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Othermothering and Othermothers in the *Harry Potter* Series

The Harry Potter *series quickly became a classic of children's literature and remains to date the most read work in the history of literature. That is certainly a good reason to examine more closely its representations of mothers and motherhood. In this paper, I argue that maternal practices and representations, particularly of othermother figures and othermothering practices, are central to the* Harry Potter *series and that they have specific psychological and social functions. I propose a typology of othermothers portrayed in this literary work. I then explore the psychological functions of othermothers for readers. Lastly, I show the paramount role played by othermothers in social and political mobilization.*

The world of Harry Potter is replete with othermothers and othermothering practices. Cast in overtly sacrificial terms, Harry's story begins with the death of his mother, who sacrifices herself in order to save her infant son's life. Despite the death of his biological mother, Harry grows up surrounded by numerous othermother figures: his aunt Petunia, Professor McGonagall, and Molly Weasley. Othermothering is still a largely underresearched area of exploration. It has mainly been used in the literature dealing with Black mothering (Collins). Stanlie James traces the othermothering practice from West Africa where communities were interrelated and communal life pivotal in people's lives (144-154). Njoki Nathani Wane defines othermothers in the following way:

> othermothers look after children to whom they have no blood relations or legal obligation. There is usually a mutual agreement between mothers, aunts, uncles, or fathers who play the role of othermothers

in a given community. A woman elder who mothers both adult and children assumes community mothering on the other hands. She assumes leadership roles and she becomes a consultant for her community. (230)

Othermothers play a very important social role and a specific role for the whole community. Their motherwork focuses a lot on socialization, empowerment and, building children's selves. And in these respects, othermothers appear as definite political actors. More specifically, they also act as cultural bearers and transmitters. In her examination of Toni Morrison's oeuvre, Andrea O'Reilly explains that

In Morrison, surrogate mothers or a community of women mother the child in the event of the mother's death or abandonment, psychological or otherwise. These mothers are also, as with Pilate in *Song*, the singing teachers or story tellers who tell the orphaned or neglected child the stories and provide them with nurturance not made available by the biological mother. (*Rocking* 137)

This article proposes a psychological and social analysis of othermothering in the *Harry Potter* series as it considers that othermothers are central to the plot. It is grounded into two bodies of work: the literature on mothering, particularly on othermothering, and the research literature on fairy tales. Firstly, I intend to characterize the othermother ideal-types portrayed in this story. Then, looking at the series as a modern fairy tale, I explore the psychological functions of othermothers for preadolescent readers. The last part is informed by the social and political mobilization of othermothers to Harry, which underlines the importance of love and unity in the battle to overcome the forces of evil. In this sense, the maternal patterns in *Harry Potter* can be seen as analogous to the othermothering practices of discriminated groups, such as African Americans (Collins). The *Harry Potter* series demonstrates that love and care can produce social change, as well as teaches us how to surmount daily social battles.

Othermother Ideal-Types in Harry Potter

The *Harry Potter* series offers an impressive account of motherhood, mothering practices, and maternal thinking. The figure of Harry's mother, Lily, is the thread that connects the whole story, which begins with her sacrifice. This ultimate maternal sacrifice is reminiscent of an established myth that can be found in several civilizations as well as in classical literature. There exists what

has been called the maternal "sacrifice paradigm" (Kaplan 76). Lily's final action invokes an old magic that gives Harry protection, as Dumbledore explains:

> Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. (*Philosopher's Stone* [*PS*] 216)

Furthermore, the physical absence of Lily, coupled with a strong spiritual presence, reinforces the role of othermothers in the series. Indeed, as Riegle points, out one of the functions of othermothers is to provide "releasing spill-ways to the power of *the* mother" (14). The weight of Lily's sacrifice is heavy on Harry's shoulders, but it is bearable, thanks to the othermothers. One could also hypothesize that the othermothers participate in a specific maternal practice that Morrison has advanced: healing (O'Reilly, *Rocking* 134). Harry, as the chosen one to defeat Voldemort, needs to be well-equipped psychologically, to be healed from his childhood suffering, and to be empowered in order to resist the racist ideology of the Death Eaters. And, indeed, this maternal sacrifice is important to understand because it creates the link to the first othermother of the story: Aunt Petunia, Lily's sister.

