

The Emory  
Philosophy  
REVIEW

## Letter of Introduction

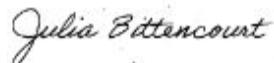
Dear Reader,

The editorial staff of the Emory Philosophy Review is happy to present the fifth annual issue of Emory's peer-reviewed, undergraduate journal of philosophy featuring the exemplary work of philosophy students. The journal seeks to support excellent undergraduate research in the humanities by offering students in philosophy and related philosophical disciplines a way to gain experience with the formal editing process and showcase their published work. We believe that, given the opportunity, Emory undergraduates are capable of producing powerful, thought provoking works in philosophy that are worthy of publication. We hope you enjoy the best of what the Emory Philosophy Review has to offer.

Each of the papers published in this year's issue were also presented at this year's fourth annual Emory Undergraduate Philosophy Conference in February 2019, which was organized by the Emory Philosophy Review and Emory's chapter of the philosophy honors society Phi Sigma Tao. Through these efforts, we hope to contribute to a lasting, welcoming philosophical community at Emory.

Please enjoy the fifth issue of the Emory Philosophy Review.

Best wishes,



Julia Bittencourt  
Editor-in-Chief

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## Table of Contents

"Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Re-Imagining Spacial Epistemology Through the Fictive" by Mawuko Kpodo.....	4
"The Consideration for Violence in Resistance and Revolution" by Emory Vaughn Cole, II.....	21
"(Post)Structuralism, Medicine, and the History of Intersexuality through the 20th Century" by Noah Garberg .....	33
"The Prophet and the Gosudarstvennichestvo: Dostoevsky's Legacy in Relation to Contemporary Russian Politics and the Reign of Vladimir Putin" by Stephen Altobelli.....	41

# Lahey v. Commonwealth: Re-imagining Spatial Epistemology through the Fictive

Mawuko Kpodo

## Prologue

*Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*<sup>1</sup> is a class action lawsuit that was brought before the United States Supreme Court by attorney Annalise Keating. She is one of a handful of black women who has ever argued a case before the highest court in the land. The lawsuit alleges that the state of Pennsylvania has been negligent by refusing to provide adequate legal counsel to people who cannot afford their own attorneys. This right, guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment, has been denied to poor people of color, who as a result, are incarcerated and serve far longer sentences than those who can afford their own attorneys.

*Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* was poised to fail for a variety of reasons. Before this case, Annalise Keating had never argued before the United States Supreme Court. As Ingrid Egan, the attorney representing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania discussed in an interview, “the only reason they [the Justices of the Court] agreed to hear this case is because Ms. Keating has made friends with some very influential people.” Egan, who has argued and won four cases in front of the Court, credits her knowledge of “the Court and its nuances” as one

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<sup>1</sup> Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is a fictional lawsuit created by the writers of “How to Get Away with Murder”. All subsequent mentions of the episode, direct dialogue from characters, and references to the case, “Lahey v. Commonwealth” are to be attributed to the following episode:

*Lahey v. Commonwealth.* “How to Get Away with Murder.” Season 4, Episode 13. Fuentes, Zetna. Balogun, Morenike & Thompson, Sarah. 1 March 2018. ABC.

of the reasons she continues to be victorious in proceedings such as these. Conversely, Keating's inexperience and lack of knowledge about the way the Court functions were supposed to cripple any chances of winning. In addition, Keating's storied and controversial past were supposed to distract from the injustice the lawsuit aimed to illuminate. In the very same interview, Egan questions, "explain to me how someone who was just fired from teaching the law can be entrusted to change it." This indictment of Keating's character as well as her professional qualifications were supposed to alienate the case by positioning Annalise Keating as an outsider trying to infiltrate the safety and neutrality of the law.

Despite these roadblocks, *Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* made it to the chambers of the United States Supreme Court. The Justices sided with the Plaintiffs. With this momentous win, *Lahey v. Commonwealth* ensured a far-reaching step forward for defendants across the country. In many ways, the Justices were indicting the entire United States legal system for discriminating against poor people of color. Such an admission of culpability is unheard of for the Court. Such a victory should not have happened. The logistical ramifications of ruling in favor of the plaintiffs in a case where race is the primary factor are overwhelming. The procedural implications alone have historically been enough for the United States Supreme Court to maintain a level of consistency when deciding cases of this magnitude. However, something about *Lahey v. Commonwealth* compelled the Justices, despite everything that could have convinced them otherwise, to vote with their conscience.

### **Introductory Remarks**

*Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* is a peculiarly unique case because it does not exist. It was a fictional lawsuit constructed and performed on the ABC television show, *How to Get Away with Murder*. In Shondaland, a term used to describe the fictional worlds created by director, writer, and producer Shonda Rhimes, a black woman can stand before the United States Supreme Court, claim that “racism is built into the DNA of America,” and walk away victorious. The value of this episode goes beyond the dream. It goes beyond the hope of an America that resembles Shondaland. This episode is valuable to me because it depicts a landscape where black women’s epistemologies push up against the dominant narratives that govern the United States. It depicts a tension between ways of knowing. It indict the knowledges that space comes with and uses a black woman as the vehicle through which such an intervention is made. The aim of this research project is to problematize and interrogate the following question: why are black women not represented on the United States Supreme Court? I argue that by attempting to answer this question using black women’s epistemologies, we are forced to question the premise of the inquiry itself.

Historically, when one has asked about the absence of black women on the Supreme Court, the question has been posed as a way to achieve representational justice. I use this terminology cynically. I am defining representational justice using what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “new racism.” In his book entitled *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva states that “we have seen the rise of a few, carefully chosen minorities who are willing to propound a happy version of the American story, and the elevation of these minority politicians as

“evidence” that America has overcome. This fairy tale is the most popular way to explain American racial politics, despite the depressing statistics telling a different story about what it means to be a minority in America in 2011” (2014: 256).

When I refer to representational justice in this paper, I am referring to the process by which people from minoritized populations are used as vehicles through which narratives about the progress the United States has made are disseminated throughout the country as a whole.

Epistemic justice is the contrary position that I am proposing. I am connecting this idea to my larger argument by purporting that reducing the question, “why are there no black women represented on the Supreme Court” to a purely representational concern, one that removes any interrogation of the space and the epistemology of the Court itself, will continue to reproduce the kinds of epistemic and systemic violences that have always plagued this country. The lived embodiment of individuals does not impact the roles they are scripted to play in the story that America tells about itself. For example, the election of Barack Obama was a representational milestone for many because he was seen as the first black president of the United States. The implications of this representational change were immediately felt. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the New York Times announced the victory with the following headline: “Racial Barriers Fall in Decisive Victory.” For many, the election of Barack Obama ushered in a new age of racial equality, one that meant real racial progress had been made in the United States. A color-blind anesthetic was released over the populace and many believed that Barack Obama would usher in a new change for American life. However, Barack Obama’s presidency was ideologically similar

to his predecessors despite his blackness. A blog post chronicling the hatred and vitriol Barack Obama faced during his candidacy and throughout his presidency states, “you hate Obama with a passion, despite the fact that he is a tax cutting, deficit reducing war President who undermines civil rights and delivers corporate friendly watered-down reforms that benefit special interests just like a Republican.”<sup>2</sup> The point this blogger was trying to make is that despite his blackness and the hatred that was leveled at him because of it, Barack Obama maintained the polity of the United States in the same fashion that many other presidents did before him. His blackness did not have a significant effect on his overall performance as president of the United States.

I purport that the dissonance that was felt between what many thought a Barack Obama presidency would be and what it actually was rests in the very identity of what it means to be the first black president of the United States. For Barack Obama, despite his personally epistemic understanding of the world, he was entering a space that was imbued with an epistemology that had to be performed. His identity, and the specific perspectival knowledges that he may be able to access were rendered invisible when he entered the space of the Office of the President. For his eight years, what we got was less of “the first black president of the United States” but something that resembles “the first black person to perform the epistemologies that the space of the Office of the President has defined and curated for centuries.” This distinction is an important one. When we ask questions of space, such as “why are black women not represented on the United States Supreme Court?” or “when will we have our first black president?” we must

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Truth, “An Open Letter to the People Who Hate Obama More Than They Love America,” Daily Kos, January 9, 2012.

interrogate the space itself. We must do this because these absences are not accidental. They are not an oversight. These absences are informed by a careful curation of spatial knowledge that renders antithetical or oppositional ways of knowing meaningless. To truly understand the representational gaps that exist, we must contend with the ways of knowing, perspectives, value systems and social memories that constitute a space where such a representational question is necessary in the first place.

