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Negotiating the Lines between War and Politics: Machiavelli's gendering of war and peace

## **Introduction**

This paper investigates the ways in which Machiavelli relates and distinguishes the conditions and virtues of politics and war. The paper begins by exploring the question of the extent to which Machiavelli identifies political with military *virtù*, and how he configures the relationship between the republican polity and the military. It draws out the ways in which politics and war are both the same and different in Machiavelli's account. This poses a problem for contemporary commentators who wish to draw clear distinctions between politics and war in explaining and evaluating politics inside and outside of the state. The paper then goes on to argue that the most productive way to read this sameness and difference is by resisting the temptation to read the relation between politics and war *either* as one of identity *or* in binary, oppositional terms. I suggest that one way of resisting these twin temptations is by re-thinking the meaning of gendered reference points in Machiavelli's analysis, which have often been used to reinforce either/ or choices, between Machiavelli as 'republican' or, in Hanna Pitkin's stark terms, as 'protofascist' (Pitkin 1984: 4). A more flexible reading of the meaning of gendering in Machiavelli's work, allows for a more complex understanding of the overlapping meanings of politics and war, and guards against tendencies to give causal or evaluative priority either to the international or to the domestic sphere in explanatory and normative international theory.

## Arts of Politics/ Arts of War

For this reason a republic has a fuller life and enjoys good fortune for a longer time than a principality, since it is better able to adapt itself to diverse circumstances owing to the diversity found amongst its citizens than a prince can do. (Machiavelli 1950: III.9, p.497)

For excellent men come from republics more than from kingdoms, because in the former most of the time virtue is honoured, in kingdoms it is feared. From this it arises that, in the one, virtuous men are born, in the other, they are extinguished. Thus, whoever considers the case of Europe will find it to have been full of republics of principalities, which, through the fear that one had of the other, were constrained to keep military orders alive and to honor those who most prevailed in them. (Machiavelli 2003: 59)

Internal and external conditions are both cited by Machiavelli as crucial to the resilience of republics, meaning their greater likelihood (as opposed to other kinds of polity) of producing men manifesting the kind of civic and military virtue that will enable them (republics) to survive. It is difficult to find a clear directionality to the causal arrows that link internal constitution and the external relations of political communities to the production of the best ways of doing either politics or war. In *The Art of War* and the *Florentine Histories* in particular, Machiavelli stresses the importance of outside threats for the cultivation of *virtù*, and castigates peace, or indeed wars in which existential threats to participants are not sufficiently profound (which he notes have been characteristic of Italy in his time), as liable to produce an ‘effeminate’ and corrupt population (Machiavelli 2003: 60). But elsewhere, in

particular in the *Discourses*, he focuses on how the internal constitution of the republic can create conditions in which *virtù* will flourish regardless of outside conditions. The common factor that both external threats and internal constitution share is that of ‘necessity’: “– men never do good unless necessity drives them to it; but when they are free to choose and do just as they please, confusion and disorder become everywhere rampant. Hence it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and that laws make them good.” (Machiavelli 1950: I.3, p. 217)

In Machiavelli’s view, by and large people will be naturally inclined to follow their own desires, and even when they may be of excellent character will not naturally have the skills of adaptability necessary to respond appropriately to circumstances when it comes to promoting the public good. The key to excellence in politics and war is to provide a systematic counter to natural inclinations, which will push people to develop and sustain civic and military *virtù*, individually as leaders or soldier-citizens and collectively as a free people. This systematic counter may involve putting limitations on the operations of the market, ensuring a particular division of power between nobility and ordinary citizens, draconian punishments or a particular layout to the military camp. In all cases it is about constructing an artificial environment in which the distribution of incentives for particular kinds of action is governed by reference to a collective good. In this respect, politics and war are equally realms of art and what they produce encompasses but also transcends the achievement of specific goals of winning battles or gaining and keeping power (Frazer and Hutchings 2011).

