

MACHIAVELLI, BURCKHARDT,  
AND THE MAKING OF  
FLORENTINE HISTORICAL IDENTITY

*Introduction*

Terms of reference commonly used to identify peoples in history, such as 'nation', 'state', 'ethnicity' and 'community', have of late acquired a renewed importance for anthropology. On the right relation of these terms rests much of the attempt to reformulate our subject as a central contribution to the study of complex societies. This is not a new aspiration. But it has been given new urgency and possibility by the volatile activities of ethnic and religious groups in contemporary societies, which have renewed consciousness both of the artificiality of the political units and structures in which we live, and of the relatively recent construction of these units in Europe, as elsewhere. This consciousness has come at the very time that kindred subjects, such as population studies and economic and social history, have been exploring the possibility that analyses based more closely on the institutions and values of particular communities and cultures may have greater explanatory power than the large, standard units - typically nation-states - commonly used hitherto. The way European history is written has begun to change accordingly.<sup>1</sup> There is thus at

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<sup>1</sup> The impact of local history, especially following the stimulus of historical demography, may be seen in a wide range of 'macro-level' analyses, from the primarily demographic (Coale and Watkins 1986) to those addressed to major social and economic transformations (Aston and Philpin 1985).

at present a potent intellectual, as well as topical, stimulus for anthropological collaboration on the nature of collective identities and their transformations over time.

Anthropology is not, of course, the simple beneficiary of these trends. It is itself a field of Western historiography which came into prominence in the nineteenth century in conjunction with the two main configurations called into question by the developments just mentioned: the ideological sanctity of the nation-state, and the idea that all countries should progress according to models of rapid economic growth. To the first, anthropology made important contributions in the form of cultural materials with which nationalism could be fashioned, for example, folklore, philology and evolutionary theories of man's social and biological development, as well as in connection with colonial administration. With regard to the second, anthropology has long shared in a wider, instrumental attitude to culture which sees differences between peoples as a consequence of characteristic historical solutions to practical problems, for example in relations between the sexes, or in the organisation of labour. As Sahlins remarks (1976), this attitude is a founding and reductive impulse underlying the subject from the nineteenth-century evolutionists to Malinowski and into the post-war era.

As both the cohesion of ethnic and national entities and the panacea of modernisation have come increasingly into question, the ambivalent position of anthropology - on the one hand, championing the causes of particular peoples while, on the other, seeking a role in the lucrative business of development studies - has been increasingly exposed to view. Anthropology's role in the creation of collective identities, past and present, deserves further scrutiny. This article considers a positive side of anthropology's nineteenth-century legacy in the field of ethnic and state formation. My procedure will be to examine in depth the accuracy of the view which Jacob Burckhardt (1958), perhaps anthropology's most distinguished forebear in this field of study,<sup>2</sup> put forward of Machiavelli's *History of Florence*. The interest of Machiavelli's analysis is not only that it provides a model discussion of the role of kin and related vital systems in the formation of states which stands up very well to what recent anthropology and historical demography have to say about renaissance Italy; central to his *History* is a thesis which has been presented of late (*pace* Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Chatterjee 1986) as an anthropological contribution breaking new ground in the study of nationalism and state formation, viz., the analysis of nations and states as imagined communities, seeming fabrications and ideological constructs.

The stage is set by a brief review of the common ground between recent social anthropology and the historical study of nationalism. Both stress that collective identities are selective and artificial constructs. Both incline to a critical attitude, especially as the history of peoples' 'self-determination' often

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<sup>2</sup> On Burckhardt's anthropological contribution see Kroeber (1952: 144-51).

suggests that identities are purpose-built for the interests of elite groups. When the debris left by such deconstructions are cleared away, a second point emerges: central to the seeming artifice of ethnic and national identities are matters in which anthropologists have long specialised, notably peoples' use of vital relations in marriage, kinship and natural symbolism as an idiom with which to determine group composition and legitimate identity.

The theme of seeming artifice which unites recent approaches finds a common progenitor in the figure of Jacob Burckhardt, the nineteenth-century cultural historian still recognised for establishing renaissance Italy as the veritable fount of Western culture. Historians, philosophers and others continue to follow Burckhardt in assigning to renaissance Florence three fundamental developments in Western historiography: the transition to the modern idea of the state, the transition from chronicle writing to history, and the emergence of statistical records as arbiters of group identity over time (Burckhardt 1958: 95ff. and 247-51).<sup>3</sup> One of the questions which interested Burckhardt was how it was possible for the Florentines to take these steps in the fraught context of the petty tyrannies, precarious republics and greater dynasties of the time, in which cities and states (Florence, Venice, Lucca, Pisa etc.) were more or less continuously at war. Or, as we might phrase it now: how did the idea of the modern state and its history first emerge from a context of ethnic rivalries?

This prologue leads on to the *storia* itself, in the Florentine version which Machiavelli completed in 1527 (1977b). I have focussed on his account for three reasons which mirror the three developments just mentioned. First, the theory of the state to which Burckhardt refers is, of course, Machiavelli's. Secondly, Machiavelli's *History* was written after, and in the light of, his principal essay on the state, *The Discourses* of 1517 (1977a), and it is now regarded as interesting historiographically for catching contemporary changes in the methods and purposes of history-writing in mid-transition (Philips 1979). Thirdly, the *History* is in essential respects a record of families. Florence is shown to be composed of them and of the factions and classes made up and led by certain of them. The story of Florence consists of alliances and dissensions articulated by marriages, deaths, departures and returns, and new generations. The story is told replete with vital imagery. It is therefore appropriate to assess Machiavelli's account (and thereby Burckhardt's) by comparing it with the historical demography and ethnography of Florentine family systems on the basis of the statistical and genealogical records which Machiavelli and his contemporaries kept.

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<sup>3</sup> On the transition to modern political concepts, see the summary remarks by Skinner (1978: II, 349-54); on historiography, Wilcox 1969; on statistics, Volle 1980.

1. *'The State as a Work of Art'*

Why do the nations so furiously rage together,  
And why do the people imagine a vain thing?