### ***The Court and its Nuances—The Epistemic Realities of Space***

When the Constitution of the United States was ratified in 1789, the Supreme Court was a nebulous and unformed entity without purpose, structure, or definite powers. Article III of the Constitution created a space within which Congress could construct and enumerate the responsibilities the Court would possess in the new polity.<sup>3</sup> Article III Section I grants Congress the authority to “constitute Tribunals inferior to the Supreme Court.” In other words, Congress has the ability to create lower federal courts. The jurisdiction of the Court is loosely defined by Section II. The Supreme Court is granted “original jurisdiction” and appellate jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup> This distinction was clarified by the Judiciary Act of 1789, when Congress defined the Supreme Court’s original jurisdiction to be “exclusive in suits between two or more states, between a state and a foreign government, and in suits against ambassadors and other public ministers” (FJC).

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<sup>3</sup> Article III, section I:“The judicial power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish. The judges, both of the supreme and inferior courts shall hold their offices during good behavior, and shall, at stated times, receive for their services, a compensation, which shall not be diminished during their continuance in office...”

<https://judiciallearningcenter.org/article-3-and-the-courts/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fjc.gov/history/courts/jurisdiction-original-supreme-court>

Appellate jurisdiction on the other hand, means that the Court only hears a case when the decision has been appealed by a lower court. This jurisdiction was further clarified by the Supreme Court Selection Act of 1988, which granted the Court complete judicial discretion in deciding which cases would be heard by the Justices. Despite these subsequent expansions, it is important to note that Article III is the only place in the original Constitution where the United States Supreme Court is discussed. The parameters and the boundaries that the Court operates within have been enumerated by Congress. In total, four clauses specifically define the boundaries of the Court. This is critical because it speaks to the original intent of the framers of the Constitution. The existence and the structure of the Supreme Court was left to the discretion of Congress. The epistemology of the Court, the rules that govern the space, the traditions, doctrines, social memories, legal strategies, and ways of knowing were to be defined by Congress and imposed on the Court itself. By leaving the space of the Supreme Court virtually hollow, the Constitution granted Congress full epistemic jurisdiction over the United States Supreme Court. In this section, I elucidate the important rules that define the ways the Court thinks and contextualize these nuances within the theoretical field of epistemology.

### ***What is space?***

The definition of space that I deploy throughout this paper is a construction I have devised using various conceptualizations of philosophical and geographical renderings of spatiality.

German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz posited that “space and time are not so much *things* in which bodies are located and move as systems of *relations* holding between things” (McDonough, J). To translate, Leibniz argues that space cannot be understood as a vessel that is simply a repository for variable bodies. Instead, Leibniz purports that space must be understood as “an abstract structure of relations in which actual (and even possible) bodies might be embedded” (McDonough, J). Space is relational. It is conditional insofar as “it has no powers independent of objects and events but can be construed only from the relations between them” (John Agnew). Space is not inherently active. It cannot be conceptualized as an entity on its own merits without “the powers of events and objects taking place that make the space seem ‘active’” (John Agnew). In many ways, I agree with this perspective. I agree that space is devoid of its richness without rooting its understanding in the beings that constitute it. Space is indeed relational. However, Leibniz undoes this conceptualization by also arguing the following:

“Although bodies may be held to stand in spatial and temporal relations to one another, Leibniz claims, space and time themselves must be considered abstractions or idealizations with respect to those relations. For while relations between bodies and

events are necessarily variable and changing, the relations constituting space and time must be viewed as determinate, fixed, and ideal” (McDonough, J)

In this passage, it is clear that Leibniz flattens the landscape of space. This conceptualization reduces space to the bodies that exist within it. Space becomes the summation of the variable events, objects, and bodies that inhabit it. If we are to consider space as a “determinate, fixed, and ideal” phenomenon, then we erase its nuances from view. This forces us to hold space constant, neutral, and uninterrogated.

Instead, I choose to define space using a combination of Isaac Newton’s idea of absolute space and Katherine McKittrick’s geographical conceptualization of space. Newton views space as absolute, “in the sense that it is an entity in itself” (Agnew). In other words, regardless of the people, objects, events, or histories that occupy space, the landscape “is ‘active’ in itself because of the forces... that operate through it” (Agnew). To supplement this definition, I rely on McKittrick’s invocation that

“geography’s discursive attachment to stasis and physicality, the idea that space ‘just is,’ and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations, is terribly seductive: that which ‘just is’ not only anchors our selfhood and feet to the ground, it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore who, we are” (McKittrick 2006: xi).

The blending of these ideas is key in understanding the lens through which I view the Supreme Court and the law as a space. McKittrick argues in the passage above that geography’s tendency

to flatten space, as Leibniz did in his theory, erases and makes invisible the active role that spaces play in the construction of the self. Without acknowledging that space is conscious and breathing, we rob spatiality of “the possibility to speak for itself” (McKittrick 2006: ix). We ignore the ways space acts on bodies. We ignore the ways space and the languages, ways of knowing, sources of knowledges, rules, and definitions that make spaces distinct are transported and transmuted. We ignore and destabilize the idea that we hold space. We hold spatial epistemologies within us. The construction of space is not a unidirectional occurrence. With this in mind, I define space as an absolute phenomenon that “is infused with sensations and distinct ways of knowing” that define and calibrate us just as much as we define and calibrate the spaces themselves (McKittrick 2006: ix).

Using this definition, I view the United States Supreme Court as a specific kind of legal space that is saturated with its own epistemic narrative. With this idea of spatiality, it is impossible to conceive of the Court as merely a culmination of the people who sit on the bench. It is impossible to view the Court as a blank canvas on which an unknown entity has painted personal judicial preferences and judicial decisions. To understand the way the Supreme Court operates, we must conceive of the Court as a space that is itself active.

### ***The Court Speaks—Epistemology of Space***

If space is a geography that speaks, what is it saying? Epistemology is the study of knowledge. On the surface, this definition disguises much of the nuance that characterizes epistemology. For the purposes of this research project, I choose to define epistemology using

the words of legal scholar Patricia Williams: epistemology encapsulates the tension that arises from “the appropriation of knowledge, the authority of creating a canon, revising memory, declaring a boundary beyond which lies the “extrinsic” and beyond which ignorance is reasonably suffered” (1991:113-114). In other words, epistemology deals intimately with not just knowledge as an abstraction but includes the very concepts we choose to define as knowledge, what we mark as worth knowing, to whom we grant permission to define knowledge, and what is permissible to ignore.

In 1935, the United States Supreme Court building is completed. Inscribed onto the west façade of the building are the words, “Equal Justice Under the Law.” This has been the dominant narrative that the Court tells itself about itself. These words are laced with a cruel irony because in 1935, the year that the building was completed, the Court ruled *in Grovey v. Townsend*<sup>5</sup> that white only political primaries were constitutional. Injustice was codified into law yet again. This is the space that Annalise Keating came to demand equal justice under the law for the plaintiffs in her class action lawsuit. Keating was contending with an epistemological system that lauds itself for being the vanguard of equal justice while it simultaneously renders decisions that reinforce the inhumanity with which nonwhite persons are regarded in the United States. This inscription illuminates the epistemic pretense that informs much of the Court’s way of knowing.

### ***Stare decisis***

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/supremecourt/timeline/1935.html>

In her rebuttal argument, Ingrid Egan invokes the principle of precedent when she states, “*in Washington v. Davis*<sup>6</sup> your predecessors decided that even if a law has a discriminatory effect, it is unconstitutional to overturn it if that was not its intended purpose.” Precedent, “as it has evolved within the common law, has at its heart a form of reasoning—broadly speaking, a logic—according to which the decisions of earlier courts in particular cases somehow generalize to constrain the decisions of later courts facing different cases.” In other words, the legal landscape narrows as precedent takes effect. The total epistemic frame is constrained by precedential rulings. Precedent standardizes the law. It claims that similar cases should be decided in the same manner. In many ways, precedent is intended to be the law’s way of re-invoking the past within the space and time of the present. The legal battles of yesterday do not have to be repeated today if they have already been deemed just, sound, and legitimate. This epistemic logic is accepted without interrogation. While there are factors that the United States Supreme Court evaluates when deciding whether or not to overturn precedent, there seems to be no debate about the doctrine itself. It is not debatable. It is a given.

Using the case that Ingrid Egan invokes, I want to describe the violence that precedent as an uninterrogated concept has on entire legal landscape, starting from the Supreme Court. If we

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<sup>6</sup> After the applications of two blacks were rejected by the District of Columbia Police Department, the two men filed suit against Mayor Walter E. Washington. The men alleged that the Department's recruiting procedures, including a written personnel test, discriminated against racial minorities. They claimed that the test was unrelated to job performance and excluded a disproportionate number of black applicants. In a 7-to-2 decision, the Court held that the procedures and written personnel test did not constitute racial discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause. The Court found that the Clause was designed to prevent official discrimination on the basis of race; laws or other official acts that had racially disproportionate impacts did not automatically become constitutional violations. The Court reasoned that the D.C. Police Department's procedures did not have discriminatory intent and were racially neutral measures of employment qualification. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1975/74-1492>

accept that the fictive holds a mirror to the everyday realities that surround us, we can understand Egan's invocation of *Washington v. Davis* to analyze the doctrine of precedent.