So how are politics and war similar or different on Machiavelli’s account? Several areas of overlap stand out: first, politics is often described in a language of war. Fighting and struggle are as much part of Machiavelli’s vocabulary for discussing the relations between classes in

Ancient Rome or between factions in contemporary Florence as it is for discussing armed conflict between polities. In the *Discourses*, the *Prince* and the *Histories*, as well as in much of his correspondence and literary writings, political relations in times of peace are discussed in terms of strategy, tactics and conquest, either directly or by analogy. As other commentators have pointed out, this language of struggle extends to Machiavelli's comedies of sexual politics, where virtue may be besieged, fought for and overcome (Pitkin 1984: 25-6). Most famously, this extends also to Machiavelli's overarching metaphor of political encounter in the relation between *virtù* and *fortuna*, where political success is famously described as strategic forethought and as violent overcoming in the *Prince* (Machiavelli 1988b: 85-87).

The *virtù/ fortuna* relation takes us to more substantive overlaps between political and military worlds in Machiavelli's arguments. In particular in the *Prince*, but also very largely in other texts, leaders that manifest *virtù* are often warriors and men (occasionally women) of violence. At the very least, they are men prepared to use violence in strategic ways, and with the capacity to raise and lead troops into battle where necessary. Contrary to clichéd views about Machiavelli's endorsement of violence in politics, violence is not always or necessarily the right choice for men of *virtù*, but it has to be part of their repertoire of action. Just as leaders have to be willing to be generals, so citizens have to be willing to be soldiers. If the *Prince* focuses on the military qualities necessary for successful founders of states and keepers of political power, the *Discourses* and the *Histories* tell us also about the need for citizens to be able to be soldiers if they want to maintain their membership of a free people. Both leaders and citizens have to be fighters, not just metaphorically or by analogy but also literally.

Machiavelli's view of the direct involvement of political leaders and citizens in war is not confined to the argument that both leaders and citizens sometimes have to fight wars or use the means of war. It encompasses also a different argument in which the institutional forms and practices of politics and war, and what it means to do politics or to fight wars well or badly are claimed to be deeply analogous and mutually dependent. They are analogous in that both the polity and the military are organised in terms not of private interest but of collective good. They both involve a functional differentiation of roles and the eliciting of excellences of different kinds from different members. Notably the good political leader and the good general are distinguished by their capacity to rise to the challenges of fortune, to have good timing, by their mastery of rhetorical skills and arts of deception, by their strategic thinking and holistic vision. And the good citizen and good soldier by their capacity to understand and act on the nature and limits of their role.

Degenerate versions of leaders, generals, citizens and soldiers are alike in identifying with their private desires and interests rather than with the public good. In this respect, Machiavelli's contempt for the figure of the mercenary, who fights only for personal gain and will fight for anyone is parallel to his contempt for citizens who focus on amassing their own wealth, or who try as a class to monopolise all political power. Machiavelli understands these phenomena as part of the same corruption that he identified with the Italy of his day and, in his historical work, as the motor of the rise and fall of power of republics and other polities. This is more than the claim that there are close parallels between a good polity and a good military, and between a degenerate polity and a degenerate military. For Machiavelli, this is all part of the same story, one in which a particular articulation of the relation between republic and military is part of what it means to be a republic. This is perhaps most obvious in the extremely close relationship suggested between good citizenship and soldiering, so that

in the *Art of War* military training appears not simply to be similar to the processes for producing good citizens, but actually the same thing.

The overlaps between Machiavelli's characterisation of politics and of war are undeniable, but there are also various ways in which the two are quite sharply distinguished. The distinction is perhaps most obvious in the difference in tone of Machiavelli's *Art of War* as opposed to his other political writings. The *Art of War* seems very far removed from the blood and guts that litter the pages of the *Discourses*, *Histories* and the *Prince*, even though it is the work that directly addresses the organisation and wielding of collective violence (Pitkin 1984: 70). Unlike in his other texts, in which the figure of the politician is treated largely without reverence, the figure of the military leader in the *Art of War* is treated with respect and some solemnity. And even though the good general shares what we might see as fox-like characteristics with the good political leader, for example being willing to use deception not only in relation to the enemy but in relation to his own troops, by lying about auguries for instance, he is nevertheless portrayed as opposed to the duplicity of the politician (Machiavelli 2003: 98-9; 153-55).

