he treats them following kindness, humanity, and love. After that, he starts understanding the seeds of discrimination against Dobby, Hagrid, and Hermione. Harry is the one who shoulders the responsibility to work against racism by confronting Voldemort's campaign and evil followers (Horne, 2010).

In the series, Draco does not accept any friendship with Muggles or Mudbloods, for he sees himself as superior to them. He even warns Harry to choose his friends carefully, avoiding any friendship with the inferior Muggles or Mudbloods. Draco sees friendship as a relationship in the light of the hierarchy of wizards; however, for Harry, his relationship with Ron, a pureblood, refuses any class-based differences in the wizarding world. Therefore, Harry saves Griphook and shows great sorrow when Dobby dies, so he shows great respect and buries Dobby by himself. Harry realizes that someone is not lucky if he is a Muggle.

For others, being Muggles insults and labels them inferior and helpless. Furthermore, Harry avoids discrimination against others because he hates it after being mistreated and

alienated by some characters. Horne (2010) emphasizes the idea that Harry is an example of someone who fights racism, refuses it, and defends Muggles, whom other races despise in an ugly way.

The only clarification is that the pure-bloods think they are superior and believe the Muggles do not deserve their magic. Thus, the Muggles are considered less potent than the pure-bloods. For example, since Hermione is a non-white person, she is alienated and considered inferior. Draco Malfoy exceeds the line by even despising her and calling her “filthy little mudblood.” Her role seconds the point of the existence of racism in the series. She is aware of her crisis of being a Muggle alienated, so she feels the suffering of other races that are considered inferior (Berlatsky, 2015). Her reaction against treating the elves as slaves makes it clear that racism in the series is central.

The pureblood wizards view Hermione as helpless or not equal in many cases, so they despise her race. As a result, Hermione receives discriminatory treatment; however, she tries to make the world of the wizards respect her race and others. But, unfortunately, her power is not enough but effective.

As another aspect of alienation, the Ministry orders the Muggle Security Act to keep the Muggles secluded from their witches and the wizarding world. As a result, no Muggle has the chance to treat or mix with wizards or witches who have their own superior life. In addition, the culture of Muggles is strange for some wizards and witches; they try to jeer at Muggles by acting like them.

The Ministry of Magic believes the Muggles are inferior and strange. Therefore, the Ministry of Magic keeps the Muggles with no power or authority. For Muggles, magic is not absolute; thus, they cannot explain strange things related to magic and consider them doubtful. Most Muggles cannot see the world of Hogwarts because the Ministry of Magic keeps them oblivious on purpose. For instance, it is easy for Harry to go through the wall at Platform 9¾ at the station, the path to go to the School of Wizardry. Although many Muggles move at the station, they can notice no gate like the wizards and witches. If Muggles see something from Hogwarts, the Ministry uses its power and Memory Charm to make them forget it (Demyanovich, 2020).

9. Alienation and Slavery in *Harry Potter*

Rowling portrays the house-elves as racialized stereotypes, so they are an alienated race. The main focus is on Dobby, who is a prominent individual of his race. In *Harry Potter*, the house-elves are disheveled and hated individuals. Being the focal creature of his species, Dobby truthfully attempts to help Harry and his friends. However, Dobby serves the Malfoys, his masters, as a slave. His masters treat him with no respect. The enslavement of Dobby is an aspect of pure racism that leads to othering and alienating the house-elves.

The clothes of Dobby signify the problem of enslavement, for his clothes are an old pillowcase that his master enforces on him. His master controls what suits him as an aspect of power over slavery. He is seen as helpless as being owned by his masters with no freedom. In the course of events, Dobby is restricted by the will of the Malfoys to free him. He can get freedom once Malfoy offers him clothes. He is eager to get a sock to feel free and leave the place of enslavement. However, it is the choice of his masters to allow him to wear something to set him free.

Alienating Dobby is an instance of evil and separation between many characters, getting away from equality and humanity's norms. It becomes the world of the conflict between the Muggles and wizards and the pureblood and non-pureblood. Some characters like Ron believe that the house-elves do not oppose slavery. However, Hermione does not like the way others treat the elves with. She expresses her anger once she recognizes the slavery of the house-elves. She asks for a reaction towards the mistreatment and the oppression against the house-elves.

Prejudice- which is a critical notion - is another form of injustice in *Harry Potter*. For example, the Dursleys alienate Harry with prejudice; they want to deprive him of his magical abilities. They are strangely against his talented, magical skills. Another instance is the Malfoy family, who is against the house-elves with the utmost prejudice. Hagrid also behaves with prejudice against the Dursleys; he describes them as lousy Muggles.

Typically, prejudice is the malicious drive that exists in the series. That world involves a social hierarchy that relies on the work of the alienated and the slaves. Besides, the Weasley family is prejudiced by Lucius and Draco Malfoy since they are weak. Selfishly, the prejudice of Voldemort against Harry supports his evil soul to kill Harry and others. Voldemort is after killing Harry, who has a Horcrux that Voldemort must obtain to be immortal. In addition, Voldemort is using his power and prejudice to enjoy killing others.