Egan states that the Supreme Court cannot overturn a discriminatory law if that law has not been shown to have been discriminatory on purpose. The reasons that surround this general practice of the Court is important. In fact, later on in the scene, a Justice laments that “the impact of a ruling based on race would have adverse procedural implications.” If the Supreme Court were to overturn or rewrite the doctrine that discrimination must be proven intentional, it would actually force the past into the realm of the present in a way that precedent specifically and intentionally does not allow for. The procedural implications of undoing a law that was “accidentally” discriminatory would call into question many of the rulings the Court has already made. It would require an unraveling of the Supreme Court. It would require us to go back to the beginning, if one could be found. It would mean an undoing of the American democratic experiment. In this case, precedent is supposed to be ahistorical, even though it invokes the past. This tactic of self-preservation is bolstered by the epistemic narrative that the doctrine of precedent “is outside of history, capable of being assessed and reevaluated independently of the time and space of its production” (Grosz 1993:191). Precedent strips the past of its nuance and unsettles the space in which decisions occur. In the argument purported by Ingrid Egan, precedent ensures that, “accidental racism” will always fall through the cracks of the United States legal system. It is important to keep in mind that “knowledges lack the means to understand their own self-development as knowledges. They lack the means by which to

understand their own historicity and materiality. Indeed, the history of knowledge is explicitly excluded as irrelevant to the contemporary forms of these knowledges.” In isolation, cases do not hold meaning. Laws do not “carry the index of their own origins” (Grosz 1993:191). What the doctrine of precedent calls for is an erasure of the historicity of knowledge. The laws that uphold the doctrine of precedent have been curated and selected to generate a very specific material outcome. The Supreme Court is the product of a carefully crafted knowledge database that elevates discourses and narratives that will preserve the original intent of the polity. Precedent uses a narrow scope of the past and what it has to mean in the present to determine the stories the United States tells about itself. Ingrid Egan invokes *Washington v. Davis* as a way to refute Annalise Keating’s argument that poor people of color are systematically denied a right to a free and proper legal defense. By removing culpability from the part of the polity, Egan is bolstering the idea that the United States has transcended racial bigotry and discrimination because there is no clearly defined grievance being perpetrated from one individual to another. This doctrine relegates the past to a story we tell ourselves.

How would a reading of Ingrid’s use of precedent be evaluated by invoking black women’s epistemologies? To answer this question, I consult chapter 1 of Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds*. McKittrick writes the following:

“Octavia Butler’s novel offers an interesting introduction to black geographies: Dana’s predicament, as a contemporary subject forced into a time-space compression and a time-space reversal, allows her to confront and produce several landscapes. Present and

past geographies, while distinguishable and particular, are also enmeshed vis-à-vis Dana's bodily and psychic experiences. Her supernatural status, as a time-traveling present-past subject, fractures rational time-space progression by allowing her to be experientially tied to urban California in 1976 and a Maryland slave plantation roughly 200 years earlier" (McKittrick 2006: 1).

McKittrick argues that as a geography, the landscape of the past, as evoked by the entire premise of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, is contextually rich, incomplete, messy, and unstable. There is no such thing as fixity. There is no such thing as, "the past was so long ago. Slavery was so long ago. Jim Crow was so long ago." The past, the present, and the future, as both time and place are collapsed, such that they cannot be contained within physical or epistemically defined borders. In her closing argument before the Justices of the Court, Annalise Keating makes statements such as, "**Racism is built into the DNA of America,**" "**Jim Crow is alive and kicking**" and "**Some may claim that slavery has ended. But tell that to the inmates who are kept in cages and told that they don't have any rights at all.**" These declarations are meant to redefine the distinction that the Court makes between past and present subjects. The past begets the present begets the future begets the past. And so on and on and on. This geographical paradigm shift not only affects the epistemic landscape but also directly shapes it. The doctrine of precedent calls for an erasure of the historicity of knowledge. On the other hand, and I argue, on the better hand, Black women's epistemologies carry within them histories. They carry ancestries. They carry narratives. They carry time as a spatial reality and as an epistemically diffuse identity. These

ways of knowing do not accept precedent as a justifiable way to capture the past. Precedent sanitizes and revises collective memories. This doctrine relegates the past to just a story we tell ourselves.

### **Conclusion**

In the context of this research project, the question I have set out to interrogate is not representational in nature; it is epistemic. By this, I mean to say that epistemologies are knowledges. They are the stories we tell ourselves about the worlds we inhabit. Epistemologies define the realms of Truth and opinion. They grant the authority to make and unmake canon, revise and reconstitute memory, and draw the lines between that which can be understood as reasonably unknown.<sup>7</sup> I argue that black women's epistemologies have been barred from the United States Supreme Court because of the threat such perspectives and knowledges pose to the dominant narratives that guide the Court. It is necessary to clarify that black women's epistemologies are embodied spatially. Epistemologies are not necessarily affixed to bodies. My secondary argument is that space carries epistemic realities that are revealed based on the people who inhabit those spaces and the social location of those particular people. The aim of this project is to problematize the question that I, myself asked at the outset of this research project. The question we should be asking is: why is space not expanding to accommodate the epistemologies that black women could bring to the United States Supreme Court? This question gets at the heart and soul of what we want the Court's function to be. What do we want from this

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, P. (1991). *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp.113-114.

country and what do we want from black women who take up space? Do we want black women to enact the same kinds of violences that we've seen historically? Or do we want something different? If we want something different, we have to rethink space.

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# The Consideration for Violence in Resistance and Revolution

Emory Vaughan Cole II

## *The History and Implementation of Violence by L'ouverture and Bolivar:*

In our modern world, violent resistance is often frowned upon for its utilization of physical force or intimidation practices to achieve its political aims (Violence). Unlike nonviolent resistance, which attempts to avoid the physical harming or jeopardization of its opposition, violent resistance activities execute specific endeavors that will lead to the hurting, damaging, or killing of others in the pursuit of accomplishing its goals (Violence). Despite many prominent political activists, such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., who assert violence can never be used to produce positive change, we must never forget the historic revolutionary movements which contradict this narrative and demonstrate when violent methods are exercised properly, they can bring forth justice and freedom for the people who employ its methods.

During the early modern period, between the 14th and 18th centuries, Toussaint L'ouverture and Simon Bolivar both orchestrated successful violent revolutions that led to the liberation of their people. Their violent revolutionary theories compelled these great men to not only free their lands from colonial domination, but to also motive their supporters in their implementation of violence and establishment of novel governmental institutions. Although I allege L'ouverture's understanding of violent revolution is superior to the perspective of Bolivar's, both men failed in their philosophies to construct well-ordered societal systems that could have prevented the

spread of violent insurrections from occurring within their realms. Nevertheless these men, and their revolutions, are a testament to how violence has the potential to be utilized effectively in order to emancipate the oppressed.

***L'ouverture's and Bolivar's Beliefs Surrounding Violence's Emancipatory Power:***

One of the main similarities that is shared between L'ouverture's and Bolivar's violent revolutionary theories is that the natural rights and freedoms denied to the oppressed, from their masters, can be reclaimed through violent resistance activities. In many of his letters outlining his revolution, L'ouverture defined freedom as "the right to do what [one] wants" (D., Toussaint xiii). In other words, freedom, for L'ouverture, was an individual's capacity to act independently without interference from outside forces. When he applied his definition to the island of Saint-Domingue, known today as Haiti, L'ouverture voiced that slaves were being denied their autonomy within the system of slavery. Adam Smith, a Scottish moral philosopher, best characterized the despairing situation of the Haitian slaves when he stated "the freedom of the planters [or slave owners] to do what they want with their property means that slaves do not have freedom" for slaves are viewed as property of their masters and are commanded to obey their demands (Stinchcombe 319-332). L'ouverture would agree with Smith's description and would go on to state the historically "stronger and more barbaric" (D., Toussaint 5-7) white plantation owner class has used coercive and legal avenues to forcibly strip slaves of their freedoms in order to advance their own profit driven agendas. Due to his evaluation of the plight of slavery, L'ouverture surmised that by undertaking violent revolutionary activities, his vengeance against

the white plantation class, the slaves would be able to bring about their own freedom and wrestle back control of their own lives from their white masters (D., Toussaint 1-2). As he frequently proclaimed to his followers, by taking up arms, the slaves will be able to recover for themselves “the liberty that [God] has given them, and [the freedoms] taken from them only” by the efforts of the vile white plantation owner class (D., Toussaint 28). It is in his speeches and letters that L’ouverture affirms that through the slaves’ application of violence, they will be able to free themselves from their yoke of enslavement and begin practicing their own agency within their lives.