The differences Machiavelli ascribes to the spheres of war and politics are articulated in two different narratives. One is a narrative about the virtues peculiar to politics as opposed to war, the other is about politics within the republic as a degenerate form of collective organisation in comparison to the institutions and practices of war. In terms of the first narrative, Machiavelli stresses how the Roman republic gained its strength from the way in which it made space for contestation between different groups of citizens. For the republic a properly structured plurality is necessary, both in order for the political community as a whole to be strong in its relation to other republics and in order that it cultivates a variety of excellences

within it to meet creatively the diverse challenges to maintaining domestic order and prosperity in the face of internal and external threats. In this respect, Machiavelli speaks approvingly of high levels of civil disorder within the Roman republic as plebians assert themselves against the aristocracy. This emphasis on pluralism and contestation is in stark contrast to the emphasis on the unity of the army in *The Art of War*. The army is a world of hierarchy and control. A major part of the task of producing and reproducing a good army is to contain and channel the plural identities of soldiers: “For a spirited army is not made so by having spirited men in it but by having well-ordered orders.” (Machiavelli 2003: 48). Within this narrative, politics appears to have the higher value – it is the more complex sphere that the military is supposed to serve. And much of the *Discourses* explores how the relationship between the two can work well and how it can work badly depending on the configuration of relations between civil and military power, through leaders, citizens and soldiers.

Machiavelli’s second narrative inverts the above hierarchy and makes the military a standpoint from which the degeneracy and corruption of politics can be seen. On this account politics is a threat to military virtue and military virtue is the potential saviour of politics. We see this clearly in the contrast Machiavelli draws between the ideal army and military camp and the realities of the city in his own day. Here it is important to note that the ideal army is one made up of citizen soldiers, who are expected to serve in the militia to defend their polity. They are not mercenaries serving for financial gain. The camp is supremely spatially, temporally and functionally ordered. Machiavelli spends a lot of time in *The Art of War* outlining the details of how this is accomplished, from the clean and straight streets of the camp, to the construction of a common framework of time for its inhabitants. In the camp diverse citizens are transformed into soldiers, trained, through drilling, to obey orders. All civilians are banished from this military space, especially women (2003: 129). The whole of

the camp has a unified purpose which effectively works through the individuals within it. It both exemplifies and makes possible the overcoming of fortune and is very much a realm of instrumental rationality. The purpose served by the camp is the production and sustenance of the collective good that is an effective military. The ideal of the camp contrasts powerfully with the realities of the city where the streets are dirty and winding. Here there is conflict, disorder and treachery, the domination of private interests and no commitment to the public good. Moreover, this is presented as a much more uncertain realm of action, enemies are everywhere and often hidden rather than ranged against you in battle, and the chances of controlling outcomes are slim. It is in this context that *The Art of War* presents training in the arts of war as an appropriate counter to the corruption of the city. Only citizens who are also soldiers can be proper citizens – the city must become more like the camp, if it is to be worthy of being defended at all (2003: 16).

### **Reading Machiavelli on Politics and War**

Machiavelli's rhetoric is full of evaluative distinctions and oppositions, in which one side of a particular pairing is legitimated through comparison with its other. However, the evaluative logic of these oppositional categories often shifts depending on circumstances, so that what counts as a good quality or good kind of political arrangement in one context, may not do so in another. *Virtù*, in political or military terms, is not a simple set of qualities but the ability to act appropriately across a range of circumstances. However, although Machiavelli's prescriptions for political and military action, and his claims about how political and military life should be organised shift according to situation, there are certain conceptual oppositions that work consistently throughout his arguments. Of these, the most obvious is the distinction

between masculine and feminine. This operates in two overlapping ways throughout Machiavelli's *oeuvre*. First in the overarching explanatory framework underpinning Machiavelli's arguments about politics and war, second as a mode of evaluation.