First Ideal-Type: Aunt Petunia, the Othermother by Moral Obligation

Aunt Petunia represents a classical ideal-type of othermother: a member of the family who takes on the role of surrogate mother. This type of othermothering is linked to the moral obligation, created by blood relation, to take care of a new orphan. This moral responsibility implies that the person is not necessarily willing to act as a loving mother, and the obligation is more material than sentimental. Aunt Petunia exemplifies this attitude: she does not demonstrate any love for Harry, as she only makes sure he survives physically. Contrary to the essentialized mother figure of Lily that portrays the mother as a caring, loving figure (the biological care ideology), Petunia shows that motherhood does not necessarily imply love. She embodies the ambivalence of mothering.

In terms of maternal practices, Petunia fulfills the bare minimum but is, nevertheless, efficient. For instance, in terms of preservative love (Ruddick 65-81), she indeed protects Harry's life by accepting him under her roof. She provides shelter, food, and clothing. But the shelter is the cupboard under the stairs; the food is scarce; and the clothing is Dudley's old, worn-out, and too big clothes. As Ruddick recalls, "What we are pleased to call 'mother-love' is intermixed with hate, sorrow, impatience, resentment, and despair; thought-provoking ambivalence is a hallmark of mothering." (68) Sometimes, Petunia has doubts,

and she is afraid as her own biological son is in danger. When Harry tells her that Voldemort is back, she is horrified. Uncle Vernon wants Harry to leave the house. Dumbledore, aware that Petunia may panic, sends her a Howler, which says in a ghostly womanly voice, "'Remember my last, Petunia'" (*Order of the Phoenix* [*OP*] 41). It is Lily's last demand to her sister to protect Harry. Petunia imposes her decision on Vernon: Harry has to stay. She shows, then, a lot of courage. But this action is not inspired by any feelings towards Harry but rather Lily is motivated by feelings for her sister and for her biological son, whom she needs to protect. It is not a maternal action but has a maternal consequence; it is a product of maternal thinking. When Dumbledore leaves Harry at Petunia's doorstep after his parents' murder, he explains in a letter what he later reveals to Harry in the following conversation:

> "But I knew too, where Voldemort was weak. And so I made my decision. You will be protected by an ancient magic…. I am speaking, of course, of the fact that your mother died to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your veins to this day. I put my trust, therefore, in your mother's blood. I delivered you to her sister, her only remaining relative."
>
> "She does not love me" said Harry at once…
>
> "But she took you" Dumbledore cut across him. "She may have taken you grudgingly, furiously, unwillingly, bitterly, yet still she took you, and in doing so, she sealed the charm I placed upon you. You mother's sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you." … "While you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort…. Your aunt knows this." (*OP* 736-737; see also *Half-Blood Prince* [*HBP*] 57-58)

Petunia's character is modeled on an othermother commonly found in fairy tales: the evil stepmother. Yet there is a big difference: she does not want to kill Harry. She preserves his physical survival.

Aunt Petunia also takes responsibility for other maternal practices described by Ruddick: nurturing and socialization. She acts reluctantly, but, paradoxically, it works wonderfully. When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, he is a social being and has social skills; he shows empathy. Amusingly, Petunia's biological son, Dursley, is overprotected and overindulged by his mother, and the results are disastrous. He completely lacks any social abilities. As Dumbledore tells her: "You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy

sitting between you." (*HBP* 57). This paradox of mothering failure as success confirms the ideal-type: in fairy tales, the bad stepmother usually has idiotic and nasty biological daughters, whereas the "adopted" one is a beautiful and empowered person. Petunia's intensive mothering (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 8-11) of Dudley also demonstrates how much this contemporary type of mothering can have destructive effects on the child as well as the mother. Petunia is completely alienated by the motherhood model imposed on her and seems unable to resist.