This notion that violence can be utilized to restore rights that were lost is also expressed in Bolivar’s South American revolution. According to his philosophy, Bolivar characterized an individual as a slave “when the government [in power], by its essence or through its vices, tramples and usurps the rights of the citizen” (Bolivar 79). When he applied his perspective to his colonial situation Bolivar concluded that his people, citizens in South American Spanish colonies, were slaves to the will of the Spanish Empire. During this period, the Spanish developed an “organized . . . system of oppression in which” Spanish endorsed military junta rulers not only forced their colonists to “tacitly relinquish [] to society” their rights and privileges but also established governmental systems which subjugated its citizens in order to furnish more riches towards the Spanish crown (Bolivar 79, 171). When coupled with Bolivar’s belief that the Spanish government had become too vast at the expense of encroaching on the rights of its citizens, he professed that violent action was needed to swiftly and decisively end the abuse that

his people endured (A State Too Extensive). Violent resistance offered Bolivar and his supports a chance to uproot a system that was constructed to subdue their freedoms and to create a governmental system free from the despotism of the Spanish. As Bolivar communicated, the evils of the government are “proliferat[ed] moment by moment [and threaten] us with our total destruction . . . We have lost all guarantees of individual freedom and security” but can reclaim these entitlements if we are to unite and fight against the Spanish forces (Bolivar 177). To state this differently, Bolivar presumed that the injustices confronted by his people under Spanish control would eventually lead to their ruin if they were not to take violent action. The Spanish systems of governance were rigged against the colonized and violent resistance offered Bolivar, and his supporters, the chance to be liberated from their domination and to reclaim their liberties. It is this capacity for violence to be emancipatory on the behalf of those who use it that resounds in both L’ouverture’s and Bolivar’s violent revolutionary philosophies.

**L’ouverture’s and Bolivar’s View of Violence’s Potential to Exceed Nonviolence:**

Another conviction that is sustained throughout L’ouverture’s and Bolivar’s teachings is that they both declared nonviolent resistance proved ineffective at producing the necessary changes that they sought. On the island of Saint-Domingue, L’ouverture maintained acts of nonviolence were inadequate for they lacked the necessary strength to overcome the self-interests and power of the white planter class. On multiple occasions, L’ouverture attempted various nonviolent resistance strategies: notably he facilitated negotiations between the slaves and their former masters to determine if a compromise could be achieved. However, a resolution

could not be accomplished for the plantation owners never intended to dispose the system of slavery. Although many of these landholders professed publicly that “all men are free” and that slavery should be abolished, these proclamations were all a farce to enable the ceasing of hostilities and a return to the slave system that allowed for the plantation owners to enjoy all that they possessed (D., Toussaint 7-8). These planters’ lust for accumulating wealth and desire to enslave the African populous, hindered L’ouverture’s nonviolent attempts to yield the freedoms that his people desired, and it was because of these initial encounters that forced L’ouverture to conclude that nonviolent methods proved ineffective at combating the slave system.

Contrastingly, violent resistance provided L’ouverture and his slave rebellion the opportunity to overcome the deceitfulness of the white plantation. By instructing his supporters to partake in violent practices, including the “burning down [of] plantations-the engine of the slave system-and [] courageously fighting the colonial masters” (D., Toussaint xi), L’ouverture contributed in ensuring that the oppressive systems of slavery in his country would never return. Violence empowered L’ouverture to overcome the greediness of the white plantation owner class that he previously failed to thwart with his utilization of nonviolence in his revolution.

Bolivar possessed a similar mindset for he maintained nonviolence would prove inefficient in overturning the command of the colonies, from the Spanish, into the hands of the South American people. Bolivar depicted the colonist situation by explaining the Spanish Empire forced its citizens into a state that is analogous to a “permanent infancy with respect to public affairs” (Bolivar 79). When the citizens attempted to bring forth their grievances before the

governmental systems in power, Bolivar described how they were immediately dismissed and punished for their vocalizations. Likewise, when corrupt leaders were brought before the judicial powers, through nonviolent methods, the Spanish government consistently “pardon[ed] them, even when their plots were of such magnitude as to threaten the health of the nation” (Bolivar 62).

As a result of the breakdown of these nonviolent methods, Bolivar surmised nonviolent practices were incapable of halting the domination of the Spanish. Particularly, nonviolence was inadequate within a system that interacts with its citizens as if they were children. If the citizens are barred from voicing their opinions on how the government should be organized, then they require a form of resistance that is able to express their collective might and that is independent from the corrupt societal systems that have been orchestrated against them. For Bolivar, violence was this opening through which the people could operate outside of the Spanish government while initiating the constructive changes that they demanded. In spite of his high regard for those in the American hemisphere who support passive resistance, Bolivar asserted his people could not be passive and nonviolent for they were slaves to their government and had no rights or privileges to rely upon (Bolivar 79). Their only option was to fight back against their oppressors if they wished to fulfill Bolivar’s motto of bringing forth “equality, liberty, and independence” (Bolivar 208) within the South American colonies. The message that violent resistance activities are superior at times to practices of nonviolence is conveyed in both L’ouverture’s and Bolivar’s violent revolutionary philosophies.

**Endorsement of L'ouverture's Violent Revolutionary Philosophy:**

Though it is imperative to value both L'ouverture's and Bolivar's theories on violent revolution, particularly for proving the necessity of violence in certain situations, I submit L'ouverture offers a more holistic philosophy for others to imitate. Specifically, I favor L'ouverture's mixed governmental system he concludes should naturally flow from the completion of a violent revolution. After his victory over the French, L'ouverture was driven to constitute a society where landowners and their workers could coexist in a manner that would both benefit the needs of the landowners while not abridging the rights of the newly freed slaves. Unsure of which governmental system to produce, L'ouverture and his supporters examined a diverse range of societal structures with the hope of yielding a regime that would bring forth "wise laws modelled on the mores [and ideals]" of the people (D., Toussaint 42). However, this task became problematic for a consensus on what form of government to establish could not be agreed upon. Realizing this development, L'ouverture determined that a mixed governmental structure would provide the compromise that his people sought while also protecting the freedoms they petitioned. To accomplish this goal, L'ouverture appointed himself as Governor-General (akin to a ruler) and would remain in this position for life so long as he maintained the support of his citizens (Elliott 52-53). Moreover, not only did L'ouverture produce a governmental structure that placed landowners and their workers at the same level of importance, but he also "opened his arms to all - black, mulatto, and white" by awarding everyone the same rights, privileges, and opportunities to voice their concerns before the

government and nominate the leaders they requested (D., Toussaint xv-xvi). L'ouverture's mixed governmental system led to "his success in restoring order and prosperity [between his citizens]" throughout the island and produced the framework that all future governments of Saint-Domingue would later imitate (Fagg).

The key difference that separates L'ouverture's governmental ideas from Bolivar's is that L'ouverture believed that the people should be heavily involved in government. When given the tools to do so, L'ouverture trusted the people's capacity to elect the leaders necessary to execute their wishes and depose those that stunted a societies growth: Bolivar condemned this way of thinking. The foundation of his ideology, Democratic Caesarism, is rooted in the notion that the people do not have the ability to understand what is best for them. Instead of submitting the "political structure [to] the domination of the will of individuals [,] . . . [a small minority based on] natural qualities of competence, honor, and [the] will to command" should be placed in control after the completion of a violent uprising (Belaúnde xv). It is through these noble leaders that the people's rights can be protected and a society can become efficient. To this end, Bolivar became comparable to a dictator who elected the leaders that would command the South American continent. Despite his pure intentions, Bolivar quickly learned the foolishness of his actions. The leaders he selected quickly became tyrants and ruled their people with an iron fist. They were only concerned for their own interests and though Bolivar had authority, he was powerless in his efforts to stop them. In reaction to their wickedness, the people revolted and violent confrontations between the numerous regimes in South America and its citizens have

continued to persist into our modern era. Later in his political career, Bolivar even admitted to the inability of his violent revolutionary doctrine in its constitution of a just governmental system. As he stated to his people, making the best governmental system was not his mission (Belaúnde xvi). Bolivar's primary goal was to enact a violent revolution and when he attempted to construct a new societal order, he admitted to “proceed[ing] unwisely and attribut[ed] poor outcomes to having failed” to have grasp what his people truly needed (Bolivar 161). The governments Bolivar established, according to his doctrine, neglected “the needs of the social structure and the well-being of the citizens” in favor of supporting the agendas of the corrupt leaders of society (Bolivar 161). It is for this main flaw in Bolivar’s thinking that has compelled me to favor L’ouverture's mixed governmental system which he prescribed in his violent revolutionary philosophy.

