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## NATION, NATIONALISM AND PLURINATIONALISM IN *THE PRINCE*

**Abstract.** This paper explores the concepts of nation and nationalism in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, with a particular focus on the introduction of plurinationalism. While Machiavelli's final chapter, *An exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians*, has traditionally been the focal point for discussions on his nationalist views, this study shifts the lens to examine how Machiavelli's strategies for maintaining control over diverse territories reveal implicit notions of nation and nationalism. By analysing the third chapter, *Concerning mixed principalities*, this paper highlights Machiavelli's understanding of the challenges posed by ruling over territories with different languages, customs and laws. The strategies of residing in newly acquired territories and establishing colonies are presented as methods for fostering loyalty and integration, thereby addressing the complexities of a plurinational principality. This study not only expands the traditional interpretations of Machiavelli's nationalism but also emphasises the relevance of his insights in contemporary discussions on governance and statecraft in a multicultural and multiethnic context. Through this perspective, *The Prince* is reaffirmed as a timeless guide on the pragmatic exercise of power.

**Keywords:** nation, nationalism, plurinationalism, Machiavelli

### Introduction

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, written in the sixteenth century, remains a cornerstone in the study of political theory and philosophy. Machiavelli's treatise provides crucial guidance for those seeking to attain and sustain

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political power. Fundamentally, *The Prince* is an exploration of power dynamics: its acquisition, management, and expansion within a principality, emphasising the strategies essential for a ruler to maintain control.

Machiavelli's views on nationalism are primarily derived from interpretations of the final chapter of *The Prince*, *An exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians*. This chapter reflects his advocacy for a unified Italian state governed by an Italian prince and inhabited by Italians, encapsulating his vision of nationalism and the defence of a sovereign nation-state.

This paper explores the concepts of nation and nationalism within *The Prince*, while introducing a novel perspective on plurinationalism. By examining the third chapter, *Concerning mixed principalities*, through the lens of nationalism – which legitimises the state through its connection to the nation – this analysis provides a fresh interpretation of Machiavelli's work, revealing its prescient nature. It is not to suggest that Machiavelli explicitly championed plurinationalism, but rather to highlight his awareness of the cultural and social complexities that impact the stability of dominions.

The first section of this paper delineates the concepts of nation and nationalism, addressing the prevalent misuse and misunderstanding of these terms. Establishing clear definitions is essential for contextualising these issues within Machiavelli's framework. The second section reviews existing scholarly interpretations of Machiavelli's connection to nationalism. The third section introduces the innovative argument of this paper: Machiavelli's implicit acknowledgment of nation, nationalism, and plurinationalism in the third chapter as strategies for managing conquests and retaining power. The final section synthesises and discusses the key concepts presented in this analysis.

### **Nation and nationalism**

The concept of a nation has been widely debated yet remains frequently misused by both scholars and non-academics. Often, the term nation is conflated with the state; however, these concepts are neither synonymous nor necessarily coexistent. As Seton-Watson (1977, 1) observed, there are

nations without states and states without nations, as well as states comprising multiple nations, with the latter being the most common<sup>2</sup>. To elucidate these distinctions, it is essential first to discuss the concept of the state before addressing the more complex notions of nation and nationalism.

The state, commonly referred to as a country, represents the most significant form of political organisation in the modern world. Primarily, the state is a legal construct characterised by political sovereignty. It operates independently, subject to no external laws or decisions. Individuals within the state are ultimately accountable only to the state itself (Kelsen 1941, 608; Seton-Watson 1977, 1)<sup>3</sup>. For an entity to be recognised as a state, it must encompass a defined territory, a permanent population, a government and the capacity to engage in relations with other states. Thus, the state serves as the sole representative of a population residing within a specified territory under a singular government (Chen 2001, 25)<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of a nation, in contrast to the legal and institutional character of a state, is primarily a cultural construct. A nation is defined as a group of people bounded by the sense of belonging to the same community with ties to a territory. This definition requires four important clarifications. First, the nation is highly intangible; it is not a

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<sup>2</sup> The widespread insistence of many states on identifying themselves as nation-states – as if each state inherently encompasses only a single nation – has significantly contributed to the misuse and frequent confusion surrounding these concepts. This misconception is rooted in the belief that a nation is the fundamental basis of a state, and conversely, that only a nation can and should evolve into a state (Malešević & Trošt 2018, 1). Originating in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this trend rapidly evolved, with states adopting the nation-state identity to legitimise their sovereignty. However, the reality is that most states comprise multiple nations. Despite this, the national recognition of these internal nations is often undermined or ignored, as acknowledging their existence could, within this conceptual framework, grant them legitimacy and a claim to sovereignty.