Second Ideal-Type: Minerva McGonagall or the Fairy Godmother as Othermother

Professor McGonagall, the first magical female character encountered in the series, is introduced when Dumbledore leaves baby Harry on his aunt's doorstep. She immediately shows her protective nature towards Harry by trying to convince Dumbledore not to do such a thing and shows maternal thinking as she believes that in this family Harry cannot be nurtured and socialized properly. This first opening story sets the tone, and one specific description reveals a clear analogy with the classical image of the fairy godmother: "Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep" (*PS* 16). And indeed, throughout the story, McGonagall behaves as Harry's godmother. The godmother is a well-established figure in the Christian world, who is chosen to act as the child's mother should the biological mother die (i.e., a Christian godmother holds a moral responsibility before God without necessarily any blood relations with the child). But the godmother also often acts as othermother, even in the presence of the mother, as a confidante, a helper, and a supporter of the godchild.

When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, McGonagall is in charge of the sorting of the four different houses, which she describes as very important "'because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts'" (*PS* 85). The Sorting Hat decides to send Harry to Gryffindor, of which Mc-Gonagall is the head. Throughout Harry's school years, she constantly behaves as a protective othermother, more rarely as a loving one, although she does offer him a broom—and not any broom, a Nimbus 2000, the most expensive one on the market —the symbol, with the wand, of his entry in the magical world. When she decides to have Harry on the Gryffindor team, she could have ordered him to get a broom (she knows Harry's parents left him money) as a teacher would do. But she makes him a present, a very emblematical one, as a mother would do. She also refuses to grant permission to Harry to go to Hogsmeade: "'The form clearly states that the parent or guardian must give permission.' She turned to look at him, with an odd expression on her face. Was it pity? 'I'm sorry, Potter, but that's my final word'" (*PA* 113). This reaction

may appear as unmotherly, but, in fact, it is not. It is part of the socialization to rules that McGonagall teaches Harry, as a mother would do. During the eve of the final battle, McGonagall provides many examples of her protective love to Harry: protecting him in the Ravenclaw Tower against Alecto and Amycus in the hallways against Snape and taking the lead to organize the defense of the castle against Voldemort while Harry searches for the diadem (*Deathly Hallows* [*DH*] 476-484). Becoming an othermother has empowered McGonagall and has allowed her to become a leader in her community. If it were not for developing these mothering feelings, she may not have become such a strong leader.

   McGonagall is different from the two other othermothers for two reasons: she is not a biological mother, and she is the only one to work outside of the domestic sphere. To use Kaplan's terminology, she is a "high-modernist" othermother, whereas Molly and Petunia are representations of "early modern" othermothers (20). They are representative of the Rousseauian split of "public/male, private/female" (21), whereas McGonagall does not need to be a mother to exist and to work with men, who respect her skills and labour. (Yet both Molly and Petunia are representative of intensive mothering, a popular motherhood ideology of contemporary society). Behind McGonagall's authoritative tone lie true motherly feelings for Harry.

Third Ideal-Yype: Molly Weasley, the Archetype of the Community Othermother

   Molly Weasley is the most archetypal motherly character of the series. She corresponds entirely to the constructed image of the "perfect mother" in a heteropatriarchal society. She personifies what DiQuinzio calls "essential motherhood." Essential motherhood is the idea that "mothering is a function of women's essentially female nature…. It requires women's exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women's psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice" (xiii). There is no one single action performed by Molly that is not directed by maternal thinking. She is depicted as the sole master of the domestic sphere, as she takes care of everything, from cooking and cleaning to buying school materials. Apart from the material aspects of her mothering practices, her emotions completely conform to essentialized maternal affect. She is solely in charge of the education of her seven children and is constantly worried about the personal security of her children, as her "magical clock" in the kitchen can indicate the physical state of all of them. But she is not weak; she is a strong woman. Her involvement in the final battle again reveals her permanent maternal mode of thinking. When she starts the final duel with Bellatrix (the only scene in which she appears as a warrior), she does it to defend her daughter's life, as she screams "NOT MY DAUGHTER, YOU BITCH!" (*DH*