**The Oversight that Afflicts L’ouverture’s and Bolivar’s Thinking:**

Regardless of my own judgment concerning which revolutionary possesses a better and more holistic understanding of the use of violent resistance, both L’ouverture and Bolivar failed in their ideologies to develop well-ordered governmental institutions that could have ceased the spread of violent insurrections. Notably, both of these men proved unsuccessful at addressing the concerns of their people which laid at the heart of these violent demonstrations. I concur with theorists, namely Niccolo Machiavelli, who proclaim if a government is properly constituted, then the people will feel no need to utilize extraordinary modes, including acts of violence, for they will feel safe and their needs met. In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli states the people of a

society “desire freedom so as to live secure” from perceived threats to their way of life (46). The people also wish “to be avenged against those who” (46) have wronged them. Machiavelli also goes on to express if a society does not satisfy these two essential needs of its citizens, then the people will implement “extraordinary modes [actions that operate outside the influence of government], such as violence and arms” (51) to protect their interests. When applied to L’ouverture, Machiavelli’s view permits us to see many of the freed slaves violently revolted against L’ouverture out of fear of losing their liberties and assurances of their safety. Though L’ouverture granted former slaves their freedom, he regrettably enacted a society where freed slaves were denied their authority to choose their profession and were forced to work back on the plantations they detested (James 156). In his philosophy L’ouverture proclaimed that if slaves were to be set free, freedom would lead to sloth, “the mother of all vices”, and sloth would lead to the downfall of society (D., Toussaint 19). Despite the people’s efforts to communicate their grievances before L’ouverture and their government, their complaints were quickly dismissed or forgotten. Enraged and irritated by their government’s response, countless communities violently rebelled to express their displeasure with their new societal regime. Although L’ouverture was able to suppress most of the uprisings his people formulated, the fact that many of his citizens “were constantly in a state of insurrection” (James 151) proves how L’ouverture was unable to constitute a proper government where his people felt secure and able to seek justice. As a result of L’ouverture’s shortcoming, the people violently revolted as Machiavelli predicted.

Likewise, Bolivar also neglected his people and was unable to confront the wave of violent revolts that would plague South America for years to come. As previously stated, Bolivar produced a societal structure that favored the needs of the governmental elite and abandoned the desires of the freed colonists. Furthermore, due to Bolivar's philosophy, the colonists had few societal options through which they could vent their concerns and accomplish their goals of electing representatives that were based on the people's desires. Unable to enact the changes they needed, the people turned to violence and coercive avenues for they felt unsafe and unprotected. If Bolivar had yielded to the instruction of Machiavellian philosophy, he would have attained the insight required to construct a well-ordered society where the people could dwell in peace without conflict or strife. It is this major flaw in L'ouverture's and Bolivar's violent revolutionary philosophies, highlighted through Machiavelli, that compelled their people to revolt against them.

### **Conclusion and Consideration for Violence in Resistance and Revolution**

As I conclude this investigation, let me be clear: I am not advocating nor do I believe that violence should be exercised in every situation where the oppressed wish to rebel. Violence, at its core, is a destructive power that is willing to employ extreme measures in pursuit of its particular aims. In our modern era, we must always remain vigilant and critical of all groups that avow their execution of violence is justified. With that being said, in spite of their faults, L'ouverture's and Bolivar's violent revolutionary doctrines prove how violence is necessary in some cases in order to bring forth effective acts of resistance and revolution. Through their

unique perspectives, both of these men assist in showing how violence can be used towards the emancipation of subjugated peoples and can surpass the efforts of nonviolent actions in selective circumstances. While many modern scholars will vocalize acts of violence can only lead to destruction, I assert violent revolutionary philosophies, such as those of L'ouverture and Bolivar, prove how statements like these are dubious or at the very least must be questioned.

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## (Post)Structuralism, Medicine, and the History of Intersexuality through the 20th Century

Noah Garberg

Intersexuality as an identity confounds and defies society. As intersexuality resists the normal definitions of sex and gender, it has been forced to accept a role of ambiguity. Still seen today in the reception of famous intersex athletes like Caster Semenya and Dutee Chand, society collectively scratches its head at individuals that don't fit our typical definitions of male and female. This role of ambiguity has become ingrained in the identity of intersexuals. As Cheryl Chase, the founder of the Intersex Society of North America, describes this sentiment: "The fact that my gender has been problematized is the source of my intersexual identity." While some intersexuals have reappropriated their identity, the question of how and why society views intersexuality in such a way remains. This problematization seems to occur through intersexuality's incongruity with deeply ingrained grammars of structure within Western society. Described as structuralism, these grammars are mobilized through the biopolitics of the modern medical system. Thus, through an analysis of the relationship between gender, structuralism, and medicine in Western thought, as well as the post-structural reaction and reclassification of gender, we can trace the history of the construction of gender identities, as well as look to what lies ahead in the future of Intersexuality.

Structuralism, as a philosophy, is a system of semiotics which seeks to define the relation

between meaning and the sources of meaning. Developed by French philosophers and linguists in the 1950s and 60s, it came to define the meaning of concepts, the “signified,” through the words that elicit those meanings, the “signifier.” Collectively, this arrangement is known as the “sign.” An example of a sign might be that of “lion,” where the word itself is the signifier, and the concept of the animal is the signified. Moreover, structuralism recognizes that this relationship is arbitrary, there is nothing permanent or natural between the word lion and the concept of lion. Language can only reference other forms of language, there is no external or objective setpoint that can be referenced to ground language in reality. As such, it defines meaning negatively, through the oppositional differences between different signifiers.

Analogically, the meaning of lion is created because it is not a mule and not a unicorn, and is then arbitrarily tied to the word “lion”. As a system of general meaning interpretation in the world, it then extends beyond the fields of just linguistics and semiotics. These grammars have had far reaching implications for Western society and its conceptualization of gender and identity. As a system obsessed with the positioning of different elements into a whole structure, structuralist influence on society has made it obsessed with categorization and compartmentalization: binaries within the relationship of a Sign quickly become binaries within our understanding of the world. Moreover, as Signs are the main ways through which we understand the world, these categorizations and structures of meaning are then easily transmuted onto the literal body. How, then, does intersexuality fit into the schema of what is understood about gender and sexuality?

While the binary relationships of meaning in the Sign are arbitrary, society has nonetheless desperately created and maintained the distinctions into an immutable binarism. In

the gender binary, a static definition of maleness stands against its opposite, static definition of femaleness. As summarized by Kessler, the structural binary of gender identity comes with an endorsement of strict gender roles. Of specific importance to the problem of intersexuality is that “Genitals are the essential sign of gender” and “any exceptions to the two genders are not to be taken seriously” (Kessler 1978). When genitals are understood as the Sign that gives meaning to gender, this schema transforms even the biological category of sex into a product of culture used to taxonomize individuals. It seems obvious then that because intersexuality as an identity fits neither perfectly into the gendered construction of the body nor gendered ordering of society, it is viewed as unacceptable and pathologized. Just like the relation between Signs, intersexuality is defined negatively, against the categories of male and female; intersexuality is understood and deemed wrong exactly because it is not male or female. This occurs not only on the symbolic level, as there are also very specific and material ways through which this meaning is imposed onto the bodies of intersexual individuals.

The medical system, as French philosopher Michel Foucault might say, is an indispensable way through which these grammars are mobilized onto the populational level. Doctors and surgeons today use these to inform their prescription of gender onto babies. The Prader Scale and the Quigley Scale are two tests used by doctors to categorize babies on a scale of genital masculinization from 1-7. If the pseudopenis of the baby is deemed to be large enough, that baby is declared a boy, if not, they are declared a girl. Similarly, the size and placement of the testes seems to give additional information to endocrinologists about an intersexual infant’s preferred sexual and gender identity. There is little thought given to the autonomy or input of the infant in the choosing of their own gender, for the doctors can already see what they deem to be

the perfect evidence of gender in the spread-eagled legs of an infant. These practices of classification are explicit endorsements of the structural conceptualization of the genitalia as the signifier of gender.

Moreover, the fervency and immediacy with which doctors jump to surgical intervention reflects cultural influence more so than medical accuracy. Intersexuality represents no immediate medical emergency, rather it is deemed a “neonatal psychosocial emergency” (Holmes). An intersexual individual can survive and develop naturally into an adult without any medical intervention; however, doctors are more interested in being complacent with structural binaries of gender, and changing the body of the infant to conform to those expectations to help them “fit in”. When in reality, this practice imposes much more psychic violence than it avoids. It would seem that because the medical system’s values are so closely related to structuralist ideals, intersexuality is quickly pathologized and slated for normalization. Thus, the imposing of surgery onto a pre-autonomous intersex infant is a more accurate application of the gender binary than it is of a medical need.

The biopolitics of this practice are obvious. The state has created an ideal conception of how one should both identify and express their gender identity. This idealization emerges as a strict coherence to the biological binary of sex/gender. Deviance from this norm is quickly corrected; uniquely so in this case as the individuals deemed unacceptable lack the agency to object to the imposition of biopower. Thus, the state can use the guise of medical authority to exert ultimate biopolitical control over the bodies and existence of intersexual infants. This exercise of control over intersexual fungibility occurs within the practices and attitudes of the medical system, which uses structuralist understandings of meaning and identity as a justification

of its practices.

