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Rhetoric of violence in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*: The exemplar of Michele di Lando [1]

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Résumé

Au IIIème chapitre d'Histoires Florentines, Machiavel écrit que « Michele di Lando, cardeur de laine…déchaussé et très légèrement vêtu… » guide les Ciompi, des plébéiens, jusqu'à l'intérieur de l'édifice principal du gouvernement de la république florentine. Ce même Michele est désigné Signori de la République, et son premier geste politique est d' « ordonne[r] d'arrêter les tumultes » et de « commande[r] les plèbes d'aller chercher Ser Nuto, » le bargello (chef des archers) de l'ancien gouvernement oligarchique. Ser Nuto est traîné par la foule jusqu'au gibet, pendu « par un pied » et lynché jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste que son pied. Michele di Lando, un personnage appartenant au passé de Florence, n'est mentionné dans aucun autre texte politique et historique de Machiavel. Néanmoins, dans Histoires Florentines –texte dans lequel Machiavel propose de raconter « en détail » les « désunions et les hostilités de la ville » – Michele apparaît comme un héros « dont sa patrie a considérablement bénéficié ». Dans un

texte où les individus héroïques sont relativement rares, l'image de Michele di Lando vu par Machiavel apparaît comme paradigmatique et comme un exemple d'action politique. Contrairement aux arguments présentés par d'autres études sur Machiavel, je considère que Machiavel présente Michele di Lando comme un fondateur héroïque et donc, comme un personnage positif dans un texte aussi pessimiste qu'Histoires Florentines. Cet argument devient plus évident lorsque présenté à travers une analyse en profondeur de la structure et de la rhétorique de la violence utilisée par Machiavel pour raconter les événements menés par Michele di Lando. Je suis d'avis que Machiavel restructure les événements de la révolte des Ciompi et les actions dirigées par Michele di Lando pour créer un 'spectacle' de la violence. Ainsi, je souligne que la narration de la violence présentée par Machiavel dans Histoires Florentines a pour objectif d'offrir aux lecteurs des leçons politiques sur les qualités nécessaires pour développer un nouveau régime politique florentin. Par conséquent, Michele di Lando apparaît comme une figure exemplaire capable de canaliser la férocité des plébéiens et les divisions sociopolitiques de Florence, capable de réorganiser la république florentine et de créer un système de participation politique plus juste.

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Texte intégral

> Those who consider it…think it wonderful that all, or the larger part, of those who in this world have done very great things, and have been excellent among the men of their era, have in their birth and origin been humble and obscure […].
>
> Niccolò Machiavelli, The Life of Castruccio Castracani [2]

The following paper will assess Machiavelli's examination of the role of Michele di Lando during the Ciompi revolt of 1378. There are a number of reasons for embarking on such an endeavor. Although Machiavelli specialists have labored with skill and patience to refinethe accuracy of our understanding of Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* and to clarify its meaning, the subtleties of Machiavelli's comprehension of the figure of Michele di Lando, a figure that arises out of Florence's past and goes unmentioned in the rest of his chief texts, has eluded full analysis [3]. The main reason for the lack of comprehensive treatment of this subject is the lack of appreciation for Machiavelli's judicious reconfiguration and use of historical sources [4]. In addition, some scholars have argued that by the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli's writing shows less of the urgency and desperation to present what could be accomplished in political life by individual figures, which is a prominent argument in his earlier writings [5]. Without disputing the importance of this take on Machiavelli's texts, I propose that this approach overlooks some of the elements in Machiavelli's historical and rhetorical outlook both within the context of the crisis of humanism and within the development of his own political thought.