589). And it is the only case in which a member of the Order of the Phoenix actually uses the death spell. The mother-as-warrior is still very much present in popular culture and may describe a "much more complex relationship with violence, one that reflects our current confusion about motherhood" (Dancey 82).

Molly is overprotective towards Harry and acts as the perfect caring othermother: she feeds him, offers him shelter, washes his clothes, worries about him at school, and loves him. She offers him presents for Christmas (clothes that she knits herself) as if he were her own child. Evidence of this last statement is offered in several scenes, such as the one with the Boggart. (A Boggart represents what one most fears in her life.) When facing the Boggart, she sees her children, her husband, and Harry all dead (*OP* 159-160). During an argument between Sirius and Molly, Sirius says, "He's not your son"; to which Molly replies, "He's as good as" (*OP* 85). And Harry actually considers Molly as his othermother: "Mrs Weasley set the potion down on the bedside cabinet, bent down, and put her arms around Harry. He had no memory of ever being hugged like this, as though by a mother" (*GF* 620).

Molly also personifies the ideal-type of othermother who takes care of the children of her community. She represents what the literature terms "community mothers" (Edwards 204-205; Lawson 198-200): women who see themselves as the defendants of the whole marginalized community against the oppressors; through social and political activism, they represent and defend the community, seek emancipation, and incarnate resistance and empowerment. Molly's community, the Order of the Phoenix, is a "fictive kin," one that extends "beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals" (Collins 193). Despite the fact that she already has seven children of her own, she behaves as a mother for Harry and Hermione. Molly's character approximates the Black othermothers depicted by Patricia Hill Collins: "because all children must be fed, clothed, and educated, if their biological parents could not discharge these obligations, then some other members of the community should accept that responsibility" (194). She is the intergenerational link—she mothers Tonks as much as Hermione—and the elder of the community, who offers the warmth of a house and a good diner to all the warriors. She makes sure everyone feels comfortable and has food. She is a "mama," who constantly worries and about the well-being of her extended family.

In conclusion, these three othermothers are ideal-types in two senses. Firstly, they are ideal-types in that they represent long-established categories in literature and especially fairy tales. Secondly, their characters underpin some of the essentialized features attributed to these categories. In that sense, one may say that they "lack of authenticity" (Kinnick 4). Although this is partly true, compared with most of the narratives of popular literature, J.K. Rowling actually offers a depiction that is much closer to the realities and experiences

of othermothers. This achievement is partly due to the well-developed psychological profile of each othermother and to the fact that motherhood issues are not personal but politicized (in contrast to most popular culture texts; for a critique see Kinnick 15-16). Thus, I argue that the level of readers' self-identification with various characters and the narrative is higher. Consequently, it is worth examining the potential psychological functions of the *Harry Potter* series for readers.