Psalms 2: 1

Although the relation between two of the above-mentioned terms - ethnicity and state - now seems to excite most interest, the leit-motiv of this relation remains the cult of national identity, or nationalism, a nineteenth-century invention.<sup>4</sup> Nationalism proposes a number of criteria as incumbent in national membership and as legitimising the claims of national movements which ethnographers have recognised in the self-definition of groups more generally. These criteria come in varying combinations, according to case: common birthright, elaborated in terms of blood, race or other symbolism of natural and vital processes; common language, territory or longstanding historical association, pointing possibly to autochthonous origins; identification of the individual with the collective good, such that group betterment is the product of individual moral agency; and investment of criteria such as these with intrinsic and sacred significance. Nationalism transforms these conventions by projecting them on a large scale, claiming that groups so constituted have, automatically and everywhere, the right to self-determination.

Much scholarly energy has been devoted to deconstructing theories of self-determination. The impression which first emerges from the many attempts to step back and compare histories of ethnic and national populations is of the great vanity of this concept. First, there is futility: in most cases these populations do not attain the statehood 'promised' by nationalism (Gellner 1983: 43ff; Kedourie 1961: 99-101). Secondly, there is conceit: the argument that self-determination derives from transcendental sources (natural right, divine sanction) or primordial ones (autochthonous origin, linguistic purity, ancient enmity) is also a glorification and may appear to place the legitimacy of national and ethnic identities beyond discussion. The third impression is of insubstantiality. The right to ethnic and national self-determination is claimed usually by some part of a population, often privileged.

Legacies of the period of European imperial expansion and contraction provide familiar examples of ways in which advantaged groups may be created: administrative and military castes drawn selectively from local populations; radical differences between families and communities consequent upon the unequal colonial development of local resources; the division of cultural allegiances between parochial interests and the European metropole; and the division of peoples by a crazy quilt-work of colonial-cum-national boundaries. Where criteria of territory, descent and privilege have proved historically pliable, claims to transcendental and primordial

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<sup>4</sup> Kedourie (1961) gives a concise review; for more recent discussion, see Anderson 1983 and Chatterjee 1986.

rights are likely to appear cynical. Indeed if peoples' identities are bound up in particular historical divisions, histories and anti-histories, they could as well be described as formed out of mutual dependence as by self-determination. But if avowed self-determination is so transparently vain in all these ways, we are even further from an explanation of why people should imagine themselves thus with so much energy through so much of history.

Pointing out the historicity of ethnic and national bodies does not put an end to the matter, since whatever historical trap-pings people adopt, their faiths, grievances and perceived room for manoeuvre become constraints in terms of which they live. And it becomes necessary for them to conceive a course of action or rationale, however contrived, for dealing with these constraints. Some are perhaps more grandiose, and harmful, than others. As Burckhardt says:

The modern political spirit, surrendered freely to its own instincts, often display[s] the worst features of an unbridled egoism, outraging every right, and killing every germ of a healthier culture. But wherever this vicious tendency is overcome or in any way compensated a new fact appears in history - the State as the outcome of reflection and calculation, the State as a work of art (1958: 22).

When we examine the 'success stories' of 'self-determination' - meaning those groups that have attained statehood - their existence appears bound up with conceit and selective dependence no less than the stories of those peoples still seen as living under the yoke of others.

The boundaries of contemporary Latin American states still provide occasions for nationalist fervour, as recent events show. Their origin lies in no higher principle than the administrative convenience of the old Spanish colonial provinces, which the small 'revolutionary' strata of merchants and landowners retained when they ousted the Spanish in the early nineteenth century. As Anderson remarks (1983: 50), all of these states, and likewise the U.S.A., 'were creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and a common descent with those against whom they fought' - 'creole' here being defined as persons 'of (at least theoretically) pure European descent, but born in the Americas'. Creole society intermingled, of course, with indigenous Indian and black slave populations, on whose land and labour it depended. And creole identities, whether cast in terms of liberation, colonialism or race, are still defined in opposition to these other groups.

Another oft-cited case is Japan. The small group of samurai who seized power in 1868 did so in order to restore the imperial dynasty and secure Japanese sovereignty against European encroachment. The dynastic principle was matched by the oligarchic consolidation of the families of these men, secured by group-centred marital and financial controls, the disenfranchisement of their fellow samurai as a legitimate power-holding class and the importation of English cultural and Prussian administrative and military

models.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, this group was able to act effectively against the majority of its fellow samurai because the class as a whole had come to be associated with ineffectual resistance to European influence. A selectively revitalised and modernised Japanese identity was subsequently turned, in a series of wars from 1894 onwards, against precisely those groups to which the Japanese traditionally opposed themselves (Chinese, Koreans) and against the more recent barbarian presence (Dutch, American, Russian, British) to which Japanese imperialist nationalism was by now related.

## 2. *Images of Collective Vitality*

Anthropologists may look equably on the extrapolation of common descent, dynasticism and similar vital charters in modern national and international affairs, of which the Japanese and Argentinian cases are examples. Almost forty years have passed since Lévi-Strauss reminded us that the names and faces composing groups may change, their alliances and antipathies may be expressed by different means and in different media, but their systematic nature can only be understood because the logic of oppositions endures. And it was Lévi-Strauss (1969) who insisted that the imaginative use of vital processes constitutes the elemental stratum of legitimate group identity.

To build up groups solely and strictly by natural means - i.e. fertility - is a gradual process, although a certain momentum may be acquired with time. Substantial common identity, population size, structure and reproductive capacity may, however, be acquired rapidly by reclassification: where, for example, speakers of related dialects may be said to share a common language, and therefore to constitute one group; where provisional arrangements consequent on different peoples moving into a new setting come with time to constitute a genealogy of group relations; or where genealogical segmentation, marriage alliance, fictive kinship and similar devices commonly used in domestic and community relations across a wide historical and territorial extent are seen as constituting one family, blood, polity, race or nation.

It is not surprising, then, that images of collective vitality should retain their integrative value in modern settings. The selective construction of historical identities remains at base a relation between the reproduction of groups (whatever the means employed) and the displacements of circumstance. The wider purview in which anthropologists are accustomed to seeing these definitional processes should encourage us to separate the 'imagined' character - or in Burckhardt's phrase, the 'artfulness' - of ethnic and state communalities from the limited historical perspective of nationalism and its critique. The latter comprise a relatively

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<sup>5</sup> There is a careful portrait of the evolution of this process in the first volume of Mishima's *The Sea of Fertility* (1976); more generally, see Anderson (1983: 89-93).

recent development of a much older, recurring process.

Lévi-Strauss has not, however, left us with a comprehensive theory of the transformations which occur in the idiom of collective vitality with the emergence of complex societies. The modern re-working of vital idioms as a basis of larger political identities should surely occupy an important place in such a theory. Indeed, anthropology in important respects begins with this problem.