So what more can be theorized, is there hope for a reconceptualization of intersex identity? Thankfully, there is: poststructuralism is a philosophical movement that has emerged from and reacted to many of the tenets of structuralism. A main part of structuralism that it has found fault in is the initial ways in which structuralists relate signifiers to the signified. Poststructuralists agree that the relationship in a Sign is arbitrary, but the relation does not stop at only one signification; rather, there are multiple ways that the meaning of a signifier can be interpreted and reinterpreted. For example, the signifier lion can be interpreted to signify the animal lion, but this can be reinterpreted to signify a king, which can then be reinterpreted to signify an empire. Poststructuralists see this almost infinite regress of meaning as a more dynamic and fluid understanding of meaning and reality. Moreover, the series of both signifiers and signified are a vast continuum: there are an infinite number of signifiers or words that could create meaning, and an infinite number of ways that this meaning can be conceptualized. It might seem paradoxical for language to attempt to delineate concrete units of meaning from infinite pools, and poststructuralist thought recognizes this; the poststructuralist conceptualization of Signs leaves room for those units of language themselves to be reinterpreted. Essentially, poststructuralism is aware of the gaps in Signs and the ways that meaning and interpretation can fail, and creates room for their reinterpretation.

Overall, a poststructuralist approach to issues of gender assignment and gender identity is much more open and forgiving than a structuralist one. Poststructuralists contend that there are a multitude of different signifiers that could lead to the meaning of gender identity. It is not a static one-to-one relationship where the genitalia or some other factor is the only thing that signifies

gender. More precisely, gender as a concept is interpreted and reinterpreted by many characteristics, the genitalia being by no means at the forefront. Instead of problematizing intersexual identity, poststructuralism problematizes the gender binary that structuralism creates, viewing it as an inadequate approach to areas of difference. For Donna Haraway, a productive method of this cultural critique is to “pull on a thread [of culture], and begin to untangle the ball of meanings” (Haraway 1987). Poststructuralism does exactly this: it pulls on the meanings we glean in the world, and what does not stand up to scrutiny must be reinterpreted. As well, even if one were to view the genitalia as a signifier, a poststructuralist would contend that there are a multitude of different meanings that can be interpreted. A penis does not only signify maleness, it can be both be interpreted to have meaning beyond just a gender binary, as well as reinterpreted to have meaning beyond only gender or sex.

This interpretation of meaning would no doubt create space for the existence of a spectrum of genders, and unproblematic the intersexual identity. It denies the inscription of a person’s identity onto their body, as well as denies an interpretation of someone’s identity from the characteristics of their body. It instead recognizes the many different types of bodies that can signify radically different genders. Moreover, a medical system that functions under a framework of poststructuralism would be much less concerned with performing gender reassignment surgery onto newborn intersexual infants. Without the genitalia as the smoking gun of gender, doctors would have even less on which to base a prescription of gender surgery. Instead, doctors would be obliged to postpone surgery that would solidify someone’s gender, until they have the capacity to express their own desires about their gender.

In summation, while structuralism has characterized the history of gender and sexuality in

both theory and science, it does not have to characterize its future. As Robert McRuer contends in *Critical Intersex*, “spaces of intersex futurity...are populous, even if the figures we will encounter there are, as Jacques Derrida might put it, not always or not yet recognizable.” He continues on to say that “the unforeseeable freedom that will arrive in a future-to-come depends upon a relinquishment of determinism, which in turn allows us to risk welcoming the unexpected.” Critical queer theory has been productive in moving intersexuality towards the realms of recognizability and intelligibility. In the creation of organizations fighting for the rights of intersexuals like the ISNA and OII, to the creation of legislation protecting the rights of intersex children internationally, headway has been made to explicitly codify the existence of intersexuality as normal and acceptable. As such, the unknown future of intersexual existence lends itself to optimism. Just as ‘determine’ can mean ‘to ascertain by investigation’ as well as ‘to cause to come to resolution’, a relinquishing of pessimistic determinism for Intersex futurity has the potential to resist both the intrusive eye and the normative hand of society. Thus, it is through a physical and symbolic reclaiming of the bodies of Intersex people, and a reappropriation of Intersex identity, that the Intersex movement's call-to-arms becomes “the literal embodiment of poststructuralism” (Kerry 2009).

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# The Prophet and the *Gosudarstvennichestvo*: Dostoevsky's Legacy in Relation to Contemporary Russian Politics and the Reign of Vladimir Putin

Stephen Altobelli

## Introduction

Long regarded as one of Russia's greatest writers, Fyodor Dostoevsky has left an indelible mark upon the country. Few, if any, areas of Russian life escaped his touch. Russia's culture, politics, religion and national identity all found themselves changed irrevocably by the writing of Dostoevsky. Today he is often hailed as a prophet of things to come, and indeed he predicted one of the most important moments in Russian history: the rise and fall of Communism in Russia. Post-USSR, Russia finds itself led by a man straight from a Dostoevsky novel — a powerful, charismatic tyrant named Vladimir Putin, whose words and actions recall a long history of anti-western sentiment and belief in Russian supremacy which can trace its history from the Soviet Union all the way to Dostoevsky himself. Putin has stated that Dostoevsky remains one of his favorite authors, but the similarities extend far beyond that; Putin at times seems to use Dostoevsky's novels as blueprints for his reign.<sup>1</sup> Under his regime, Russia has expanded its territory, set itself firmly against the West, and brought back Orthodox Christian values, all things which Dostoevsky would have supported. However, this simple reading of Dostoevsky's legacy — that it forms the basis for an autocrat's iron-fisted rule — ignores the many complexities of Dostoevsky's beliefs. Although many parallels can be drawn between the Slavophilic writings of Dostoevsky and the regressive, nationalistic policies of Vladimir Putin, this oversimplification of Dostoevsky's legacy ignores many of its more humanistic

complexities.

Born on October 30, 1821, Dostoevsky led a strange and troubled life, overcoming many challenges to assert himself as one of the greatest writers in his country's history. Those challenges, including a distant father who died when he was young, a serious problem with gambling, and crippling epilepsy, informed his novels in many ways. Dostoevsky's characters wrestle with their own demons just as they wrestle with weighty theological arguments and existential ideas. Existentialism also informed his ideas about Russia; for much of his life, especially in his early work as a journalist, Dostoevsky was obsessed by the idea of what Russia *is*. His ideas about Russia shifted throughout his life, as he moved from a passionate Slavophile to a man consumed with the idea of "complete universality".<sup>2</sup> He remained convinced, however, that Western ideas had poisoned Russia, especially its youth, writing in 1878 that "our student goes not to the people but somewhere abroad, to 'Europeanism', to the abstract kingdom of a universal man".<sup>3</sup> This reflects one of Dostoevsky's strongest beliefs: that Russia, the Russian people, and the Russian Orthodox Church, were unquestionably superior to their European counterparts.

It is these last three beliefs, more than any other, which have influenced Russia's current leader. A former KGB agent, Putin became the president of the largest country in the world in 1999, taking power after nearly a decade of what many in Russia felt was a downward spiral.<sup>4</sup> "Let us not forget" writes Andrei Kovalev, a former security staffer under both Yeltsin and Putin "that even the crumbling USSR was objectively much stronger than contemporary Russia, which has been weakened not only by the fatal errors of the past but also by the complete madness of Putin's policies".<sup>5</sup> Said policies seek, above all else, to accomplish one thing: a return to the

pre-Soviet past, which existed relatively unchanged for centuries until the emancipation of the serfs by Peter the Great in 1861. Dostoevsky himself spoke of the “enormous change taking place in Russia” and declared that “we have, at last, become convinced that we too are a distinct nationality”.<sup>6</sup> However after this first flourish of democracy, it would be many decades before the October Revolution of 1917 brought real and lasting change to Russia, fully erasing the Tsarist past and ushering in a new age of supposed freedom. In reality, this new age proved to be hardly more democratic than any of the previous, with a list of successive dictators, autocrats and strongmen holding power through a combination of military might and fervent devotion to the Communist ideal. Following 1991 and the end of the Cold War, Russia had again supposedly turned towards more western ideals with the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and the relatively liberal presidency of Boris Yeltsin. Again, this hope proved inconsistent fleeting, as the boom of Russia swung slowly back towards authoritarianism. This authoritarianism came in the form of Vladimir Putin. It may have taken several years before Putin’s agenda became clear, but today it is clear that he seeks to return Russia to a state of supreme power, and that he sees this as tied intrinsically to Russia’s past.