In relation to the first meaning, although the meaning of *virtù* shifts according to context, it is always understood in contrast and opposition to *fortuna*. This in an overtly gendered, sexualised opposition, with *virtù* literally associated with masculinity and manliness, and *fortuna* represented as a woman. The precise meaning and significance of both terms has been subject to much contestation in Machiavelli scholarship. In broad terms, *virtù* is a specifically human quality, which is manifested as the ability to pre-empt or constructively respond to the challenges thrown up circumstances, which may include anything from the plotting of your enemies to changes in the weather. *Fortuna*, in contrast, is all of those things that make up 'circumstances', sometimes portrayed as a kind of fate ruling over social and natural events, sometimes as an overpowering force of nature, and at other times simply another term for chance and contingency. At one point, Machiavelli famously claims that the battle for control of events is split roughly evenly between *virtù* and *fortuna*, at others it seems that *virtù* has only a very minor effect in comparison to the combined forces of nature and fortune, but either way Machiavelli comes back again and again to these two reference points as a way of making sense of and evaluating political and military contexts and prescriptions for action (Machiavelli 1988b: 84-87).

In spite of Machiavelli's recommendation that men of *virtù* should treat fortune roughly, and his frequent eroticisation of the relation between *virtù* and *fortuna*, *fortuna* is a powerful figure in Machiavelli's work. However, in his treatment of women and his use of gendered rhetoric more generally, Machiavelli uses gendered terms evaluatively to mark the difference

between good and bad action and character in the political and military spheres. The epithet ‘effeminacy’ is always a key condemnatory term, and to be manly is always a good thing (see Pitkin 1984; Freccero 1993; Brown 2004; O’Brien 2004). Effeminate is used to describe various kinds of weakness, indecisiveness or dependence. It can be a characteristic of individuals, but it can also characterise peoples, in particular those, like the Florentines of Machiavelli’s day in his opinion, who have become over-accustomed to luxury and self-indulgence and lost the capacity to fight, in part because they have contracted defence out to mercenaries. Manliness is consistently linked to strength, decisiveness and independence, and again can be a characteristic of individuals or of peoples.

Machiavelli’s reliance on conceptual oppositions in his argumentation encourages two kinds of reading of his work, both of which rely on drawing consistent lines between different aspects of Machiavelli’s analysis. One kind of reading tends to reduce Machiavelli’s meaning to one or other side of a given binary, another kind reads him in terms of fixed binary distinctions. We see this in ongoing discussions about the relation between war and politics in his thought, and its implications for distinctions between domestic and international, law and violence. Neal Wood (1967) argued that Machiavelli’s conceptions of politics and *virtù* could be subsumed under the category of war. His argument relied on the central opposition of *virtù* and *fortuna* in Machiavelli’s thought, and the identification of *virtù* as essentially the successful response to existential threat. Wood pointed to the way in which many of Machiavelli’s exemplary men of *virtù* were in fact warriors and argued both that war (as the key producer of *virtù*) drives the cyclical pattern of the rise and fall of states and that politics itself is a kind of war (Wood 1967: 167; 171). For Wood, *virtù* exhibited in war enables the founding, defending and extending of polities. Without war, in conditions of peace, men become indolent and effeminate, lose *virtù* and fall into disorder, which then has to be

countered by new wars, either of conquest from without or within in which a new order is created, and is subject to the same cycle of rise and decline. The problem, according to Wood, is that law cannot be a satisfactory substitute for war, it simply does not provide the extreme conditions of necessity (existential threat) in which true *virtù* appears. This means that no peaceful political order can be relied upon to produce *virtù*, and the only way in which politics and polities can flourish is by taking on a warlike form that ultimately has to become actual, civil or external, war.

“When it comes to international affairs - the rationalist component prevails. One is often left with the impression that to him, what happens among states is almost taken for granted, simply the logical result of a concatenation of events of variables that can be calculated in advance, and that the room for individual action is quite narrow” (Cesa 2014: 6).