I conceive Machiavelli's account of the revolt of the Ciompi and the acts of Michele di Lando as a process of 'reproduction and reappropriation' of historical sources [6]. Both contemporary chroniclers and humanist historians had already presented the outlines of the events of the Ciompi and the actions of Michele di Lando at full length. Yet, Machiavelli's account of the actions of Michele di Lando deviates from the original sources, most especially in terms of its detailed retelling and its adding of dramatic and violent imagery. Through this reconfiguration of the events, Machiavelli

gives Michele's role new force, to the point that he becomes the center figure of the Ciompi events [7]. Secondly, I argue that Michele di Lando arises as an emblematic and quasi-mythological political character, who Machiavelli presents as reflecting with his humble origins and natural abilities. This conception of the events, moreover, presents Michele di Lando as a heroic founder-figure, and hence as a major positive example in the otherwise largely pessimistic *Histories* [8].

The remainder of this essay will be dedicated, first, to a sensitive analysis of Machiavelli's vocabulary in his interpretation of the role of Michele di Lando in the Ciompi revolt. I will compare and contrast Machiavelli's detailed analysis of Michele's role in the Ciompi revolt of 1378 with the accounts presented by contemporary chroniclers of the event (those of Alamanno Acciaioli and the so-called *Squittinatore*), and the recounting of the events by humanist historians Poggio Bracciolini and Leonardo Bruni [9]. Finally, I will draw some conclusions on the theory of founding that emanates out of the story of Michele di Lando and show how this conceptualization brings light to interpreting the overlooked character of Michele di Lando and the *Florentine Histories* in general.

I

The following paragraphs are mainly restricted to the case of the Ciompi and the emergence of Michele di Lando in Machiavelli's historiographical work; yet, they also seek, in an indirect manner, to stress the problem of how Machiavelli's turn to study and writing of Florentine history marks a clear distinction from earlier chroniclers and historians in a more general manner [10]. Certainly, Machiavelli does refer to and uses the available sources in his search for historical facts and raw data [11]. Still, Machiavelli does not feel in debt to his distinguished predecessors, nor does he pay *hommage* to them [12]. Machiavelli's approach vis-à-vis the material, then, is almost rebellious: the Florentine secretary takes into account *their* perspectives on the history of Florence –that is, the account of those who

had preserved the memory of the events prior to and during Machiavelli's times [13]. Nevertheless, Machiavelli reframes them, consciously and linguistically, in order to add up *his* personal and political account [14]. Detailed retelling, as Machiavelli proposes in the *Proemio* to the *Histories*, is a purposeful tool to appeal to the imagination of the reader: first, it portrays a perspective of a given historical event, and second it mobilizes the *ingegno* or imagination of the readership to provide a 'gift of counsel [15]'. Machiavelli, then, devises a historical narrative that has, to some extent, the intended impact of a political pamphlet: it is not merely meant to inform but also to act as a ´wake-up call´ to his readership.

Machiavelli's account of the most virulent part of the revolt begins with the events of the month of July 1378, during which the plebs led by the Ciompi –the wool carder's guildsmen– set in motion a series of tumults resulting in « arson and robbery » throughout the city. For Machiavelli, these Ciompi were driven, first, by indignation, and, second, by fear to be punished for the violence committed by the plebs under the leadership of the oligarchic faction that had run the city up to those days [16]. Here, Machiavelli adds a creation of his own, a direct speech on the part of an anonymous, « most daring and more experienced », plebeian [17]. This anonymous *Ciompo* states: « Do not let [the patricians'] antiquity of blood, with which they reproach us, dismay you; for all men, having the same beginning, are equally ancient and have been made by nature in one mode. Strip all of us naked, you will see that *we are all alike* [18] ». The speech functions as an introduction to the events that will follow: from the incipient stages of the revolt during which the Ciompi's deeds were mainly dictated by the factional fights among the leading sectors of Florence, now the Ciompi take the leading role in the narrative as represented by the anonymity of the speaker. The speech, hence, gives further ascendancy to the Ciompi as a collective actor, taking the central role in Machiavelli's narrative, and highlighting the class character of the divisions and struggle [19].