The emergence of European civilisation greatly occupied the evolutionary theorists of the later nineteenth century, to whom the beginnings of anthropology and its interest in society as imagined in terms of vital processes are now customarily attributed. In explaining the moral and material progress of Western society, writers such as Bachofen, Morgan and McLennan stressed the emergence of monogamy from the inchoate corporate sexuality and solidarity which they supposed to characterise primitive peoples. They correlated with successive stages of this evolution the gradual emergence of definitive features of advanced social and political organisation, such as the development of private property from corporate family holdings and the formation of civil societies as opposed to those based on sacred and familial law.<sup>6</sup> The logic of marriage, kinship and family as the basis of collective action was traced in ancient legal, tribal and city structures and contrasted with the growth of individualism, natural law and Christianity, which were thought to effect their breakdown (e.g. Fustel de Coulanges, n.d. [1864]; Maine 1963). The artifice inherent in peoples' self-constructions is a recurring source of wonder, and often admiration, in these writings. In passing, we may call particular attention to Maine's point that civilisation only became possible by the elaboration of legal fictions, especially adoption (which allows the artificial creation of family ties) and the incorporation of foreigners (from which developed the *ius gentium*) (1963: 24-6).

Burckhardt's renaissance studies, written in the same period as these anthropological classics, stand in an important relation to them. The methods followed by Burckhardt's contemporaries generally combined fragmentary observation of contemporary 'savage' peoples with philological and exegetical study of ancient texts in order to project general histories of mankind in the form of successive stages and types of civilisation. Burckhardt's focus in history was later, and more confined. Where his contemporaries devised stages leading up to modern civilisation, he identified Florence and Venice as sites in which the emergence of modernity could best be observed. Available to Burckhardt in these places were archival sources which included many contrasting period accounts: family histories, government papers, property taxes, diaries and the successive chronicles and histories written by and of the inhabitants. These sources permitted a different approach to historical change from the teleologies written by his contemporaries, in which each stage of civilisation, having sown the seeds of its own internal contradictions, found itself revealed and, *ipso facto*, overthrown by its successor. Instead, the Florentines themselves became agents

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<sup>6</sup> The liveliest short survey of these arguments remains that by Engels (1971: 17-18).

in history: creators of their state and its institutions, developers of their own individual characters and conscious contributors to the place of Florence in history. In Burckhardt's approach, modern developments, although contrary to older family and factional loyalties, do not simply displace them: they are not mutually exclusive, even if contrary; they exist simultaneously even if evolved differentially. In his view (1958: I, 102-4), the greatest exponent of this vision of state formation, 'as a living organism', was Machiavelli.

### 3. *The Vital Model in Machiavelli*

Niccolò Machiavelli, writing the history of his native Florence, begins with a remark on a seemingly disparate subject, the great fecundity of northern Europe.<sup>7</sup> His observation was, however, pointed and political in a way unlikely to be lost on his contemporaries. The barbarian invasions which brought down the western Roman Empire were echoed in the overweening power which French and German princes exercised in Italy, down to Machiavelli's own time. He considered the excess reproduction of northern manpower, together with the discipline with which it could be deployed, a worthy subject for contemplation by Florentines and other peoples concerned to preserve themselves. The greatness of Florence was, in sharp contrast, marred by internal dissensions. The factional politics of its major and minor families divided and reduced its numbers, and weakened its resolve. The consequences were manifest particularly in its external relations: the disadvantageous pay-offs and treaties into which it entered in order to retain at least some of its interests and the insufficiency of its army, which forced it to rely on mercenaries and foreign generals.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Istorie*, p. 72; *History*, p. 35. In this and the references that follow I have, for the convenience of the reader, given pages both in the *Istorie* (1977 [1527]) and its translation *History* (1891 [1527]); parallel arguments in the *Prince* (1952 [1517]) and *Discourses* (1950 [1517]) are indicated by chapter number and book and discourse numbers respectively.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Istorie*, pp. 224, 252, 286-8; *History*, pp. 147, 168, 197-9. The association of the greatness of peoples with their demography is fundamental to one of Machiavelli's best known themes, that states are founded and endure according to their innate force, especially force of arms. For this reason an expanding population is necessary to cities and states (*Istorie*, pp. 72, 137-8; *History*, pp. 35, 80-1; *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 6; bk. ii, discs. 3, 4, 8, 19; *Prince*, chs. x, xxvi). Conversely, mercenaries and foreign assistance are in general to be avoided; either they fail to do your bidding, or their success leaves you at the mercy of their superior force (*Istorie*, pp. 134-6, 416-19; *History*, pp. 79, 300;



According to Machiavelli, the peoples of northern Europe, wishing to resolve their population surplus while preserving and perpetuating greatness, divided their numbers without internal strife by mobilising large segments of the population for military expeditions in which they established colonies and new states. The founding and early history of Florence had been similar. Machiavelli writes:

Amongst the great and admirable orders of former kingdoms and commonwealths (though in our times it is discontinued and lost) it was the custom upon every occasion to build new towns and cities; and indeed nothing is more worthy and becoming an excellent prince, a well-disposed commonwealth, nor more for the interest and advantage of a province, than to erect new towns, where men may cohabit with more convenience, both for agriculture and defence. For besides the beauty and ornament which follows upon that custom, it rendered such provinces as were conquered more dutiful and secure to the conqueror, planted the void places, and made a commodious distribution of the people; upon which, living regularly and in order, they did not only multiply faster, but were more ready to invade and more able for defence.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the greatness (*grandezza*) and fecundity (*generativa*) of peoples is not mere reproductive abundance, but their orderly development in all spheres, underwritten by the capacities inherent in an expanding population. Put another way: the historical identity of peoples consists in their relative greatness.

The means by which greatness may be acquired and held is a central theme in all three of Machiavelli's major works,<sup>10</sup> and in this

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*Discourses*, bk. i, discs. 21, 43; bk. ii, discs. 10, 11, 20, 30, 31; bk. iii, disc. 43; *Prince*, chs. xii, xiii.

<sup>9</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 137-8; *History*, pp. 80-81; *Discourses*, bk. ii, disc. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Greatness is emphasised particularly in Machiavelli's Preface to the *History* (*Istorie*, pp. 68-71; *History*, pp. 22-5). In the text he applies *grandezza* to individuals (e.g. *Istorie*, pp. 400, 543; *History*, pp. 287, 393), families (e.g. *Istorie*, pp. 251, 486, 509; *History*, pp. 167, 352, 370), and states (e.g. *Istorie*, pp. 70, 83, 332, 542; *History*, pp. 25, 42, 232, 393); likewise *Prince* (Preface, chs. iii, xix, xxvi) and *Discourses* (bk. i, discs. 6, 33; bk. ii, disc. 13).