### The Russian Idea

The identity of Russia has long gripped the Russian people, with deep divisions between east and west, between Orthodox Christianity and intellectualism, and authoritarianism and democracy. This fundamental question of Russia’s place in the world has existed since Dostoevsky’s day; he wrote extensively on it and even so he had no clear position on the issue. In his earlier years, Dostoevsky wrote that “the character of our future activity must be to the highest degree *universal to mankind*”.<sup>7</sup> Mochulsky identifies Dostoevsky’s position as that of one

seeking to reconcile Slavophiles and Westernizers, and to promote the unity of the Russian idea with the rest of mankind.<sup>8</sup> Of course, Dostoevsky has long been known as a passionate Slavophile, disdainful of the west, a shift which occurred after Dostoevsky traveled abroad in Europe. Many of his novels certainly reflect the view that western ideals, western intellectualism and the socialism form the root of many of his countries' ills. The greatest proof of this belief can be found specifically in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan Karamazov, an atheist and intellectual finds that his radical ideas about God, humanity and free will lead to the murder of his own father, representing the way in which Dostoevsky believes that extreme intellectualism will destroy Russia. The duality of Russia was a problem which gripped Dostoevsky throughout his life; a hundred and fifty years later, it troubles Putin as well.

Putin displays evident similarities to one of Dostoevsky's most iconic characters: Raskolnikov. Many of his actions bespeak a desire to assume the mantle of *Übermensch*, from his propaganda to his political actions. This desire for superiority takes a darker turn when it translates to actual policy. Putin's foreign aggression echoes Napoleon, one of the historical figures used by Raskolnikov to justify his actions in *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>9</sup> Raskolnikov's belief in the righteousness of "the destruction of what exists in the name of better things" echoes Putin's speech after the annexation of Crimea.<sup>10</sup> In that speech, Putin essentially justifies his breach of international law by claiming that the United Nations and the United States have breached it plenty themselves, calling their reaction "amazing, primitive, blunt cynicism".<sup>11</sup> Raskolnikov and Putin share many similarities: an origin as a relative outsider, humble beginnings, a hunger for power for its own ends, and the willingness to breach the laws of God and man to satisfy that hunger.

Putin is quite concerned with the problem of Russian identity. He put his signature on the “Millennium Message” published on December 29, 1999, an online manifesto which outlined many of Putin’s beliefs, notably that of the “Russian Idea”.<sup>12</sup> The “Russian Idea” is Putin’s term for a collection of what he viewed as distinctly Russian values: “patriotism, collectivism, solidarity, *derzhavnost’*— the belief that Russia is destined always to be a great power...exerting its power abroad — and...*gosudarstvennichestvo*” which translates roughly to ‘statism’.<sup>13</sup> Hill and Gaddy note that while *gosudarstvennichestvo* does not translate entirely into English, it holds a very important and particular meaning in Russia, where it is defined as one who is above petty partisan politics, a true civil servant who believes above all in the state itself.<sup>14</sup> Putin’s identification of himself this way is in keeping with his public image. Born in Leningrad in 1952, Putin claims that he attempted to join the KGB when he was sixteen “in order to defend his fatherland”.<sup>15</sup> In reality, he joined several years later upon graduation, and rose through the ranks of the organization even as, post-Soviet-collapse, it became rebranded as the FSB.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the regime change, Putin continued to diligently serve his country. Of course, Putin never truly believed in the Soviet ideal. Michel Eltchaninoff identifies the contrast in Putin’s “opposition to Marxist-Leninist policy... [and his] unstinting loyalty to...the secret police”, a contrast which makes sense in relation to Putin’s belief in the idea of Russia as something greater than politics.<sup>17</sup> This, more than anything, forms Putin’s idea of Russia. He is a nationalist, first and foremost: to him, Russia is not east or west, it is *Russia*, unique and independent. This belief echoes Dostoevsky’s that “all our Slavophilism and Westernism is all a great misunderstanding” expressed in the last months of his life in his famous Pushkin speech.<sup>18</sup> Both Dostoevsky and Putin wrestled with the complexities of Russian identity, and both eventually settled on the

answer that Russia's identity came in the end from its culture, history and people, not from east or west.

By identifying himself as *gosudarstvennichestvo*, Putin indicated that one of his major desires was to restore Russia to power, making it the kind of superpower of which Dostoevsky would have been proud. This desire manifested itself in reality on March 18, 2014, when Putin annexed Crimea, citing "the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus" in his speech justifying his actions.<sup>19</sup> The entire speech is filled with references to the common peoples of both Crimea and Russia, to Russian history, and to the shared culture of both countries. It sounds as if it could have been written by Dostoevsky himself, and indeed, there are many echoes to the writer's Pushkin speech, which espouses the "readiness and inclination [of Russia] for a common and universal union with all the races of the great Aryan family".<sup>20</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy note this move as evidence that "Putin's Russia was now a definitively revisionist power".<sup>21</sup> They rightly see this as proof that even if Putin may hate the Marxist economic theory upon which the USSR was founded upon, he envies its unquestionable power. Of course, the belief in the importance of "gathering together the Russian lands" stretches much further back than the USSR, and it is more likely that Putin was looking more to Dostoevsky than to Stalin or Lenin. While he remained publicly ambivalent about the latter two, he has expressed praise for the former on several occasions.<sup>22</sup> From the similarities in their beliefs, evident in the similarities in their speeches, it is clear that Dostoevsky's legacy played a large influence on Putin.

### The Russian Orthodox Church

Evidence of this influence can be found in Putin's domestic, as well as foreign, policy.

Restoring Russia to its former glory did not just constitute a land-grab in Putin's mind; it also involved a “spiritual Renaissance of Russia”, and a restoration of traditional Russian culture and traditional Orthodox values.<sup>23</sup> “In Putin’s conception” write Hill and Gaddy, “there were two categories of countries[:] genuinely sovereign countries...that were strong enough in terms of history, culture, and identity...to assert their own interest independently...[and] everyone else” (317). Clearly, Russian culture was something that Putin considered intrinsic to the very concept of Russian statehood; if he wanted to truly rebuild the state, then that would require a revitalization of culture. During the Soviet years, Russian history and culture had been choked by the state and Dostoevsky himself had been branded “a reactionary, a supporter of Czarism and Orthodoxy, a psychological, decadent, individualistic, and introspective writer”, all characteristics which were of course anathema under the Communist regime.<sup>24</sup> Again, Putin’s policies seek to return Russia to the age of czars, when Russian culture thrived.

The Russian Orthodox Church remains one of the greatest pillars of Russian culture. Dostoevsky fervently believed in the power of the Orthodox Church, especially as something greater than all other forms of Christianity, which he deemed “Western Christianity”. Mochulsky mentions how Dostoevsky “set the Russian ‘God and Christ’ ...sharply set in opposition to the Catholic West”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, some of Dostoevsky’s most beatific and good characters are deeply religious, from Sonya in *Crime and Punishment* to Elder Zosima and Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Putin desired to associate his rule with the Orthodox Church, and carefully cultivated an image of himself as a churchgoing man.<sup>26</sup> This allowed Putin to cast his internal enemies and detractors as enemies of Russia itself. He cited Pushkin by name in a speech about the Russian intelligentsia, and a statement that Pushkin once made about “people who stand in

opposition not to the government, but to Russia”<sup>27</sup>. This desire to associate with the Church manifested in Putin’s policy towards homosexuality. Under Putin, Russia’s legislature passed several new anti-gay laws, including one designed to prevent “homosexual propaganda”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Putin viewed the “demographic problems” (notably a declining birthrate) of the country as having a root in a lack of morality and homosexuality, leading him to the almost Dostoevskian belief that the Church served as the best solution.<sup>29</sup>

At first glance this elevation of the Orthodox Church may seem another continuation of Dostoevsky’s legacy; however it is here that Putin first strays from Dostoevsky’s beliefs. While Dostoevsky certainly felt a great love and respect for both Russia as a state and the Russian Orthodox Church, he did not believe that they should ever be even tacitly united. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan, the middle child and radical atheist, proposes at one point the establishment of ecclesiastical courts, essentially merging Church and state.<sup>30</sup> Ivan’s idea travels far, reaching even the wise Elder Zosima, who responds to the idea with disapproval.<sup>31</sup> In Zosima’s mind, ecclesiastical courts would force the Church to assume the role of the state and punish criminals, through imprisonment, death or exile.<sup>32</sup> The last strikes Zosima as the most harmful, as a man may be cut off from society, but he can never truly be cut off from the Church.<sup>33</sup> The merging of the two would, unfortunately, force just that to occur. Throughout the book, Ivan is presented as an overeducated fool, a man who is too smart to realize the dangerousness of his own ideas put into action, as seen in their dark influence upon the boys of the village and Smerdyakov. Zosima, on the other hand, is presented as a kind, loving father-figure to Alyosha, and a beloved figure among the villagers. Therefore, it is obvious that Zosima would espouse Dostoevsky’s own opinion. Ivan certainly doesn’t — as an intellectual, an atheist and a socialist he represents

everything that Dostoevsky despises. Of course, Putin's engagement with the Church does not approach the establishment of ecclesiastical courts, but the principle of setting the state's enemies against the Church as well is extremely similar.