<sup>3</sup> As Max Weber (1946, 78) most celebrated statement says, “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”

<sup>4</sup> This definition does not suggest that states require international recognition to qualify as states; rather, it posits that states must possess the capacity to engage in relations with other states to achieve such status. The Republic of China (Taiwan), for instance, is not recognised by most countries globally, yet it maintains the ability to engage in diplomatic and economic relations with them. International recognition is a political act and not a legally binding condition for the existence of a state (Kelsen 1941, 605; Crawford 2006, 24).

community with exclusive membership but rather a self-defined entity wherein individuals identify as members by personal choice <sup>5</sup>. Consequently, the nation possesses a critical psychological aspect, as its members perceive themselves as part of an imagined community without necessarily knowing its full extent; they are members of a community that is constructed in their mind but not necessarily or obviously seeable (Connor 1978, 379–80; Anderson 1983, 6)<sup>6</sup>.

Second, the most crucial element of the nation is the individuals who comprise it (Barrington 1997, 712). Since the nation exists in the imagination of its members, they form its foundation. It is not the territory or shared historical and cultural background, but the individuals who recognise each other as part of the same community that constitute the nation (Ichijo & Uzelac 2005, 213)<sup>7</sup>. Third, the territory associated with a nation is not as precisely defined as that of a state. Unlike the clear boundaries of a state, the territory of a nation is more fluid, subject to historical, political, and cultural evolution. This lack of fixed borders reflects the dynamic nature of a nation's attachment to its land, allowing for varied interpretations among its members regarding the nation's territorial extent (White 2007, 53–54, 58–59).<sup>8</sup>

Fourth, individuals may identify with multiple nations, sometimes considering their national identities as multilayered. For instance, a

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<sup>5</sup> This personal choice is what Renan (1882) would describe as a *daily plebiscite*.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson (1983, 6) defines it as an *imagined community*.

<sup>7</sup> The discourse on what engenders a sense of belonging to the same nation often highlights, among other factors, the sharing of a common language or a similar historical background. These elements are sometimes depicted as intrinsic to the concept of a nation, suggesting that a distinct language, for instance, is a requisite for nationhood. However, nations that share the same language, such as many in Latin America or those that speak English, are still considered distinct nations. These features are not constitutive elements of a nation but rather attributes that facilitate the self-identification of individuals as members of a nation by fostering connections among them (Reicher & Hopkins 2001, 8–9; White 2007, 1: 23–24).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the territorial boundaries of the Basque Country are subject to varying interpretations. Some define these boundaries as the current borders of the autonomous community of the Basque Country (Euskadi). In contrast, others consider the nation to extend across its historical boundaries, encompassing not only Euskadi but also Navarra and the French Basque Country, collectively referred to as Euskal Herria (Mansvelt Beck 2006, 524).

Scottish person may feel part of both the Scottish nation and the British nation, viewing Scotland as a component of the broader British nation while also recognising it as a distinct nation itself (Bond & Rosie 2006). This multiplicity arises from the self-defined nature of nations, whereby no higher authority can dictate the legitimacy of a nation or restrict an individual to a single national identity. Ultimately, the nation is a feeling of belonging that cannot be legally or politically denied.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, nationalism is inherently a political concept. Nationalism posits that the nation and the state should be congruent, meaning the borders of the nation should align with those of the state. This ideology represents the political expression of a nation's potential self-governing aspirations and the belief that only a nation can legitimately form or become a state (Gellner 1983, 1; Barrington 1997, 714; Malešević & Trošt 2018, 1). Misinterpretations of nationalism are common, particularly when nationalism is erroneously viewed as a defining characteristic of a nation.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars argue that a nation must seek self-sovereignty to be considered a nation, suggesting that a nation inherently desires political independence (Roeder 2007, 3; Barrington 1997, 712; Stilz 2011, 575).