The Psychological Function of Othermothers

Harry Potter's story is a modern fairy tale. Bruno Bettelheim provides a few general characteristics of this genre: fairy stories show "an existential dilemma"; in fairy tales, "characters are typical rather than unique"; and in every fairy tale, "good and evil are given in the form of some figures" (8-9). These general characteristics can be found in *Harry Potter*, but they are more complex than traditional folk stories because the characters are more ambivalent. In particular, othermothers express in their mothering practices certain ambivalences (Ruddick): Petunia entertains a love-hate relation with Harry; McGonagall hesitates between motherly behaviour and teacher requirements in her dealings with Harry; and Molly juggles between all the mothering tasks that she performs for her many blood and community children. When she participates in the last battle, she finds it a relief to be a warrior and not any longer a stay-at-home mom. It is a kind of emancipation but, at the same time, she fights to protect all of her children. It is a fairy tale for older children who can appreciate the psychological complexities of any person in the face of an existential dilemma. But all these characters remain typical of fairy tales: Harry Potter, the hero; Voldemort, the evil villain; the elves, centaurs, and Thestrals as animal helpers or "magical auxiliaries" (Propp 100); human auxiliaries, such as the othermothers, Harry's friends, and the other members of the Order; and "magical objects" Propp 100), such as the Invisible Cloak, the Time-Turner and Gryffindor's Sword. Finally, if one looks at the structure of fairy tales as described by Propp (35-80), one sees that most structural elements are respected in the Harry Potter story (Röhrich 3).

Essentially, Harry Potter's story provides children with all the psychological tools of traditional fairy tales. But the complexity of the narrative appears to be better suited to preadolescents. According to Freud, "[I]t is during this period of total or partial latency that are built up the mental forces which are later to impede the course of the sexual instinct, and like dams, restrict its flows—disgust, feelings of shame, and the claims of aesthetic and moral ideals" (93). Freud insists that this period is paramount to the growth of a "civilized" child (93-95). This period of latency (ages nine to twelve) sees children's autono-

mization—especially from their parents—and individuation; they are also more curious. They are searching to understand the ambivalences of life, and it is usually around that time that children will seek the support of othermothers as a way to distance themselves from their parents. This "releasing function" was noticed by Riegle (13) about Black mother-daughter relationships. *Harry Potter* offers a more complex view of social life. To the image of the "wicked" stepmother of children's fairy tales, J.K. Rowling adds the image of the othermother in order to address children's intrinsic fear of losing their mothers. Such images help adolescents going through the transition from childhood to adulthood to successfully pass through the latency phase. This is achieved by locating othermothers at the centre of the plot.

The primary function of *Harry Potter* is to "provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence" (Bettelheim 11). The three most secure places for Harry are his Aunt Petunia's house, Hogwarts, especially Gryffindor's House, and the Burrow (Molly's house). Consequently, the three safest locations for Harry are associated with each of his three othermothers. Harry's confidence is built in these places, in the contact and experiences that he has with his othermothers. Marjorie Worthington rightly highlights that Walt Disney's princesses have, "with rare exceptions," no mothers (30). It is not only that their mothers are dead but that they are not part of the story at all. In the *Harry Potter* saga, Harry's mother is dead, but Harry can rely on several othermothers. The narrative offers, therefore, a powerful tool for children living in a society in which they are isolated. The family unit has been reduced to its most cellular type. Outside the family circle, strong individualism, the compression of time and space, and the structure of work prevent the development of true friendship, fraternity, and community ties. *Harry Potter* offers young readers a guide and a hope to survive in a postmodern and individualist world. It shows that an isolated, unloved young boy like Harry can find friends and othermothers to help him gain confidence and that one can recreate an extended family and a strong community. The centrality of othermothering in the story is reminiscent of Ruddick's idea: "Every infant requires *at least* one mother" (emphasis added, 211).

The *Harry Potter* series is also exceptional because—contrary to most fairy tales in which mothers are absent, women are obedient, and passive princesses share essentialized anti-feminist dreams—othermothers play a key role as helpers of the hero. Even if Aunt Petunia resembles the evil stepmother, she puts her life at risk for Harry. Hermione is depicted as the cleverest young wizard for her time. Ginny is definitely a better wizard than her brothers. This shows that the *Harry Potter* books are more feminist than traditional

fairy tales. But the *Harry Potter* books still remain typical of the genre, as the "fundamental character traits of the woman, which are often decisive for the plot of the story, are her unwavering loyalty, unflinching selflessness and self-sacrifice, her long-suffering determination" (Röhrich 111). Nevertheless, any feminist parent would prefer her daughter to be Hermione rather than Cinderella and to love Harry instead of waiting for Prince Charming. The series is a great pedagogical tool for feminist parents teaching their children about the importance of love, friendship, and othermothers.