Here again, Putin's actions hearken back to a pre-Communist past, recalling the Caesaropapist tendencies of past rulers. Under Putin, the Church has crept closer and closer to the state, and closer and closer to violating the 1993 Russian constitution, which explicitly prohibits the merging of the two.<sup>34</sup> Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the Tsar ruled Russia as the heads of the spiritual and political apparatuses of the country respectively. Occasionally, as in the case of Ivan the Terrible and Phillip II, Metropolitan of Moscow, the two came into conflict. Before the reforms of Peter the Great, which severely curtailed the Church's power, placing much of it under the authority of the state, the two existed equally, even if they did not always rule in harmony.<sup>35</sup> Today, Zoe Knox describes the Russian Orthodox Church as a "pseudo-state church", lacking the formal cooperation that it enjoyed with the state in the past, but still significantly closer to the government than the churches of most western nations.<sup>36</sup>

Under Putin, the Church has assumed more power than it has in decades, but it remains tied, politically and financially, to the state.<sup>37</sup> Putin has crept closer and closer to one of Dostoevsky's most memorable creations: the Grand Inquisitor, ruler of a wholly secular and politicized church-state, a man who has strayed so far from the teachings of God that he attempts to persecute Christ Himself. While some of Putin's actions may appear to have their roots in Dostoevsky's writing, the majority are geared towards the accumulation of power; any resemblance to history is merely window dressing. As James R. Millar notes, Putin resembles the

Grand Inquisitor in more ways than just his blurring of Church and state.<sup>38</sup> Putin has also begun to act like an “enlightened despot”, making many of his country’s economic and political decisions himself without anything more than the faintest nods towards democracy, similar to how the Inquisitor took the role of God, making decisions fit for more than one person upon himself.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

Putin’s similarities to the Inquisitor and Raskolnikov could be used as evidence that Dostoevsky’s legacy does in fact inform Putin’s rule, but that argument misses an obvious point: these are characters representing ideas which Dostoevsky hated. Raskolnikov finds himself tormented by his extreme intellectual ideas and by the crime that they drove him to; he only truly finds peace when he confesses to Sonya. The Grand Inquisitor surely represents everything that Dostoevsky loathed; after all, the Inquisitor is the product of Ivan Karamazov, the archetypal intellectual. Dostoevsky presents both the Grand Inquisitor and Raskolnikov as cold, worldly, rationality made flesh. Both, especially Raskolnikov, use logic to justify their decisions, neglecting love and spirituality from their life, and both are presented as fallen, earthly characters. Putin’s similarities to these two characters are evidence that his ideals are far from Dostoevsky’s.

Putin’s foreign and domestic policies represent the disparities between him and Dostoevsky as well. On the surface, it would appear that both Putin and Dostoevsky share many of the same beliefs; however, a closer look at their actions and words reveal that they actually differ on many crucial points. While Putin mainly embraced the Orthodox Church as a cudgel to wield against his enemies, Dostoevsky was a genuine Christian, whose faith informed his entire

life, as is evident to anyone who has read his books.<sup>40</sup> This surface-level belief in Dostoevskian ideas is characteristic of Putin's rule as a whole. It can also be seen in his annexation of Crimea. While Dostoevsky may well have advocated for Russian rule over all the Slavic peoples of Europe, his belief was "that to be a true Russian does indeed mean to aspire finally to reconcile the contradictions of Europe, to find resolution of European yearning in our pan-human and all-uniting Russian soul, to include within our soul by brotherly love all our brethren" bears little relation to Putin's aggression.<sup>41</sup> Putin cares little for the concept of brotherly love, let alone that of a pan-human soul.

On the surface, Dostoevsky has many similarities with Putin, and it is easy to see how the former could have informed the latter; however, this comparison misses the many contradictions between the two, and overly simplifies Dostoevsky's complicated, many-sided beliefs. Putin uses Dostoevsky in his speeches to justify his actions, but cherry-picks his legacy, discarding the parts which do not fit his agenda.<sup>42</sup> As Irving Howe notes, "part of the truth about Dostoevsky is that this extraordinarily sensitive man who trembles for the slightest creature can also be a coarse and brutal reactionary".<sup>43</sup> Putin has none of the sensitivity and all of the brutality. Furthermore, while Putin believes in the Russian soul, and that Russia should rule all Slavic peoples, he ignores Dostoevsky's fervent hope that one day the universality of the Russian soul will allow it to unite all of Europe in brotherly love. In fact, Dostoevsky's unironic belief in the power of love remains something which Putin never even pretended to agree with. There is nothing of Dostoevsky's idealists in Putin — nothing of Myshkin's compassion, nothing even of Razumikhin and his passionate optimism, or of his defense of his friends. If anything, Putin is an intellectual: cold and overly calculating, willing to exploit Russian religion, history and culture to claw his way to

absolute power. In truth, Putin is no true *gosudarstvennichestvo*. As his strategy with the Orthodox Church demonstrates, Putin cares about strengthening himself more than he does about strengthening Russia. A victim of political oppression in his own life, Dostoevsky hated autocrats, almost as much as he hated the idea of a Church-state. Sent to Siberia for writing against the czar, he certainly would have thought little for Putin, a man who cares far more about the political entity of Russia than he does about the cultural idea of it, or about the idea of the Russian state as divorced from politics. For all his contradictions, the one thing that is absolutely clear about Dostoevsky is that he loved his country, fully and passionately, a love untainted even by his strong political beliefs. He, if anyone, is the true *gosudarstvennichestvo*: his work has, perhaps more than that of any other Russian writer, created and sustained the culture of the nation that he loved so much. Both prophet and *gosudarstvennichestvo*, Dostoevsky both defined and augured Russia's future, a future which ended with the crowning of a man who, in an ironic twist of fate, warped and perverted Dostoevsky's legacy to suit his own authoritarian ends.

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Michel Eltchaninoff. *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin*, transl. by James Ferguson. United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2017, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky. "Pushkin Speech." Moscow festival in memory of the greatest Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, 20 June 1880, the Pushkin monument, Moscow. Memorial speech.

<sup>3</sup> Dostoevsky quoted in Konstantin Mochulsky and Michael A. Minihan. *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973, p. 571.

<sup>4</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy. *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2015. Print, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Kovalev, Andrei A., Steven I. Levine, and Peter Reddaway. "Conclusion." In *Russia's Dead End: An Insider's Testimony from Gorbachev to Putin*, 291. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.  
doi:10.2307/j.ctt1qv5pc5.14.

<sup>6</sup> Dostoevsky quoted in Mochulsky, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mochulsky, p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky et al. *Crime and Punishment: The Coulson Translation, Backgrounds and Sources*,

*Essays in Criticism*. Norton, 1989, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 221.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Putin. “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” 18 March 2014, the Kremlin, Moscow. Presidential address.

<sup>12</sup> Hill and Gaddy, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Hill and Gaddy, pp. 39-40.

<sup>14</sup> Hill and Gaddy, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Eltchaninoff, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Eltchaninoff, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky. “Pushkin Speech.” Moscow festival in memory of the greatest Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, 20 June 1880, the Pushkin monument, Moscow. Memorial speech.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Putin. “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” 18 March 2014, the Kremlin, Moscow. Presidential Address.

<sup>20</sup> Dostoevsky, “Pushkin speech.”

<sup>22</sup> Eltchaninoff, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> Putin quoted in Eltchaninoff, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Alberto Moravia. “From The Marx-Dostoevsky Duel.” Dostoevsky, Fyodor, et al. *Crime and Punishment: The Coulson Translation, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*. Norton, 1989, p. 620.

<sup>25</sup> Mochulsky, p. 404.

<sup>26</sup> Hill and Gaddy, pp. 67-68

<sup>27</sup> Hill and Gaddy, p. 254.

<sup>28</sup> *Gosduma* quoted in Eltchaninoff, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Eltchaninoff, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, Susan McReynolds Oddo, et al. *The Brothers Karamazov: A Revised Translation, Contexts, Criticism*. 2nd ed, W. W. Norton & Co., 2011, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Dostoevsky, Oddo, et al., p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Zoe Knox. “The Symphonic Ideal: The Moscow Patriarchate’s Post-Soviet Leadership.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2003, pp. 575-596. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3594548](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594548)

<sup>35</sup> Knox, p. 576.

<sup>36</sup> Knox, p. 591.

<sup>37</sup> Knox, p. 576.

<sup>38</sup> James R. Miller (2007) Reading Putin in Russian and Soviet Literature, Problems of Post-Communism, 54:5, pp. 52-56.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> Hill and Gaddy, p. 255.

<sup>41</sup> Dostoevsky, Pushkin Speech.

<sup>42</sup> Eltchaninoff, pp. 114-115.

<sup>43</sup> Irving Howe. "Dostoevsky: The Politics of Salvation." Gambier, Ohio: *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1955, pp. 42-68.