Almost half a century since Wood’s argument, in a recent discussion of Machiavelli’s contribution to thinking about international relations, Marco Cesa makes the case for a qualitative distinction between domestic and international realms in Machiavelli’s thought (Cesa 2014: 6). Cesa argues that although peace is a problem for both of these realms, social peace and international peace are not the same. The international in Machiavelli’s writings is archetypally the realm of necessity (existential threat). It is always more unstable and dangerous and can be analysed much more reliably in terms of strategic, instrumental rationality than its domestic counterpart. Somewhat paradoxically, although the international is more unstable and dangerous, it is also more predictable (2014: 19). Patterns can be observed and consistent lessons can be learned in relation to war and foreign policy that might be less clear in the tumultuous realm of domestic politics, in which non-rationalist components also have a place. The key, therefore, to understanding what Machiavelli has to

say about external war/ peace and foreign policy is to separate it from his analysis of political community. At the same time, however, Cesa argues that not only is the international (war) distinct from the domestic (law), the former has priority over the latter, in the sense that it is only through establishing external security that internal order can be achieved. In this respect, the international is the only basis for the (always temporary) victories of individual and collective *virtù* over *fortuna* (2014: 16)

Both Wood and Cesa can provide plenty of textual evidence to support their readings of Machiavelli. This textual evidence frequently returns us to Machiavelli's gendered language, to how he configures the relation between *virtù* and *fortuna*, and the gendered evaluative terms he uses to describe and analyse the rise and decline of polities and peoples. I suggest that even though their arguments are quite different, with Wood effectively subsuming politics under war, and Cesa arguing for a clear distinction between politics and war, they both gain some of their plausibility through a reading of Machiavelli's explanatory and evaluative gendered framework. In Wood's case the links Machiavelli makes between war, necessity, *virtù* and manliness reinforce the incompatibility between the realm of war and the sphere of law and peace that Machiavelli explicitly associates with effeminacy. Logically, it cannot be the case that, if *virtù* is essentially a military and manly concept, it can properly be possible in conditions of peace and law, except insofar as those conditions are made to resemble the condition of war. We know this must be the case because we know that it is impossible for something to be both manly and effeminate. It is precisely because Wood understands the links Machiavelli makes between war, necessity and masculinity as opposed to peace, law and effeminacy in fixed terms, that he concludes that politics cannot be the proper realm of *virtù*, and that a genuinely virtuous politics is equivalent to successful war-making (Wood 1967: 170).

In Cesa's case, the distinction between military and political *virtù* confirms the distinction between war and politics, international and domestic. Military *virtù* is the product of a distinctive kind of necessity, and manifests itself as strategic rationality. Political *virtù*, in contrast, is produced in the realm of law, where necessity is not so powerful, and incorporates non-rationalist as well as rationalist considerations (Cesa 2014: 6). Machiavelli's gendering of the distinction is here understood in terms of two different models of the encounter between *virtù* and *fortuna*. In the international sphere this is an encounter at the most profound level of existential threat, and the meaning of *virtù* is not about creative response to new challenges, but rather about the capacity to calculate in a condition in which choices are minimal. In contrast, in the domestic sphere, emotions and identities cloud the picture and make it possible for political *virtù* to be manifested creatively and in a variety of ways, not simply through the use of force or negotiations underpinned by the capacity to use force, as in war and foreign policy. In addition, however, the domestic sphere may be characterised by *virtù* in ways that the international cannot, because in the international the stark choice is one of kill or be killed, and in that context actions that would otherwise be considered worthy of condemnation may become seen as heroic. Here, the manliness associated with war is that of the willingness to do what it takes in order to survive, in contrast to the feminised sphere of law, in which threats are not normally existential, precisely because actors in the international sphere have secured and extended the boundaries of the state. What begins as a symmetrical binary distinction between two spheres, soon develops in Cesa's argument into the assertion of the priority of one over the other, in both explanatory and evaluative terms (2014: 14-15).

The arguments of Wood and Cesa rely on the identification of war with a particular kind of necessity. Necessity in this context is existential threats to individual and collective survival.