Traditional fairy tales deal with the difficult relationships between children and parents (the Oedipus complex). The latency phase is the time for other adults to relay the parents. Indeed, of all the maternal practices, training may prove to be the most difficult: "Many mothers find that the central challenge of mothering lies in training a child to be the kind of person whom others accept and whom the mothers themselves can actively appreciate" (Ruddick 104). Othermothers enter the scene if they have not already. This period is also when children acquire new skills and cultural competencies. And probably most people have gone through such socialization and training processes with the help of othermothers. It may be one of the reasons the series is so attractive for adult readers.

Othermothers and Social and Political Mobilization

I described the Order as a "fictive kinship" earlier in the article. The members of this kinship are not linked by blood but by values. They form a united family ready to fight to defend their values: love, respect, and an inclusive morality as a cosmopolitan community of all humans (wizards and muggles). As the wizard Kingsley points out, "We're all human, aren't we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving" (*DH* 357). The Order opposes Voldemort and his Death Eaters, who defend a racial viewpoint of the wizardry community. For them, only the pure-blood and half-blood wizards should be allowed to handle a wand. Within this racial conception, there is an impermeable racial hierarchy: the pure-bloods, the half-bloods, and then all of the others, who should be servants and slaves. Rowling makes a clear analogy with twentieth-century European history. In times of wars and times of extreme social conflict and crisis, these fictive kinships and these othermothers play a pivotal role. It is not by chance that the concept of othermother has been much discussed in the context of Black communities. Othermothers and their practices represent sites of resistance. Without them, Harry, Hermione, Tonks, Sirius, Remus and all the others would not have the strength to fight the dark forces. The othermothers, particularly Molly as a community othermother, empower them, as Black othermothers have done throughout history, by training strong

children, by teaching them to believe in themselves, and by allowing them to develop. It is also interesting to notice that these relationships also empower these women. Molly can get away from her household duties in order to fight; Minerva can get out of her secondary role and take the lead during the final battle. Empowered mothering (O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws* 12-13) is not unidirectional but inherently relational. It empowers women who, by becoming othermothers, embody the face of resistance and represent the pillar of their communities. Empowered mothering also empowers children, who become equipped to fight racism and discrimination. I think this empowerment is the outcome of the relationship other/mothers-children.

This radical opposition between two views on the constitution of the community is coupled with a clear discourse on social class in the series. Within each "blood-defined" community, class relations are always present, even more so among the pure-bloods. This is illustrated by the disparaging remarks made by the rich Malfoys towards the poor Weasleys (both pure-blood families who are cousins). The Order, therefore, fights for not only an inclusive cosmopolitan human community but also an egalitarian community. These two opposed political narratives call for strong political mobilization in which othermothers play a key role.

Collins makes an important argument about the relationship between othermothering and political activism when she states "U.S. Black women's experiences as othermothers provide a foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-American women" (205-207). Harry finds in the Order multiple othermothers. He is cared for, loved and nurtured by them, and it is what gives him the strength to face the many challenges waiting for him on his quest to defeat the evil forces. The ability to rely on a "fictive kinship" and othermothers is what makes Harry able to love, contrary to Voldemort. Voldemort was raised in an orphanage and was deprived of any kinship ties or maternal love; thus he is not able to feel any love for anyone. Harry has been loved and nurtured by othermothers, which is what provides him with the strength that he needs to win. A few seconds before the final duel, Harry tells Voldemort that "I was ready to die to stop you hurting these people … that's what did it. I've done what my mother did. They're protected from you, Haven't you noticed how none the spells you put on them are binding?" (*DH* 591). Harry highlights the importance of self-sacrifice— the ultimate sign of love and gift of one's self to a higher cause. It is an important element of the Kantian discourse that is diffused throughout the series. But this self-sacrifice is understood only thanks to the original sacrifice of Harry's mother and the

will shown by Petunia, McGonagall, and Molly to sacrifice their lives in order to save Harry and other children. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series represents a very intense narrative in favour of the political power of biological mothers and community othermothers. As Collins argues, "the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward" (207). J.K. Rowling defends a representation of "motherhood as a symbol of power" (Collins 209).