This assumption presents several issues. First, it transforms the nation into a purely political concept, where the defining feature of a social group as a nation is its aspiration for self-rule. This perspective undermines the self-defined and emotional nature of a nation, instead emphasising the necessity of political actors explicitly demanding sovereignty. Second, it complicates the determination of which nations seek self-sovereignty. Does a small political faction's call for independence

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the existence of nations is not often denied politically and legally. In Spain, Article 2 of the 1978 Constitution labelled Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia as "nationalities" to recognise a different status compared to the rest of regions but without acknowledging them as nations (*Constitución Española* 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Connor (1978, 378) finds that the most fundamental error when defining nationalism is equating it to the loyalty towards the state. Nevertheless, in recent times, the most fundamental of all errors seems to be using the term nationalism, in particular nationalist, to denote disapproval towards others' political beliefs with the intention to label them as (far) right-wing, separatists or even terrorists. This is nonetheless ironic considering that most modern states claim to be nation-states and legitimate their existence based on them being nations, which by the proper definition of nationalism, these states are the primary proponents of nationalism itself.

suffice to classify a group as a nation, or is a broader consensus among self-identified members required?

Defining the nation with nationalism as one of its constitutive elements erasing therefore the self-defined aspect of it would be problematic in many instances. For instance, Galicia has a history of regional resistance but lacks a strong pro-independence movement compared to the Basque Country and Catalonia (Schrijver 2006, 120; Losada 1999, 152). Would the absence of a self-ruling movement invalidate its status as a nation? Similarly, is Quebec not a nation because its independence referendum failed? Is Veneto a nation due to a minority secessionist movement, despite being largely ignored by scholars and political entities? A nation may or may not pursue political aspirations because it is fundamentally a cultural construction. Only those who advocate for the alignment of national and state borders are nationalists, without diminishing the national identity of those who do not share such political aims.

In summary, a nation is defined as a group of people united by a shared sense of community and connection to a specific territory, whereas nationalism is the political doctrine asserting that the nation and the sovereign state should coincide. Based on these definitions, the following section presents a different approach to interpreting *The Prince* and Machiavelli's stance on nation and nationalism.

### **Nation and nationalism in *The Prince***

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* remains a seminal work in political theory, exploring the dynamics of power, leadership, and statecraft. Among the myriad themes addressed, the concepts of nation and nationalism play a critical role in Machiavelli's vision for political unity and control. However, when examining Machiavelli's approach to the concepts of nation and nationalism here, it is crucial to acknowledge that Machiavelli did not explicitly use these terms.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, discussions of these concepts often centre on his call for a unified Italian state under

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<sup>11</sup> As Easley (2012, 97) states, applying contemporary concepts of nationalism to philosophers from different political eras is anachronistic. Yet, exploring the intellectual heritage of such concepts remains a meaningful exercise.

Italian control, particularly in the final chapter *An exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians*. Machiavelli's advocacy for Italian unity has led to his characterisation as a nationalist.

However, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the nature of Machiavelli's nationalism. Gilbert (1954, 38) sees an emotional sense attached to Machiavelli's plea for the unity of Italy, appealing to his feelings for the Italian nation. On the other hand, Easley (2012, 104) interprets Machiavelli's Italian nationalism as a strategic instrument for power and control. In other words, Machiavelli supports a united Italy to achieve his ultimate goal of avoiding foreigners to rule over Italian principalities only.

Despite these differing interpretations, it is undeniable that Machiavelli exhibited nationalist tendencies. While it is impossible to precisely translate Machiavelli's intentions, his words strongly suggest such conclusion. In his last chapter the author reveals the existence of *being Italian*:

"...then at the present time, in order to discover the virtue of an Italian spirit, it was necessary that Italy should be reduced to the extremity that she is now in..."  
(Machiavelli 2001, 97-98)

The concept of Italian spirit is critical to understand Machiavelli's idea of nation and plea for an Italian prince. It represents the feeling of being Italian, the shared sense of existing as an Italian. This Italian spirit is deeply rooted in Renaissance ideals of civic humanism and the shared cultural heritage of the Italian city-states. Although Italians often felt a stronger connection to their local regions, intellectuals of the time frequently referenced Italy as a whole, laying the groundwork for a broader Italian identity. This period of cultural revival significantly influenced the construction of a shared Italian identity, which would later be instrumental during the Risorgimento (Hay 1971, 4).