And Machiavelli's explicitly gendered concept of *virtù* is read as the capacity to pre-empt and respond effectively to such threats. For both commentators, this means that a hard line has to be drawn between the sphere of war and the kinds of actions and contexts that Machiavelli characterises in feminised terms. This leads Wood to abandon the idea of a distinct sphere of politics, and Cesa to argue for a clear distinction between international and domestic, it leads both to argue that Machiavelli demonstrates the causal and evaluative priority of the sphere of war over the sphere of politics.

The substantive conclusions drawn by Wood and Cesa are contested in alternative interpretations, in particular by those who see Machiavelli's republicanism as the key to his thinking about domestic and international politics (Hannaford 1972; Pocock 1975; Bock, Skinner and Viroli 1990; Viroli 2007). Hannaford's rebuttal of Wood argued for the importance of retaining a distinction between politics and war in the reading of Machiavelli, citing all the different ways in which Machiavelli offers alternative accounts of *virtù* outside of the context of war, and claimed that Machiavelli valorised the realm of law as opposed to war. A range of recent readings challenge both Wood and Cesa in a different way by reversing the priority given to war over politics, and arguing that war is actually driven by the nature of republics (Hörnqvist 2004; Sobek 2005), so that the domestic inside trumps the international outside as a source of explanation. In all cases these alternative readings can be supported by textual evidence across Machiavelli's writings.

Commentators on Machiavelli regularly make the point that the political context of his thought, and the purposes of his writings are central to understanding his arguments and that this is one reason why he can appear to be an inconsistent thinker. In this respect, we should not necessarily expect the same concepts to mean the same thing across such different texts

as *The Art of War* and the *Discourses*, or the *Discourses* and the *Prince*. Having said this, however, there is then a tendency to go on to analyse Machiavelli as if he was offering a consistent theory. For example, Cesa points to the unsystematic, contextual and fluid nature of Machiavelli's thought (Cesa 2014: 7-8), makes the point that he does not offer a political or international theory in a conventional sense, but then reads Machiavelli on war and foreign policy precisely as if he was offering such a theory (2014: 8). As soon as one reads Machiavelli as if he were a theorist, then one is obliged to seek out ways of stabilising his meaning. A key way of accomplishing this stabilisation is by reference to the gendered language that persists across Machiavelli's writings, and appears to give us an anchor for interpretation. In this respect the governing distinction between *virtù* and *fortuna* in explanatory terms, and the distinction between manliness and effeminacy in evaluative terms plays a crucial role in enabling the fixing of Machiavellian distinctions, particularly when it comes to the relation between politics and war, domestic and international regardless of the specific terms of one's interpretation. In the final section, we will go on to have a closer look at how gendered distinctions operate in Machiavelli's thought.

### **Fortune is a Woman**

It is impossible to miss the gendered terms of Machiavelli's analysis, nevertheless it was not until scholars started to interrogate his work from an explicitly feminist perspective that this became a focus for the critical interrogation of his meaning. In the anglophone context, Pitkin's *Fortune is a Woman* (1984) paved the way for a sub-field of Machiavelli scholarship, in which the gendered politics of all of his writings, including his literary as well as his political work, came under scrutiny. On these accounts the ruling gendered binary of *virtù* versus *fortuna* is the key to a range of other Machiavellian binaries, between men and

women, civilization and nature, form and matter, human and animal, adult and child, independence and dependence, order and disorder. In all cases, the second term is a threat to, or contradictory of, the first term. And feminist critics sought to show both how Machiavelli's arguments could be better understood when his gendered framework of reference was taken into account, and to show the ways in which his arguments necessarily excluded women from being taken seriously as political actors (Pitkin 1984; O'Brien 2004). In spite of the grounding importance of gendered binary oppositions within this work however, from Pitkin's interpretation onwards, feminist critics have also identified profound ambivalences around gender in Machiavelli's thought, in particular when it comes to the meaning of being a man of *virtù*.