This listing is not exhaustive and represents only a small part of Machiavelli's treatment of the theme, since he makes use of a variety of expressions, only some of which can be considered in a short paper. For instance, terms referring to ruling groups (e.g. *grandi*, *potenti*) suggest greatness, especially as they are cognate with descriptive phrases such as *popolata e potente*, *grandi e maravigliosi*, *grande e potentissime*, *fatto grandissimo* etc., which refer not only to ruling groups but to those they lead; yet it is clear from his consistently negative reference to ruling factions

respect, at least, his interest in Italian history follows period convention. As Gilbert (1977: 140) notes, when Giulio Medici commissioned Machiavelli to write a history of Florence in 1520, he was following a practice which ruling factions had adopted in the preceding century. Vernacular chroniclers, over an even longer period, had written to perpetuate the memory of great persons and events, mythical origins and divine interventions, in terms of which the virtue and continuity of city-states was demonstrated (Green 1972). The revival of classical models in the fifteenth century reordered these accounts in linear narratives punctuated by observations and orations showing the greatness of peoples as conforming to broad natural, moral and political precepts. The point of history-writing remained closely bound up with the legitimacy which stylized reinterpretations of past greatness conferred on contemporary peoples and their leaders, and with the lessons of the past which could be seen in current affairs.

Machiavelli's *History* incorporates something of the best of both traditions. He inherited the theme of greatness not only from past Florentine chronicles, but from the main classical sources, Aristotle, Polybius and Livy. He used the vivid, if at times digressive style by which chroniclers compounded event on event to bring together elements of contemporary greatness and decline which illustrated classical themes: that families and peoples have an inherent moral and political character, also perpetuated in their customs and education;<sup>11</sup> that the histories of families and peoples

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(see note 13 below) that power and position do not automatically convey greatness. A related set of terms, having to do with strength (*forza*) and virtue (*virtù*), are considered below under note 31.

As might be expected, the informal and untechnical nature of Machiavelli's terminology requires attention to sets of terms, in the context of recurring examples to which they are applied. There are a number of perceptive studies which have developed this approach to which I am indebted: Gilbert 1984; Price 1982; and Wood 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Peoples may be identified by their abiding tendencies to republican or monarchical government (*Prince*, ch. v; *Discourses*, bk. ii, disc. 4). Machiavelli continually uses phrases which posit the vital nature of the state: *uno vivere politico*, *uno vivere civile*, *uno vivere libero*. Machiavelli remarks in the *Discourses* (bk. iii, discs. 43, 46) that fundamental and enduring differences characteristic of families and peoples do not spring solely from the blood (*nascere solamente dal sangue*), since intermarriage would bring about variation; hence one must look also to the preservation of family traditions, to which the considerable body of genealogical records and family histories kept by the Florentines attests (see, notably, Alberti 1969). Inherent characters are treated only in passing in the *History*, usually in terms of the strata into which families tend naturally to divide (e.g. *Istorie*, pp. 69, 213, 221; *History*, pp. 23, 139, 145). 'Virtue of arms' and 'generosity of

are like life cycles, the vitality of even the greatest being brought down by *umori* (humours, i.e. internal discord and conflict);<sup>12</sup> that these humours are natural tendencies 'arising from an ambition in one to command, and the aversion of others to obey';<sup>13</sup> and that humours proceed by means of self-interested conspiracies, secret payments and favoured family connexions (the *modi privati* of political action), as opposed to open military and administrative endeavours (the *modi publici*). Machiavelli's recurring example of the *modi privati* is Cosimo Medici.<sup>14</sup>

The bulk of the *History* recites a story of conflicts, amply illustrating these themes. Florentine dissensions began in a dispute between two families over a marriage contract.<sup>15</sup> The entire community divided into factions according to families supporting one side or the other, each having by tradition formed alliances within and without the city. As opponents multiplied, so did occasions for slights, injuries and violence. A recurring pattern of feud involving conspiracy, assassination, war and the flight of families, either temporarily or in permanent migration ensued. The success or failure of any one family induced other family realignments and sometimes the absorption of the domains of defeated parties, at least until those expelled had reorganised and enlisted sufficient external and internal support to make a return or there were other shifts in familial politics. Machiavelli remarks that in each Italian state the affairs of the whole are determined by a small number of families or their heads, amounting to no more than forty or fifty citizens; as the survival of any one family perpetuates the memory of conflict, so the conflict itself is perpetuated.<sup>16</sup>

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minds', for example, are said to spring naturally only from *i nobili* (nobility), as opposed to *il popolo* (citizens, including many ruling families such as the Medici) and *la multitude* (the masses, also called *le plebe*, *gli'ignobili* etc.) (*Istorie*, p. 213; *History*, p. 139). All groups tend to haughtiness and insolence when in power (e.g. *Istorie*, p. 221; *History*, p. 145).

<sup>12</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 325-7; *History*, pp. 227-8; *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Istorie*, p. 212; *History*, p. 138. Machiavelli uses *umori* to describe dissension and fighting generally; although particular individuals and families are sometimes picked out (*Istorie*, pp. 160, 290, 308; *History*, pp. 97, 199, 213-4), reference is usually to the shifting factions in which families are allied (*Istorie*, pp. 212, 261, 271-3; *History*, pp. 138, 176, 184-5).

<sup>14</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 451-3; *History*, pp. 326-7; *Discourses*, bk. iii, disc. 28. On Cosimo see: *Istorie*, pp. 308-16, 453-63; *History*, pp. 213-20, 327-35; *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 33.

<sup>15</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 142ff.; *History*, pp. 83ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 16; *Prince*, ch. xiii.