Additionally, Machiavelli expresses this idea of sharing a common spirit and values once again in the last chapter:

"Look attentively at the duels and the hand-to-hand combats, how superior the Italians are in strength, dexterity, and subtlety... Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared with such arms, so that you can be defended against foreigners by Italian valour." (Machiavelli 2001, 99)

The description of the Italians and the mention of the *Italian valour* in contrast to foreigners elicits Machiavelli's imaginary of the individuals who could be called Italians. Italians, in turn, are defined by their belonging to Italy; they are the members of the Italian nation. Even though the political landscape of Italy was highly fragmented, Machiavelli was aware of the parts that formed what he called Italy:

"...so that Italy, left as without life, waits for him who shall yet heal her wounds and put an end to the ravaging and plundering of Lombardy, to the swindling and taxing of the kingdom and of Tuscany, and cleanse those sores that for long have festered." (Machiavelli 2001, 98)

Machiavelli mentions Lombardy and Tuscany to exemplify what Italy was – a compound of dominions that, although independent, were part of the collective Italian imaginary. Therefore, Machiavelli saw a complete entity composed of all these dominions sharing commonalities; a common *spirit* shared by all their members and the basis for the Italian nation in this common identity forged by their shared history and culture.<sup>12</sup> This served as the legitimisation to establish a common state, to join the fate of all the Italians under a prince for all Italy.<sup>13</sup>

This paper, however, does not focus on the final chapter of *The Prince*, nor does it delve into Machiavelli's nationalist inclinations. Instead, it analyses other parts of *The Prince* to offer a new perspective: the introduction of plurinationalism in Machiavelli's strategy for power and control.

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<sup>12</sup> Discussing the existence of the Italian nation might be controversial in this context. It is often considered that Italy as a nation is a product of a purposed nation-state building project of the nineteenth century as Massimo d'Azeglio famously said: "We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians" (Noether 1993, 779). Nevertheless, the assumption of Machiavelli's view is rooted on the fact that, as stated in the previous section, the nation is self-defined. It is possible for many to not identify as Italians but for the Italian nation to still exist because of some do identify their nation as Italy. In here, Machiavelli clearly saw a commonality among several communities that shared the *Italian spirit*, even though the idea of an Italian nation was not as fervent as one would consider from a contemporary perspective.

<sup>13</sup> Importantly, Machiavelli's reflections on the Italian nation and the Italians were not limited to a mere romanticisation of the Italian identity; his goal was rather to repel foreign invasions therefore renewing the glory of Italy and the Italians (Black 2013, 101).



### Plurinationalism in *The Prince*

This section explores the concept of plurinationalism in *The Prince*, focusing on Machiavelli's strategies for managing and controlling mixed principalities. Plurinationalism here refers to the existence of a state containing more than one nation.<sup>14</sup>

In the third chapter, *Concerning mixed principalities*, Machiavelli differentiates between territories that are culturally and linguistically similar to the ruling state and those that are not. He<sup>15</sup> notes that:

"Now I say that those dominions which, when acquired, are added to an ancient state by him who acquires them, are either of the same country and language, or they are not. When they are, it is easier to hold them, especially when they have not been accustomed to self-government; and to hold them securely it is enough to have destroyed the family of the prince who was ruling them; because the two peoples, preserving in other things the old conditions, and not being unlike in customs, will live quietly together, as one has seen in Brittany, Burgundy, Gascony, and Normandy, which have been bound to France for so long a time: and, although there may be some difference in language, nevertheless the customs are alike, and the people will easily be able to get on amongst themselves. He who has annexed them, if he wishes to hold them, has only to bear in mind two considerations: the one, that the family of their former lord is extinguished; the other, that neither their laws nor their taxes are altered, so that in a very short time they will become entirely one body with the old principality." (Machiavelli 2001, 18)

Machiavelli's distinction between dominions and his use of France as an illustrative example provide the first glimpse of his approach to the concept of nation. Territories of the same country and language can be understood as identifying as the same social community, in other words,

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<sup>14</sup> As discussed throughout the paper, plurinationalism exists despite the regret of many states that claim to be one nation only. Examples of plurinationalism are scattered all over the world from Canada to Bolivia to Indonesia. This does not mean that these states are not a nation as well, but that they also contain other nations within them since the nation is not an exclusive but rather multilayered concept (Merino 2018, 2).