Pitkin's psychoanalytically influenced reading argued that we can explain Machiavelli's ambivalence about the meaning of masculinity by reference back to his insecurities about his own masculinity. These insecurities arose, Pitkin argued, from Machiavelli's experience of being out of power and at the mercy of his enemies. And she claims he responded by constructing different models of masculinity, in terms of the 'fox', the 'founder' and the 'citizen' (Pitkin 1984: 105). In explaining the reasons for Machiavelli's ambivalences and ambiguities about the meaning of manliness, Pitkin argued that this is because: "The feminine constitutes 'the other' for Machiavelli, opposed to manhood and autonomy in all their senses, to maleness, to adulthood, to humanness, and to politics." (Pitkin 1984: 109). In other words, the range of understandings of masculinity in Machiavelli's work encompasses a range of ways in which the feminine can be kept in check, it is a variety of responses to the same disordering threat of femininity. And this is why *virtù* manifests itself so differently in different contexts.

Later feminist work on Machiavelli followed Pitkin in identifying gender as fundamental to the ways Machiavelli explains and evaluates the world (Freccesco 1993; Kahn 1993; Brown 2004; Snyder 2004). As with Pitkin's argument, a regular feature of this work is the identification of the fundamental gender binary between masculinity and femininity as driving his political analysis and prescriptions. As with Pitkin also, however, almost all of this work points to the ambivalent and shifting nature of Machiavelli's identifications of masculinity. And to the way in which manifestations of *virtù*, paradoxically often seem to involve some borrowing from characteristics previously identified as feminine. As Brown puts it: "Thus, the self-sufficient/ independent political actor is, in a sense, androgynous. He is manhood in drag, that is, clothed in his *perception* of female garb, attempting to use both male and female power in the struggle with other men." (Brown 2004: 164). Machiavelli's ambivalences around gender create problems for feminist arguments seeking either to show the fundamental importance of a fixed gender binary to Machiavelli's analysis or to demonstrate the exclusiveness of Machiavelli's political theory in relation to women as political actors. It seems that the substance and the logic of Machiavelli's arguments are both stabilised and destabilised by his gendered terms of reference.

Pitkin's type of analysis, with its reliance on psychoanalytic theory, is now unfashionable within the history of political thought. Contextualist approaches to the history of ideas, emphasise the anachronism of importing specifically modern frames of reference into the interpretation of texts and ideas from different times, and the ways this can lead to deep misunderstandings of their meaning (Tully 1987). This draws our attention to the specific conceptual assumptions involved in Pitkin's analysis. Clearly the key reference point for Pitkin's argument is the gendered binary between masculine and feminine. Moreover, as we have seen, this is also a key reference point for non-feminist analyses, such as those of Wood

and Cesa, which seek to illuminate the ways in which Machiavelli understands and evaluates the relation between war and politics, international and domestic spheres. And although Pitkin reflects self-consciously on the meaning of gender, and Wood and Cesa take it for granted, they all three imply the *virtù/ fortuna* binary, precisely because it is gendered, carries certain exclusive connotations, which must mean that his analysis is driven by the necessary opposition between manliness and effeminacy. This raises the question of how Machiavelli himself would have understood the gendered terms of his analysis.

“One way to reconcile Machiavelli’s rejection of the effeminate with his portrayal of *Fortuna* and his admiration for women who lead is to put his work in the context of the Renaissance understandings of sex and gender.” (Jaquette 2004: 350)

Thomas Laqueur in *Making Sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990) argues that there is a deep transformation in the ways in which what we now refer to as ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are predominantly understood within western thought, which begins to take shape in the seventeenth century and is consolidated in nineteenth century biology and psychology. Prior to this period, following Galen, differences between men and women, manliness and effeminacy were understood in terms of a kind of hierarchical continuum, in which what was identified as female/ effeminate was regarded as an inferior, lesser or partial version of what was male/ manly. After this period, differences between men/ women or masculine/ feminine come to be understood in incommensurable terms as relating to two separate and specific types or modes of being, so that ideas about fixed characteristics specific to male/ masculine or to female/ feminine become accepted common sense. In this respect, even using the terms ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ in relation to Machiavelli’s thought could be seen as misleading and anachronistic. These are terms premised on a binary understanding of sexual difference at

biological and social levels and could not have been meaningful at the time at which he was writing (Repo 2016). At that time, there were ongoing debates about women and their capabilities (Marcina 2004: 313-315), but it was within the context of the Galenian commonsense in which, as Jaquette points out: “ – all individuals, men and women, are a mix of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, ‘wet’ and ‘dry’. There were ‘feminine men’, and ‘masculine women’.” (Jaquette 2004: 350).