Following the speech, Machiavelli gives entrance to his unexpected hero, as the previous, and legitimately elected, Signori abandoned the palace to the mob,

> When the plebs entered the palace [of the Signoria], one Michele di Lando, a wool carder, had in his hand the ensign of the Gonfalonier of Justice. This man, barefoot and scantily clothed, climbed up the stairs with the whole mob behind him, and as soon as he was in the audience chamber of the Signoria, he stopped; and, turning around to the multitude he said, 'You see: this palace is yours and this city is in your hands. What do you think should be done now?' To which all replied that they wanted him to be Gonfalonier and lord, and to govern them and the city however seemed best to him. Michele accepted the lordship, and because he was a sagacious and prudent man who owed more to nature than to fortune, he resolved to quiet the city and stop the tumults [20].

As we can observe, Machiavelli's portrayal of the event follows the accounts of Alamanno Acciaioli, the *Squittinatore* and, to some extent, that of Bruni's *Istoria Fiorentina*. First, Acciaioli writes,

> Uno Michele di Lando, pettinatore overo che fusse sopra I pettinatori e sopra li scardassieri, fattore di bottega di lana, avea il gonfalone del popolo minuto in mano, cioé quello che si cavó di casa lo executore, ed era in inscarpette sanza calze, con questo gonfalone in mano entró in palazzo con tutto il popolo che ´l volle seguitare, e su per le scale n´andó infino nella udienza de´priori, e quivi si fermó ritto. E a voce di popolo gli dierono la signoria, e vollono che fusse gonfaloniere di iustizia e signore [21]. [One Michele di Lando, wool comber in charge of the wool combers and carders, had the banner \of the people in his hands, was poorly clothed and without shoes. With the banner in hand, he entered the palace with all the people that wanted to follow him, and mounted the stairs up until the audience of the Priors, where he stopped. By the voice of the people, he was given the Signoria and they wished him to be Gonfalonier of Justice and Lord]

Similarly, the *Squittinatore* states, « Allora sì giunse uno Michele di Lando pettinatore...sanza pezzo d´arme a lato o indosso e sí fu preso e postogli in mano il confalone della giostizia ed e´ lo prese per la mani, e per salvallo per lo popolo minuto [22] »[Now appears one Michele di Lando, wool

carder...and received the banner of Justice, which he took in his hands to 'save' it for the people]. Bruni's *Istoria* recounts the appearance of Michele as follows: « ...Cresciuta la molitudine, prese il palagio del podestà e miselo a sacco; e di poi col medesimo furore ritornò al palagio de` priori e strinsono i priori renunziare il magistrato; e ridotti come persone private, furoi d`ogni autorità ne gli rimandarono a casa. E la molititudine colla vittoria entrò nel palazzo, e fece gonfaloniere di giustizia Michele di Lando... [23] » [Having grown [in strength] the multitude took and sacked the palace of the *podestà*; then, with the same furor, they turned to the palace of the priorates and forced the magistrate to abandon his post. Having been reduced to private persons, denied of all authority, the magistrates were sent back to their homes. Then, the victorious multitude entered the palace and chose Michele di Lando as Gonfalonier of Justice].

As we can observe in the two chronicles, Michele di Lando is depicted as a member of the plebs and not as an individual character with a distinguished *ethos* and reputation [24]. The first deviation of Machiavelli's narrative from the chroniclers and Bruni is the use of a short direct speech on the part of di Lando, which gives force and enlarges Michele's individual character. « You see », Michele tells the Ciompi, «this palace is yours and this city is in your hands. What do you think should be done now? [25]» Michele turns around to speak directly to the mob (he asks them what they want, and they reply that they want him to be their leader); hence, his individual character becomes prominent over the indistinguishable collective crowd. The acceptance of such command, moreover, adds to the leading role of di Lando and makes him reach the level of a political leader.

In just a few moments (or lines), Michele's figure shifts from that of a member of the lowest sector of Florentine society to that of a political actor who takes the leading political position of the Florentine government [26]. Following Machiavelli's first characterization of Michele di Lando as « barefoot and scantily clothed », the Florentine secretary 'reminds' his readers of Michele's main virtues: he is « sagacious and prudent», two individual qualities, as we will observe, thoroughly absent from both the mob and the oligarchic factions [27]. At the same time, Michele's humble

origins resound in the mind of the reader: he remains a man of low origins all the while he shows the abilities of a statesman.