<sup>15</sup> In Chapter V, *Concerning the way to govern cities or principalities which lived under their own laws before they were annexed*, Machiavelli also discusses the acquisition of territories that are different from the original principality. Nevertheless, this chapter is concerned with the change from freedom to absolute monarchy rather than with the difference in the population.

the same nation. Moreover, Machiavelli also introduces the possibility of having a different language yet being able to easily coexist due to sharing the same customs. This is the case of Brittany, Burgundy and others that while being different from each other, they are still bounded by the sense of belonging to France; there is a perception of membership within the same group. Machiavelli sees here that even though dominions were self-ruled, there is a bound between people beyond legality and politics; they are connected because they have the potential of nationhood.<sup>16</sup>

Then, having established that dominions of the same language, customs or laws would be easily assimilated into the main principality because of the similarities shared by their inhabitants, Machiavelli turns to deal with those principalities that differ significantly:

“But when states are acquired in a country differing in language, customs, or laws, there are difficulties, and good fortune and great energy are needed to hold them...” (Machiavelli 2001, 18)

The departing point for Machiavelli is the understanding that the new acquired territory by the prince and his original principality do not share any similarities that could unite them, they are in fact different nations. Therefore, the prince finds himself in a non-desirable scenario: he owns a plurinational principality<sup>17</sup>. Machiavelli's recognition of the differences between dominions within the same principality reflects an implicit understanding of plurinationalism – the existence of multiple nations within a single political entity.

A different dominion that shares at least the same language or the same customs than the one the prince is originally from, will not experience the same conquest as one where the language and the customs are radically different; a territory with a different language and customs will be fiercer in its defence and will try to rebel<sup>18</sup>. The issue of nationalism

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<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to point out again how Machiavelli sees the ability of people becoming part of the same social community without the necessity of sharing the same language. Groups may not share the same language but rather other characteristics, such as customs and laws as in this example, that creates this self-identification as members of the same circle.

<sup>17</sup> Or as Machiavelli describes it in this same chapter “a state composed of divers elements.”

<sup>18</sup> Although this is not to say that the first type of territories is completely of the same nation than the one of the prince, it is doubtless that the proximity between the two

also emerges here. A prince will confront more difficulties to legitimise his ruling over a territory that is in essence of different nation because of the expectation of having a ruler that can somehow identify with the population, that seems to belong to the same social community.

Plurinationalism presents significant challenges for rulers, and despite its undesirability, its existence cannot be ignored. For instance, after the Romans conquered Gaul, they faced prolonged resistance from its inhabitants, including major revolts such as the one led by Vercingetorix (Dyson 1971). This example illustrates the enduring hardships that arise when different nations are united under a single rule. Machiavelli was acutely aware of these difficulties and the complexities they introduced in maintaining control over such diverse territories.<sup>19</sup>

Confronted with the reality of plurinationalism, Machiavelli presents three options for maintaining control over such dominions: sending the prince to reside there, deploying the army, or establishing colonies. Among these three, the author favours the first one, sending the prince to reside in the new dominion. Even more, the author discusses the need for building connection with the prince:

“...and one of the greatest and most real helps would be that he who has acquired them should go and reside there. This would make his position more secure and durable, as it has made that of the Turk in Greece, who, notwithstanding all the other measures taken by him for holding that state, if he had not settled there, would not have been able to keep it. Because, if one is on the spot, disorders are seen as they spring up, and one can quickly remedy them; but if one is not at hand, they are heard of only when they are great, and then one can no longer remedy them. Besides this, the country is not pillaged by your officials; the subjects are satisfied by prompt recourse to the prince; thus, wishing to be good, they have more cause to love him, and wishing to be otherwise, to fear him.” (Machiavelli 2001, 19)

In this new territory, to this unknown *group*, the prince is nothing but a foreigner to the new dominion with which he shares no connection to.