Given that Machiavelli lays such stress on the mortal dangers which dissensions carry for states, it is at first puzzling that he attributes greatness not only to states, but to persons, families and ruling groups which are the very agencies of internal division. It is clear from his examples that he expects the interests of these entities to conflict. 'There was no greatness to which [Florence] might not have arrived', he remarks, 'had it not been obstructed by new and frequent dissensions'.<sup>17</sup> Discord provided enemies with opportunities: 'the Venetians were jealous of no other obstruction to their greatness but the union of those [i.e. Medician and anti-Medician] parties', and so they assisted Cosimo when he was briefly in exile.<sup>18</sup> Discord weakened the Italian states collectively: the famous division between the Guelphs and Ghibellines (i.e. Church and Imperial factions), when it spread from other states to Florence, simply followed lines already laid down by local family dissensions and became an aspect of their perpetuation.<sup>19</sup> When we turn to the families and followings to which the successive 'malignant and factious humours' and 'dangerous and mortal diseases' of state are attributed - the Buondelmonte and Uberti, the Donati and Cerchi, the Ricci and Albizzi, and the Medici - these groups are described as *grandezza, famiglie potentissime, ricchezza, nobilit  ed uomini potentissime*; but also in terms of *ambizione* (ambition), *superbia* (haughtiness), and *insolencia* (insolence).

The issues raised in Machiavelli's *History* are thus something more than customary period historiography. It is true that he upholds convention by maintaining the central theme of greatness: there is praise of many past Florentine values, institutions and actions, including several fulsome passages about the Medici, and his book was addressed by convention as well as commission to members of that ruling family, whose present power doubtless inclined them to join in deploring the dangers implied by continuing dissension. However, the priority and significance which Machiavelli gives to dissent separates his account from those of his peers. Apparently Machiavelli wrote a history of greatness which lays primary emphasis on tumult and decline!

In his preface, Machiavelli cites the 'dissensions, intrinsic animosities and the effects which followed from them' as the main justification for his work, and he goes so far as to say that 'if anything in history be delightful or profitable, it is those particular descriptions'.<sup>20</sup> The paradox is, however, only apparent, as Skinner (1978: I, 181) points out with regard to a parallel section of the *Discourses*:

Machiavelli starts out from the orthodox assumption that one of the main aims of any Republic which values its liberty must

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<sup>17</sup> *Istorie*, p. 146; *History*, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> *Istorie*, p. 332; *History*, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 143-4; *History*, p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> *Istorie*, p. 69; *History*, p. 23.

be to prevent any one section of the populace from seeking to legislate in its own selfish interests. He then suggests that, if we genuinely accept this argument, we cannot at the same time uphold the conventional view that 'tumults' and civic discords are inevitably damaging to the freedom of a Republic.

How, then, does Machiavelli reconcile the two images of greatness he presents: one in which the inherent vitality of states is weakened, perhaps fatally, by internal conflict, and the other in which this vitality owes its existence to the same source?

### 3.1 Grandezza

Given the volatility of families, factions and states, it is not surprising that the legitimacy of rule should be contentious and that people seek to have the interpretations and lessons of historians in their employ. The historian does not, however, gain much control over the interpretative process. 'Actions which carry greatness', Machiavelli observes, 'however they are performed, or whatever their outcomes, always seem to bring men more honour than blame.'<sup>21</sup> In other words, greatness has a self-defining tendency. For example, we may imagine a group which gradually establishes a hold on legitimate power. It thereby attains a position from which it can influence subsequent events. If it successfully aligns itself with tradition and keeps its external and internal opponents at bay while representing themselves as ill and divisive humours, that group then *becomes* great. The failure of such groups to emerge over time likewise becomes proof of the absence of greatness in a given people. Evidently, such 'self-determination' allows considerable scope for the abuse of power.

The historiography of greatness thus returns us to the several elements of modern ethnic and national identity outlined in Section One. Greatness involves: (1) an appeal to inherent characters; (2) an original vitality of peoples and places; (3) the manipulation of historical ties of descent and marriage; (4) a central role assigned to the moral and political agency of certain individuals and the small, privileged factions to which they belong; and (5) the artful interpretation of (1), (2) and (3) according to the dictates of (4). The onus in accounting for greatness is plainly on the nature of the 'artful interpretation'.

Two general sorts of artifice are recognised in the *History*, both pertaining directly to greatness. Machiavelli uses *industria* to refer to the products of men's imaginations and labours, which distinguish the man-made from the natural. As we have seen, greatness owes not simply to having a large population or a fertile spot, but to the more or less systematic development with which people build upon their vital charters. The other meaning of artifice is

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<sup>21</sup> *Istorie*, p. 71; *History*, p. 25.

deception, for which Machiavelli adopts several terms: *frode* (fraud), *inganno* (deceit), *congiure* (conspiracy) and *intenzione* (design). The grey area in which these two general meanings overlap is very important to Machiavelli for, as we have seen, at the basis of his concept of history are animosities intrinsic to peoples in both their greatness and their decline, in consequence of which they enter into plots against one another. Are there points, then, at which the development of vital, intrinsic sources of greatness require deception in the affairs of men? In what circumstances do such actions destroy greatness? These questions arise in Machiavelli's discussion of each of the elements of greatness just listed.

#### a) Vital Charters

The Florentines, Romans and northern Europeans were great, in the first instance, because of their fecundity and fertile situation; their 'arts' were the military discipline with which they expanded upon them. Pisa and Venice, in contrast, became great despite their 'malignant', 'sickly and waterish' locations. Their greatness was made possible by an influx of peoples: Genoan refugees fleeing the Saracens turned Pisa from a minor to an important local force, and Venice was created as a free republic out of diverse groups fleeing the successive invasions of Italy that began with Attila.<sup>22</sup> On close inspection, however, the assimilation of foreigners turns out to be no less crucial to the greatness of Florence. Drawing upon mythologies given in the vernacular histories, Machiavelli says that Florence was established as a colony of Fiesole, but then peopled by Romans; it was then swelled by inhabitants from surrounding areas subsequently conquered, who were brought to Florence. When Machiavelli refers, for instance, to the Albizzi as an ancient Florentine family, their source turns out to be Arezzo. In the period between the fall of Rome and the establishment of the republic, Florence admitted a succession of foreign princes and their retainers.<sup>23</sup> The *generativa* of the early period of Florentine greatness relied, it appears, on a pattern of continuous assimilation.

Beneath these examples lies the paragon of the Roman republic, discussed at length in the *Discourses*. When the Romans gained military advantage over a neighbouring people, such as the Samnites, they granted them many rights of citizenship, entering into alliance with several of their families but retaining headship for themselves. In this way they increased their numbers and strength and obtained reliable allies in subsequent fights with the Latins and Etruscans, whom in due course they likewise made associates (*compagni*). When Rome subsequently expanded outside Italy, however, they established their sovereignty by making peoples in these places subjects (*suggetti*):

since they were used to living under kings. Those Italian

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<sup>22</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 77, 95, 120-21; *History*, pp. 38, 51, 68-70; *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 138-41, 146-7, 215; *History*, pp. 81-3, 87, 141.