II

Yet, Michele's individual and rational virtue is not enough for a solitary reformer, and he goes on to demonstrate that he can be a fox and a lion at once. The following passage in Machiavelli's text also departs from the chroniclers and Bruni's accounts. In this case, Machiavelli's addition involves a detailed narrative of violence, which exaggerates certain details of the event that were certainly evident to contemporary and educated readers. Added to the employment of this narrative of violence, it is also noteworthy the elevated position that Machiavelli gives to the popularly elected Gonfalonier of justice, Michele di Lando. As his first governmental decision highlights, Michele is a 'natural' political leader: it does not take him much time to make his first political moves and decide to pacify and re-organize the city – « he resolved to quiet the city and stop the tumults [28] ». Nevertheless, Michele engages in political deception and brutality, for

> …to keep the people busy and to give himself some time to get in order, *he commanded* [the plebs] to seek out one ser Nuto who had been designated Bargello by Messer Lapo da Castiglionchio; the greater number of those around him went off on this errand. […] Ser Nuto was carried by the multitude to the piazza and hung on the gallows by one foot; and as whoever was around tore off a piece from him, at a stroke there was nothing left of him but his foot [29].

We can observe, first, that Michele di Lando is given a fundamental position in this event, for he takes the role of *commander* and leading figure of the event. Machiavelli explicitly portrays the poor wool comber as a man of intellectual talents capable of mobilizing « the greater number of those around him » so as to take command over the entire city. More importantly, only Machiavelli's account has Nuto's arrest occasioned by di Lando, since

none of the previous accounts give such a prominent role to Michele di Lando as the 'intellectual commander' of the execution of Ser Nuto of Cittá di Castello. The *Squittinatore*'s chronicle has Nuto arriving at the piazza on his own volition and it is thoroughly silent of di Lando's role in the event, whereas Acciaioli's chronicle and Bruni's *Istoria* avoid the discussion of the event in its entirety [30]. For instance, the *Squittinatore* writes,

> Uno Bargello, ch'era chiamato ser Nuto dalla Cittá di Castello, si era venuto a proferere al popolo grasso, che regieva prima, che e´ gubernebbe la terra, d´impiccare i poveri uomini di Firenze. Non piacque a Dio che sua volontá fosse; e´ fu preso dal popolo minuto e fu tutto tagliato per pezzi; il minore non fu oncie sei [31]. [One sheriff, named ser Nuto of Città di Castello, came to town under the lead of the 'fat people' [aristocrats] that reigned and governed the city, to hang the poor people of Florence. God did not want his will to succeed and Ser Nuto was imprisoned by the low people and was cut into pieces, so that the smallest one measured six inches].

The *Squittinatore's* account highlights the role that Nuto played in the collective imagination of the mob – that is, his origins and his role in the city; yet, he thoroughly dismisses the execution and Michele's role in it. Acciaioli's *Cronaca* does not even retell the event; on the contrary, it focuses on the character of ser Nuto as the vicar of the oligarchy, who had been brought from Cittá di Castello and made sheriff of Florence « …per impiccarci tutti per la gola [32] » [To hang them all by the throat]. Moreover, Machiavelli reproduces the events as recounted by his predecessors. For instance, in Acciaioli, the *Squittinatore* and Machiavelli's accounts, we get to see that the previous regime brought Nuto to the city to violently repress the tumultuous plebeians. Yet, the fact that Machiavelli gives a prominent role to Michele di Lando in the execution of Ser Nuto gives reason to think that Machiavelli's di Lando employs Nuto as the symbol of the *ancienregime* of the Florentine elite. The *Bargello* fills in the collective imagination of the people (and the political interest of Michele di Lando), as representative of the hatred the plebs felt toward the previous oligarchic political order in Florence. Di Lando is well aware of this, since he

commands the crowd to go after ser Nuto only. No other names are given, nor are other executions recounted [33].