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hypothetical nations is far closer than the one between territories with different languages and customs.

<sup>19</sup> This does not imply that Machiavelli was aware of the challenge of owning a plurinational state in today's current terms, but rather that he was capable of seeing the difficulties that a ruler must face when aiming to control a territory that is entirely different from the conqueror's.

Anticipating potential disorders that occurred in a dominion different from the prince's original principality, Machiavelli recommends the prince to reside there and foresee problems before they arise. Yet, most importantly, the subjects of the new dominion become able to *know* the prince. When subjects can easily reach the ruler, they are more likely to love him if they want to be good and fear him if they want to be otherwise. This balance of love and fear helps maintain order and loyalty. This strategy emphasises the importance of the prince's role in bridging the gap between different nations within the plurinational principality.

Moreover, Machiavelli foresees the problem that can arise if a foreign power tries to invade a new dominion where the prince is unknown to locals:

"...for it will always happen that such a one will be introduced by those who are discontented, either through excess of ambition or through fear, as one has seen already. The Romans were brought into Greece by the Aetolians; and in every other country where they obtained a footing they were brought in by the inhabitants. And the usual course of affairs is that, as soon as a powerful foreigner enters a country, all the subject states are drawn to him, moved by the hatred which they feel against the ruling power. So that in respect to those subject states he has not to take any trouble to gain them over to himself, for the whole of them quickly rally to the state which he has acquired there. He has only to take care that they do not get hold of too much power and too much authority, and then with his own forces, and with their goodwill, he can easily keep down the more powerful of them, so as to remain entirely master in the country. And he who does not properly manage this business will soon lose what he has acquired, and whilst he does hold it he will have endless difficulties and troubles." (Machiavelli 2001, 20)

A prince who has not invested himself in the new territory, will find that locals, moved by their hatred towards the prince that is a foreigner and an invader, will readily invite and embrace new rulers to overthrow the existing one. This phenomenon, as illustrated by the historical example of the Aetolians inviting the Romans into Greece, emphasises the crucial importance of managing local power dynamics. The prince, although the ruler, must be mindful of his *foreign* position in the new nation, that even though is his dominion, he is not part of the inhabitants' group, of their nation. He must purposefully become part of the territory, in this case especially by forging alliances with the minor powers, to earn their

respect and compromise. In other words, the prince moving to the new principality could also serve as a slower nation building process, as the prince places himself as a member of the principality and eventually becomes one of them rather than a foreigner. Inversely, the population, including the minor powers, also identify themselves with the prince as a part of the same community. This incremental integration is essential for maintaining stability in a plurinational state.

It is also pertinent to explore the two remaining options, sending the army and sending colonies. Machiavelli quickly dismisses the former, the fastest but riskiest option of deploying the army to suppress the new principality. The primary goal here is to minimise the costs associated with maintaining an army and the potential hostility it could incite. Nevertheless, Machiavelli recognises the potential advantage on sending colonies, saving costs as well as minimising the impact on the life of the inhabitants:

“The other and better course is to send colonies to one or two places, which may be as keys to that state, for it is necessary either to do this or else to keep there a great number of cavalry and infantry. A prince does not spend much on colonies, for with little or no expense he can send them out and keep them there, and he offends a minority only of the citizens from whom he takes lands and houses to give them to the new inhabitants.” (Machiavelli 2001, 19)

Employing a nationalist perspective, sending colonies to newly acquired territories, not only serves as a cost-effective means of control but also facilitates the assimilation of these territories into the prince’s original dominion. By establishing colonies in strategic locations, the prince creates pockets of loyal subjects who carry the culture, laws, and customs of the ruling state. This gradual cultural integration helps to align the local population with the values and governance of the prince’s original domain. The colonists, acting as intermediaries, promote stability and order, thereby reducing resistance and fostering loyalty among the locals. Over time, the presence of these colonies can lead to a blending of identities, making the new territory more cohesive with the prince’s original state. This method of assimilation ensures that the territory is not only controlled but also becomes an integral part of the prince’s realm, enhancing both security and unity. It slowly homogenises the plurinational principality and mitigates their stark differences.