*compagni* of Rome suddenly found themselves surrounded by Roman subjects, and oppressed by the great state, which Rome had become ... and when they saw the deception under which they had been living [*lo inganno sotto il quale erano vissuti*], it was too late to remedy their condition.<sup>24</sup>

Their rebellion succeeded only in reducing them to a subject status. Here, then, deception is the crux of Roman greatness, which proceeds by an adroit policy of absorbing the lives and identities of other peoples.

#### b) Virtù

When Machiavelli sets out the different kinds of state in the *Prince*, he distinguishes, first, peoples long under hereditary rule, those annexed by them, and new dynasts; in the second category are republics. Of the Italian instances of the first which he holds up to his readers, only a minor one, the Duke of Ferrara, was of a long-standing dynastic family. The main powers in Italy are all, as he says, *misti* (mixed): they acquired and retained rule by a combination of fairness, force and connivance in which they made their subjects' best interests at least appear to coincide with their own. King Alfonso of Aragon could successfully annex Naples because the people were long accustomed to dynastic rule; Francesco Sforza, a hired general, acceded by force and marriage to the Duchy of Milan on the death of the last reigning male descendant of the ruling Visconti family; the Visconti had attained their power previously by similar means.<sup>25</sup> In respect of republics, the main case is of course Florence. There, following the success of the *modi privati* of Cosimo, a merchant family retained its power by artfully preserving a facade of republican institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Such a view of the 'art' of statecraft may well appear to end in cynicism. Machiavelli attributes the following argument to a successful *agent provocateur*:

observe the ways and progress of the world; you will find the rich, the great, and the potent arrive at all that wealth, and greatness, and authority, by violence or fraud; and when once they are possessed, you will see with what confidence and security they gild over the brutality of their usurpations, with the unjust (but glorious) title of acquests.<sup>27</sup>

Such sentiments have often been thought to represent Machiavelli's own view, but the admiration he sometimes expresses for the Sforzas and Medici of the world reflects his candid assessment of their historical role: their strength is the due consequence of other

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<sup>24</sup> *Discourses*, bk. ii, discs. 4, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 118-19; *History*, p. 67; *Prince*, chs. i, ii.

<sup>26</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 454ff.; *History*, pp. 328ff.

<sup>27</sup> *Istorie*, p. 328; *History*, pp. 157-8.

people's relative weakness and the dissipating effects of dissensions. Thus the inherent vitality of peoples which, as we have seen, may be developed by the adroit use of foreign personnel, may also be usurped and directed by foreigners. Although Machiavelli notes these facts with all candour, he does not prefer them, especially with regard to Florence, as is shown by his scathing criticism of the use of mercenaries and foreign generals, and his glowing recitation of the spontaneous indignation and violence with which the Florentines expelled would-be foreign despots, for example, Walter de Brienne in 1343.<sup>28</sup>

To this point we have seen that, in Machiavelli, the inherent vitality on which a people's greatness and identity rests reflect the growth and development of its population, their disposition towards certain forms of political organisation and the art with which leading groups make use of these vital resources. The association of greatness and vitality in Machiavelli is thus not fundamentally biological or genetic, but a politics and culture reflecting a contemporary picture of nature and man's place in it:

Nature having fixed no sublunary things, as soon as they arrive at their acme and perfection, being capable of no farther ascent, of necessity they decline. So, on the other side, when they are reduced to the lowest pitch of disorder, having no farther to descend, they recoil again to their former perfection: good laws degenerating into bad customs, and bad customs engendering good laws. For virtue begets peace: peace begets idleness; idleness, mutiny; and mutiny, destruction: and then *vice versa*, that ruin begets laws; these laws, virtue, and virtue begets honour and good success.<sup>29</sup>

Needless to say, cycles of greatness describe not only states, but families and persons.<sup>30</sup>

Machiavelli derived this cyclic picture from classical sources - as indeed he derived the Roman model of state expansion discussed above - and the Galenic imagery of bodily humours, both of which are aspects of such cycles. As Whitfield (1947: 92-105), Wood (1967: 160) and Gilbert (1984: 179) have all remarked, Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* (virtue) is central to the classical model. *Virtù* refers to the innate force of will in certain men, some 'indefinable inner force', as Gilbert says, which can be inculcated in the collectivity by education and military discipline. More generally, *virtù* refers to evidence of political and military ability, drive, efficiency and determination, such as follow from such capacities.<sup>31</sup> States may continue for a time on the foundation of laws

<sup>28</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 188-205; *History*, pp. 120-32.

<sup>29</sup> *Istorie*, p. 325; *History*, p. 327.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, *Istorie*, p. 251; *History*, pp. 167-8.

<sup>31</sup> On this see Price (1982: 443). Machiavelli also follows classical usage in opposing *virtù* to *fortuna* (fortune, destiny); in the *Prince* (ch. xxv) the natural analogy which underlies his model is



and government which the activities of virtuous men have given them; but they will fall, as the natural cycle is, into indolence and internal dissension, unless there is some necessity which makes them overcome their intrinsic animosities, at least in the short term. One solution is to induce necessity by artifice: a policy of permanent expansion is a good recipe for continued greatness, since it maintains discipline and increases a state relative to others.<sup>32</sup>

c) Congiure

Such a policy assumes, of course, a number of prior conditions: that it is in fact possible to overcome internal factionalism, and that the people have not already fallen prey to usurpers and tyrants, whether native or foreign. *Virtù* thus has to be manifested internally before it can be made a basis of relations between peoples or states. The overweening ambition of any one section of the populace must be restrained; where it has gained the upper hand, means must be found for its removal. Machiavelli addresses these issues again and again in his works, particularly under the heading of conspiracies, or *congiure*.<sup>33</sup>

The organisation of conspiracies follows a pattern that might be expected, on the basis of preceding discussion of the way in which greatness, or collective identity, is defined. Conspiracies are generally the work of a small number of men of standing (*uomini grandi o familiarissimi del principe*), who seek to gain control, or change the course, of affairs of state. Usually they have sustained, or fear, attacks on their greatness, which Machiavelli notes are perceived as attacks on basic sources of vitality: their persons and property, especially women's honour. Since the family is the first unit of organisation upon which all of these matters reflect, as well as the primary setting in which inherent character is transmitted, it is not surprising that injuries and conspiracies alike follow the tendencies shown by leading family members and extant patterns of descent and alliance. The cases on which Machiavelli dwells at length in the *History* - the assassinations of the Duke of Milan and of Giuliano Medici - follow in the first case from the honourable reaction of a group of young noblemen to the womanising and appropriations of the tyrant Duke, and in the second from the failure of a marriage alliance and a subsequent wrangle

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expressed in terms which return us to the starting-point of *generativa*: 'it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if you wish to master her, to conquer her by force; and it can be seen that she lets herself be overcome by the bold, rather than by those who proceed coldly'.