The world of the nineteenth century, in which the concept of gender became an essentialised oppositional binary in which it was impossible to be both male/ masculine and female/ feminine at the same time (unless deviant or ill) was one in which exclusive binary oppositions played a fundamental political role, in particular in western imperial and civilizational discourses. Arguably, western social scientific thinking remains marked by this classificatory legacy, not only in its thinking about sex, which shifts into the notion of gender as a parallel socially constructed binary, but in the ways in which mutually exclusive formal and substantive binaries structure analytical, explanatory and evaluative possibilities. This is not, however, the same as Machiavelli’s world. In the latter, gender was less about substantive, qualitative differences between categories of biological, psychic or social being, and more about a hierarchical worldview in which the same person could occupy multiple gendered positions simultaneously, and could slide up and down the hierarchical continuum between manliness and effeminacy. When considered in this light, what have been held to be Machiavelli’s inconsistencies and ambivalences by feminist and non-feminist interpreters take on a different significance. Instead of deriving from mistakes, or lack of systematicity, or shifts in context, they may actually derive from our imposition of an alien conceptual ordering on Machiavelli’s work. In our case, a conceptual ordering that requires clear distinctions between male/ masculine and female/ feminine, and that reads the use of

gendered language as fixing distinctions that in Machiavelli's time were not fixed in the same way.

So what follows from interpreting Machiavelli's arguments in ways that reflect a more fluid understanding of the implications of the use of gendered terms? In my view, it follows that we need to be extremely wary of reading lines Machiavelli draws between war and politics, inside and outside in fixed and exclusionary terms. This means that the kinds of argument made by Wood, Cesa and Pitkin all become problematic. If, as Marcina puts it, "the boundary between *virtù* and *Fortuna*, between masculine and feminine is unpoliced" (2004: 312) then it cannot be claimed that Machiavelli reduces politics to war, that he holds a fixed distinction between them, or that women are necessarily excluded from politics. All of those readings rely on the two sex contemporary model of the meaning of sex/ gender, and all of them have problems accounting for the 'inconsistent' and 'ambivalent' aspects of Machiavelli's analysis that seem to undercut the claims being made by the reading in question. In contrast, I would argue that more fruitful readings of Machiavelli are those that take most seriously the apparent 'inconsistencies' and 'ambivalences' of his argument. By thinking with Machiavelli about how war is politics and politics is war and yet neither are reducible to the other we can understand better the complexities of the interface between political community and violent conflict. We can avoid the absurdity of presuming that the direction of the causal arrows linking the two always work in one direction or the other. And we can better understand the dimensions of force within political communities and of politics within the organization and deployment of force (Frazer and Hutchings 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Much (non-feminist and feminist) interpretation of Machiavelli has drawn on his gendered rhetoric to reinforce the idea of hard lines between politics and war, domestic and international, law and violence. I have suggested that this is because they are reading gender in the incommensurable terms of the two-sex, binary post-enlightenment model, rather than in terms of the hierarchical one-sex model of Machiavelli's day. The latter offers scope for continuity and flexibility between seemingly oppositional categories, and opens up spaces for thought which our own more rigid conceptual structure finds harder to accommodate. Within these spaces, we are able to appreciate the ways in which war is political and politics is war, as well as the ways in which they are mutually dependent, without reducing one to the other, or giving either systematic explanatory or causal priority to one or the other. In this respect, Machiavelli's gendering allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the relation between the state and war, and more broadly, between politics and violence, than is available within the terms of much contemporary debate in international theory.

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