In the latter part of the chapter, Machiavelli compares how the Romans and King Louis XII of France attempted to retain territories that were completely different nations. On the one hand, the Romans are praised for following the guidelines of Machiavelli. They did not try to change overnight the territory, but sent colonies that rather than destroying the dominion, will be assimilated within in, respected the minor powers that already existed without increasing their strength and protected the territory from any other foreign invasion. On the other hand, Louis XII made a succession of mistakes that precipitated his debacle:

*"Therefore, Louis made these five errors: destroyed the minor powers, he increased the strength of one of the greater powers in Italy, he brought in a foreign power, he did not settle in the country, he did not send colonies. Which errors, had he lived, were not enough to injure him had he not made a sixth by taking away their dominions from the Venetians... and you will see that he has done the opposite to those things which ought to be done to retain a state composed of divers elements."*  
(Machiavelli 2001, 21)

Louis XII of France acquired territories in Italy, which differed in language and customs. He neither settled there nor sent colonies. Hence, he did not try to approach the population of the new territory, or in other words, did not begin any process of nation building. On the other hand, the disrespect to the Venetians was the King's last mistake. The Venetians, not only powerful as they were, were also a part of a community to which Louis XII was rather a foreigner. Their power but also their historical attachment to the territory legitimated more the Venetians to own the dominions than Louis XII, that although King and ultimately the prince, did lack recognition from the population. Moreover, the Venetians were also Louis XII's confidants within the new territory, that even though owned by him, he was not yet part of it.

In conclusion, Machiavelli's strategies for ruling mixed principalities reveal a sophisticated understanding of the complexities involved in governing a plurinational principality. He recognises that effective governance requires not only military might but also cultural sensitivity and strategic integration. This approach is not a mere endorsement of plurinationalism but rather a pragmatic response to the realities of ruling over diverse territories.

## Discussion

None of Machiavelli's chapters of *The Prince* have been under as much discussion as his last chapter, "An exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians", for his eager defence of a united Italy under the rule of Italians, leading to discussions on nationalism. This paper, while acknowledging these discussions, has explored the concepts of nation and nationalism in *The Prince* from a novel perspective. Instead of focusing on Machiavelli's vision for his own country, it has examined what rulers should do to preserve control over territories inhabited by different nations. This approach introduces the term plurinationalism into the discourse on Machiavelli's work, aligning with his overarching themes of control and power.

Machiavelli's insights into the management of mixed principalities, particularly in the third chapter, *Concerning mixed principalities*, stresses his pragmatic approach to ruling diverse territories. He emphasises the importance of cultural and linguistic similarities for the ease of governance, but also provides strategies for managing territories with significant differences. Machiavelli's recommendation for the prince to reside in newly acquired territories and the establishment of colonies are strategic moves to bridge the gap between ruler and subjects, fostering loyalty and preventing rebellion. Residing in the territory allows the prince to address issues promptly and build a direct relationship with the subjects, while colonies facilitate cultural assimilation and integrate the local population into the ruling state's framework.

The concepts of nation and nationalism, although not explicitly defined by Machiavelli, are inherently linked to his strategies for maintaining power. Machiavelli's implicit understanding of a nation as a group bound by common language, customs and identity is evident in his advice to treat different dominions with sensitivity to their unique characteristics. His discussion of the difficulties in ruling territories with distinct languages and customs highlights the challenges of governing a plurinational state. By advocating for strategies that promote unity and loyalty, Machiavelli acknowledges the power of national identity in ensuring the stability of a plurinational principality.

In conclusion, this paper has not contradicted the traditional interpretations of Machiavelli's nationalism but has expanded the discussion to include the concept of plurinationalism. By focusing on Machiavelli's practical advice for rulers managing territories of different nations, it sheds light on the complexities of governance and the strategies necessary for maintaining control. This should not be seen as an endorsement of plurinationalism, but rather as an essential intermediate step for a prince who aims to effectively govern and integrate diverse territories. Through this lens, *The Prince* remains a timeless guide on the pragmatic exercise of power in a complex and varied political landscape.

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