<sup>32</sup> *Discourses*, bk. ii, disc. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Walker remarks (Machiavelli 1950: II, 154-5) that Machiavelli's longest sections in the *Discourses* and the *Prince* are those on conspiracies; Machiavelli shows similar concern in the *History* by taking dissension as his central theme (*Discourses*, bk. iii, disc. 6; *Prince*, ch. xix; also for example, *Istorie*, pp. 199-201, 502-7, 512-25; *History*, pp. 127-9, 365-9, 372-81).

over property between the Medici and another potent Florentine family, the Pazzi. In both cases, an immediate moral and material incident provided a vehicle for a deeper and more widespread fear of tyranny.

The *virtù* necessary to carrying a conspiracy successfully to completion is similar in many respects to military discipline: discretion and courage rely on artful planning and execution, including a willingness to use fraud or other extraordinary means; powerful commitment follows from recognition that failure of the enterprise means the loss of everything; and danger drives conspiracy inevitably towards violent means, ending in the death or banishment of either conspirators or enemies.<sup>34</sup> Wood (1967: 165) notes that Machiavelli associates *virtù* especially with those who found, preserve or expand a state militarily, or those who conspire successfully to take and secure control over states.

Successful conspiracies, according to Machiavelli, are very rare. To begin with, 'one rarely comes across men so indignant at an unjust act as to endanger themselves by seeking vengeance'.<sup>35</sup> Even then, conspirators must have such mutual confidence that they are willing to lay down their lives for each other. There is also the matter of the self-defining quality of greatness: it is only advisable to contemplate conspiracy against a prince or faction if he or they are objects of general hatred, such as could lead to general endorsement of a conspiracy, should it succeed; but where such hatred exists, there may be an inclination to leave the task to others who appear better placed; and great men and evil tyrants alike, by their reputations, inspire fear and respect that will weaken the resolve of conspirators and encourage others to curry favour by informing on them. The failure of a conspiracy, in turn, strengthens the hand of ruling groups; and so on and so forth. All this returns us to the ground of intrinsic animosities which, by dividing a people, provide ample leverage for those factors which generally lead conspirators into disaster.

When we turn to the *History* and ask, 'Who conspires?', the answer is always: members of opposed families and of the factions in which they are allied. Machiavelli, in tracing the story of a given feud, carefully lists the families to be found on each side and sees in one incident the cyclic continuation of previous generations of animosities.<sup>36</sup> Again and again he remarks on the attempts

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<sup>34</sup> On the theme that necessity engenders virtue, compare examples of conspiracy (for example, *Istorie*, pp. 301-5; *History*, pp. 364-9) with Machiavelli's comments on military prowess (for example, *Discourses*, bk. iii, discs. 8, 12). Just as conspirators may resort to secrecy and deception against a tyrant (for example, *Istorie*, pp. 199-201; *History*, pp. 127-9), so fraud is legitimate when 'dealing with an enemy that has not kept faith with you' (*Discourses*, bk. iii, disc. 40).

<sup>35</sup> *Discourses*, bk. 3, disc. 6, on which the following summary of Machiavelli's account of conspiracies is based.

<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli writes: 'And that nothing which is humane may be

of families to cement alliances by marriage and the intrigue with which this is surrounded.<sup>37</sup> The favouritism and nepotism which characterise the *modi privati* provide a friable power base: favourites are even more likely to conspire dangerously against their patrons than are injured parties, while promotion along family lines breaks down the moment there is no common adversary.<sup>38</sup> Wise leaders avoid creating favourites and 'kill the sons of Brutus', i.e., remove those family lines which have conspired against them; in Florence, this generally meant banishment.<sup>39</sup>

Machiavelli's account of greatness, or in other words, of the historical character and identity of the Florentines, may be summarised as follows. Greatness begins in intrinsic characters (*fortuna, generativa, virtù*) and is subject to no less intrinsic forces (*umori*) which bring about a decline in vitality. But history shows that greatness develops differentially according to the art and agency of different peoples, which enables them to overcome, or at least stay for a time, the effects of *umori* and of fundamental insufficiencies in native population, resources and leadership. Inherent vitality, in becoming great, transcends its own limits. The life of the state, or greatness as the creation of particular peoples, depends in certain crucial historical instances on conspiracies, which are turning-points in collective life. Are conspiracies devoted chiefly to private intrigues and factional gain? Or do they succeed in balancing the tendency of great persons and families to become insolent and tyrannical? Does *virtù* triumph? Machiavelli does not pose the contest of *umori* and *grandezza* in order to resolve it, but to arrive at a historical verdict.

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perpetual and stable, it is the pleasure of the heavens that in all states or governments whatsoever, some fatal families should spring up for their ruin and destruction. Of this our city can afford as many and as lamentable instances as any of her neighbours; as owing its miseries not only to one or two, but several of those families: as first, the Buondelmonti and Uberti; next, the Donati and the Cerchi; and now, the Ricci and Albizzi (a shameful and ridiculous thing)' (*Istorie*, p.219; *History*, p. 145). See also *Istorie*, pp. 144, 160-63, 268, 310; *History*, pp. 85, 97-9, 181, 215.

<sup>37</sup> *Istorie*, pp. 114, 141-2, 161, 327, 348, 389, 400, 464, 469-70, 485-6, 487, 510; *History*, pp. 64, 83-4, 98, 229, 245-6, 278-9, 287, 336, 339-40, 352, 353, 371.

<sup>38</sup> *Discourses*, bk. iii, disc. 6; *Istorie*, pp. 453-5; *History*, pp. 327-9.

<sup>39</sup> *Discourses*, bk. i, disc. 16; bk. iii, disc. 3; *Prince*, chs. iii, iv; *Istorie*, pp. 203-4, 219-20, 315-6, 323-4, 485; *History*, pp. 131, 144, 220, 226, 351.