These accidents are not accidents – the crashes and explosions and derailments and whatever else has happened since we last watched the news. People are disappearing and dying, and he's behind it – Voldemort. I've told you this over and over again; he kills Muggles for fun. Even the fogs – they're caused by dementors, and if you cannot remember what they are, ask your son! (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007, p. 26)

In some cases, prejudice is ironically unjustified and weak. For example, the pureblood wizards consider Hermione a weak Muggle, although she has special, strong magic. Hermione makes it proved that Muggles could be decisive, disapproving of the notion that purebloods are superior for their colossal power. Harry seems innocent and kind in another instance, but he does not sense any influence for prejudice. However, he later encounters lots of risks and sees that the world is not perfect or fair. Once discovering that he is half-blood, other arrogant characters like Lucius Malfoy do not consider him a true wizard because of his mother's lineage. That puts Harry in confusion and risks (VanderArk, 2001).

10. Friendship against Alienation

The conflict of alienation builds a barrier against the pure sense of friendship and humanity for the characters. For Draco, any friendship must match his racial and wizardry hierarchy. On the other hand, Harry crafts friendships as a means of abolishing that barrier. His friendship is a typical example of Humanity and a genuine relationship with Hermione, the Muggles, and Ron. A friendship forms the lap to protect and huddle Harry instead of his family and provides affection, trust, and encouragement. The friendships Harry makes at Hogwarts form a new family that has become the source of his power and support. Harry and his companions turn any relationship into openness and love, except for the evil characters. Friendship in the series is nourished by love, inclusiveness, and transparency. Thus, Harry and his team become a source of influence, unity, and success (Peppers-Bates& Rust, 2012).

As Harry treats Dobby with respect, Dobby appreciates that and attempts to protect Harry with no restrictions or racial considerations. Harry flips the barrier of racial discrimination and turns it into a tool of love, humanity, and appreciation; namely, Harry offers respect to others. As a result, Harry values his friendship with Griphook, and it is Harry who buries Dobby the house-elf with great touching emotions. Friendship triumphs, and Dobby expresses his appreciation to Harry and his unique character as a friendly wizard. Harry is a remarkable wizard whose character, humanity, and friendship make him admirable, not his magical power.

In a sense, the series of *Harry Potter* presents a unique and faithful connection between Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Their friendship is a force of strength that immensely works to cause the failure of evil and protect others from alienation. The friendship in *Harry Potter* stands as a path towards the state of equality between the Wizards and the Muggles. It eliminates the wall of racism and alienation. Good friendship leads to a social network with no limitations or bias (Peppers-Bates & Rust, 2012).

When Harry meets Ron on the train on his way to Hogwarts, Harry seems worried since he knows nothing about magic. He is afraid that magic is something hard to master at Hogwarts. Ron quiets his fears immediately. He tells him that there are lots of new Muggles who come to Hogwarts and learn quickly. His initial friendship with Ron gives him confidence and power, and both protect Hermione later as other schoolchildren disdain her.

Another instance is when Ron faces Draco Malfoy with Harry; he truly protects Harry. Harry and Ron can succeed since they abide by their love, trust, and friendship. Their unity and friendship support them to work together to defeat Voldemort.

Harry has moral goodness that excels in Azkaban and proves him to be different. Harry thinks that Sirius Black murdered his parents, so he has to kill him. However, he chooses to confine Black and wait until Dumbledore arrives. Later, he finds out that Black is not the killer of his parents, so his Humanity, which he enjoys, is deeply rooted and helps him avoid wrongdoing. His kindness extends to include the creatures in The Forbidden Forest; he shows goodness and kindness to Firenze, the centaur, as well.

Another good case of a pure and positive relationship, away from racism, is between Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall. Readers often find their work together against evil forces. They are there to drop baby Harry off at number four, Privet Drive. Professor McGonagall is the Deputy of Dumbledore for a long time. They have been working against any evil forces or powers in the series. Their friendship symbolizes the strength of goodness that triumphs or helps the good people. Eventually, a good friend and good characters represent Humanity and honor in the *Harry Potter* series.

Albus Dumbledore was never proud or vain; he could find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched, and I believe that his early losses endowed him with great humanity and sympathy. I shall miss his friendship more than I can say, but my loss is as nothing compared to the wizarding world's. That he was the most inspiring and the best-loved of all Hogwarts headmasters cannot be in question. (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007, p.16)

11. Conclusion

To summarize, this article has looked into the issues that various characters confront in *Harry Potter* due to postcolonial concepts and factors that alienate them. These alienated characters try to fight back and promote kindness, humanity, and justice. Racism seems unaccepted, for it weakens Humanity for a while, but not forever. Society must stop these crimes and respect the humanity of all characters. Good characters must fight the evil forces that destroy any real culture and its people. Except for the evil characters, Harry and his companions turn every relationship into one of love and respect. A good friendship is nourished in the series by passion, unity, and equality. Harry and his friends reflect the crimes of racial discrimination against the innocent and helpless characters. As a result, the glorious company of Harry becomes a source of power, solidarity, and prosperity.

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