The question remains as to whether or not J.K. Rowling consciously developed a narrative of powerful (other)mothers. A quick look at her official biography indicates that there might have been quite a strong level of awareness, as she writes a lot about her mother and her loss:

> I think most people believe, deep down, that their mothers are indestructible; it was a terrible shock to hear that she had an incurable illness, but even then, I did not fully realise what the diagnosis might mean…. Then, on December 30th 1990, something happened that changed both my world and Harry's forever: my mother died. It was a terrible time. (Rowling, "Official Biography")

Do the political narratives of the stories inspire Rowling's readers? The *Harry Potter* series has been read throughout the world. In 2008, for example, over 400 million copies were sold, and the series was translated into more than sixty languages (Dammann). People have found in this narrative a powerful discourse of hope. The series echoes other social movements in which mothers and othermothers have played a key role in mobilizing resources, such as the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (Lacassagne) and las "locas" de la Plaza de Mayo (Arditti). The success of *Harry Potter* lets us envision mothers at the heart of social movements for peace. This discourse may sound utopian and sentimentalist, as Ruddick points out: "Peace, like mothering, is sentimentally honoured and often secretly despised." But she adds: "Just because mothering and peace have been so long and so sentimentally married, a critical understanding of mothering and maternal nonviolence will itself contribute to the reconception of 'peace'" (137; see also Swerdlow). Non-violence is different from pacifism. Harry Potter, his othermothers, and his friends fight evil forces because they have to. And it is the trio of othermothers and their maternal practices that make Harry and his companions able to defeat the dark forces. Interestingly, Rowling does not fall into the essentialist trap of liberal feminism (for a critique see Forcey 363-371). It is not about gender but about behind a mother. A striking example of this lies in the different behaviour of childless Bellatrix—who fights for the sake of fighting and killing, something she clearly enjoys—and

her sister Narcissa, Draco's mother, who does not hesitate to lie to Voldemort, wants the battle to stop to save her son's life. Mothers are also warriors who go to war, but they may go to war for different reasons and may be better at making peace (Forcey 372) because, fundamentally, at the heart of their commitment is the well-being and peaceful future of the community's children.

Conclusion

I have looked at the *Harry Potter* series as a "maternal text," as fiction "about mothering, motherhood and being mothered" (Podnieks and O'Reilly 1). Three ideal-types of othermothers were identified and each performed specific mothering practices: the othermother by moral obligation, who shows preservative love; the childless othermother, who discovers maternal love and expresses protective love; and the community mother, who embodies many mothering practices to support and help the whole community to emancipate. They share one commonality: the maternal relationship that they establish with Harry and other children empowers them, and, at the same time, it empowers the children. This mutual empowerment is what permits them to fight, win, and reach peace. In this sense, it represents a perfect illustration of the inherent relation between mothers and the politics of peace. Overall, this literary series has a lot to bring to the study of othermothers, who are often forgotten. They accompany children in their personal journey from childhood to adulthood. They offer mother-readers support in the face of the hard challenge of training children by reminding them that othermothers are here to help in this task. Othermothers are key actors of social and political mobilization. They show maternal thinking and maternal practices in every aspect of their decisions and behaviours. They offer children an extraordinary hope: that once their mothers leave them, they will not be alone. Othermothers will be there to support them. The series is exceptional in the place it gives to othermothers (Staub 2).

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