## 3.2 Umori

Vital events and relations served Machiavelli at two levels of argument. First, there is the co-ordinating analogy to nature: the image of the body politic, with its life cycle of fertility, growth, humours and decline. This structure is not purely rhetorical, since its second and simultaneous role is demographic; the growth, virtue, dissension and conspiracy which animate the body politic are effected by changes in the composition and distribution of the families and factions which are the political body's members. The coherence of this model was pointed out by Burckhardt (1958: 102), although it has sometimes been viewed sceptically.<sup>40</sup> Recent studies of the social and historical demography of Florence, addressed chiefly to the century and a half preceding Machiavelli, now give further and striking support to the picture he has left us, by showing how the two aspects of Machiavelli's vital logic coincide.

First, the fall from original fecundity suggested by Machiavelli is attested by the instability of birth-rates and the contemporary topicality of Florentine sub-fertility (Herlihy 1980). Secondly, Machiavelli, having observed that Florentine manpower was insufficient, then adduced from Roman and other cases that the preservation and development of greatness is achieved by the absorption of other peoples. And so Florentine sub-fertility was compensated for a time by the absorption of young people from the surrounding countryside; later, increasing immigration from more distant parts of Italy and from Germany became common (Cohn 1980: 113). Thirdly, Machiavelli's term for the weakening of Florence was *umori*, i.e. an intrinsic susceptibility to certain maladies. This was a powerful and apt image, given that the *History* was written about a century and a half after the Black Death, during which time plague and other epidemics recurred. Disease was probably the main factor destabilising Florentine population growth, since it struck younger age-groups heavily and repeatedly, thereby compounding checks to fertility inherent in local marriage patterns (Herlihy 1977).

The fourth support for Machiavelli arises from the nature of these checks, which reflect the strategic importance of marriage and family relations in the political definition and differentiation of groups. Aggregate analysis shows that social strata and the consolidation of power in certain lineages over time were articulated by patterns of endogamous marriage (Cohn 1980: 58ff.). The historical ethnography of particular lineages shows that alliance between groups and their respective honour, prestige and economic condition were often focussed on family links perpetuated through arranged marriages (F. Kent 1977: 93-9; D. Kent 1978: 49-51; Klapische-Zuber 1985: 80-87). The effects of these institutions

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<sup>40</sup> Hexter (1957) and Gilbert (1984: 177) point out that Machiavelli's use of the term *stato* does not simply equate with 'the state' in the sense of 'the body politic'. This is true of this one term, and it reflects the fact that Hexter's argument is confined to the *Prince*, in which the state is naturally bound up more with the person of the ruler.

and values on fertility appears to have worked by restricting the number of childbearing years that husbands and wives were able to spend together in marriage. The micro-demographic model of Florence outlined by Herlihy and Klapische-Zuber (1985: 81-3, 202-31; also Klapische-Zuber 1985: 117-31), chiefly on the basis of the Florentine *castato* of 1427-30, suggests the following combination of factors.

Men tended to marry in their early thirties, by which time they would have been able to establish their worth as potential household and lineage members. Women, in contrast, married much earlier, often in their teens. The age difference between spouses influenced fertility in several ways. First, given an average life duration of about forty years, husbands were likely to die while wives were still in their reproductive prime. Secondly, the preference for young brides and the conflicting pressures put on widows on their own and their husbands' families meant that widows were much less likely than men to remarry. Thirdly, the pattern of male mortality, together with preferred family alliances, restricted the pool of eligible husbands relative to the numbers of women in younger cohorts. The demand for suitable grooms greatly influenced the cost of dowries in turn, limiting the number of daughters a father could afford to marry off. Contemporary diaries remark on the difficulty of marriage consequent upon the politics and economics of Florentine families (Guicciardini 1965: 29) which can also be followed in the workings of the state dowry fund (Kirshner and Molho 1978) and the remarkable increase in the number and population of nunneries (Trexler 1972).

Finally, the overall pattern of family and factional politics displays a cyclic pattern in which, as Machiavelli noted, the older nobility were gradually pushed aside by merchant families, which proved more adept at clothing their basically oligarchic politics in the institutions of the republic (D. Kent 1975). Rather more families figured in this process than Machiavelli suggests, and the role of marriage and descent needs to be considered in relation to the neighbourhoods and quarters into which the city was divided. But the strategic and fragile role of affinal links and the precarious and artful means by which certain families developed and maintained patterns of patronage are well-attested by more detailed recent studies (D. Kent 1978; Bullard 1980).

#### 4. Concluding Note

The preceding pages have, following Burckhardt, considered Machiavelli's *History of Florence* as the locus of a major transition, the emergence of modern concepts of the state from a context of ethnic rivalries. To remark on Machiavelli's modernity in this way is not to assimilate his account of Florence to collective identities as we might now define them, but to specify the point of translation between his categories and our own. If we wish to understand the history of the paradox outlined in Section One of the simultaneous

'self-determination' and 'mutual dependence' of contemporary ethnicities and states, we can recognise it in its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century dress as the conflict between *grandezza* and *umori*, by which Florentines suffered or prevailed over one another and defined themselves in relation to other peoples and states. I have tried to show how Burckhardt's phrase 'the State as a work of art' follows from Machiavelli's text and how it aptly describes the formulation of this conflict in the *History*. The main themes of recent anthropological and political enquiry into ethnic and state formation are at least prefigured - and often very subtly and effectively rendered - in the works of these two earlier writers.

The theme of artifice has, of course, a long association with the name of Machiavelli. So much so that the terms 'machievellism' and 'machievellian' have come to have rather peculiar meanings. Sometimes they refer to the thesis that effectiveness alone counts in the affairs of men ('the ends justify the means'). But they are also applied, willy-nilly, to the many sinister developments of this thesis that have been wrongly attributed to Machiavelli.<sup>41</sup> The importance of vital imagery and relations in Machiavelli's historiography is an important check to such reductive and cynical readings. On the one hand, Machiavelli recognises that the politics and brute facts by which one nation or faction may dominate another are likely to be accompanied by selective interpretations of the inherent, vital criteria of legitimate authority to suit those in power. On the other, his awareness of the artifice by which collective identities are constructed does not keep him from subscribing to the continuing and fundamental value of the vital charters of particular peoples and places. Machievellism, properly speaking, is the politics of *virtù*, i.e. a process by which the greatness and artful devices of some persons and groups become the vital charters, define the limits to growth and determine the continuity of wider polities.

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Gilbert 1977 and Raab 1964.

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