Michele now dominates the story in its entirety, combining physical presence with mental subtlety. His high-mindedness and corporeal action can be seen even clearer if we return to Machiavelli's 'old' hero of *virtù*, Cesare Borgia. In his *Prince*, Machiavelli praises Borgia for correcting his path, since, even though Borgia obtained power over the Romagna « by fortune of his father [Pope Alexander VI]," he was still able to become a "prudent and virtuous man [34] ». One of the most important differences between Borgia and di Lando is the way in which Machiavelli's heroes obtain such *virtù*: whereas Michele is virtuous 'by nature,' Borgia had to 'learn' his way to *virtù* [35]. Michele's heroic individualism, as an exemplar of the conquest of virtue over adversity is much more in line with another of Machiavelli's heroic creations, Castruccio Castracani of Lucca, about whom Machiavelli tells us,

> Those who consider it…think it wonderful that all, or the larger part, of those who in this world have done very great things, and have been excellent among the men of their era, have in their birth and origin been humble and obscure […] [36].

Machiavelli's 'new' heroic figures, Michele and Castruccio, unlike Borgia, have no aristocratic blood, but both can be indentified as individuals that have transcended their obscure origins. Nevertheless, only Michele di Lando is capable of transcending simultaneously his origins and the traditional factional allegiances. Thus, his *deeds, not his origins* mark Michele di Lando as a man worth of consideration and as an exemplar of political action.

As a final consideration on the resemblance of Michele's actions and those of Cesare Borgia, Nuto's execution happens in a public space, the most symbolic piazza in Florence -the *Piazza della Signoria*- next to the main governmental headquarters. Despite sharing Borgia's intentions of channeling brutality through a public spectacle of violence, the source and

use of this mechanism on the part of Michele are much more ‘public’ than that employed by Borgia. And although Borgia’s spectacle is also meant for public display, the meaning of the execution remains “private,” as part of the world of intrigue and pseudo-mythology [37]. Michele’s deeds, then, come to coronate his process of detachment from the revolutionary extremism of the mob and his entrance into the world of political authority.

III

Following the execution of Ser Nuto, Machiavelli stresses Michele’s interest in establishing justice and order in the city for which he orders to stop the riots and the sacking. For Machiavelli, then, di Lando’s main goal was to quiet the tumults and order the city, « so as to begin with justice the empire he had acquired by grace, *he had it publicly commanded* that no one burn or steal anything; and to frighten everyone, he had gallows erected in the piazza frighten *everyone* [38]». Once Michele’s rule over Florence seems to begin, the *Eight of War*, the leaders of the Florentine army and the instrument of political power of the Florentine oligarchy, present Michele with open opposition. In another addition of his own, Machiavelli tells that whilst the *Eight* thought themselves rulers of the city, Michele « sent word to [the Eight] to leave the palace [of the Signoria] at once, for he wanted to show everyone that he knew how to govern Florence *without their advice* [39] ». Once again, we get to observe how Machiavelli’s account deviates from those of his predecessors, since Acciaioli comments that the *Eight of War* felt “ingannati” [deceived]. The Eight believed that, by being the remnants of the previous oligarchic Signoria, they deserved to rule over the city [40]. Likewise, Bruni’s account tells us that the city had « due capi, e quell che deliberava l’una parte l’altro disfacea, ne seguiva grande confusione e disperazione delle cose che s’avevano a fare [41] » [the city had two
leaders, and what one decided to do, the other would undo, and as a result there was
great confusion and 'despair' as to what should be done].

Contrary to the beliefs and interests of the *Eight*, Michele called up a council that created a new government council, or *Signoria*, and added three new seats that represented the new guilds of the lower social sectors of the city [42]. Michele also distributed favors to, among others, Salvestro de' Medici and some 'bourgeois' figures that were sympathetic to his government, « not so much to compensate them for their deeds as that they might at all times defend him against envy [43]». Michele, as we get to see, becomes a moderate leader against the oligarchs, whose incorrigible arrogance, obsession with petty factional quarrels and delusions of grandeur (as represented by the actions of the *Eight of War*) made them a threat to the republican order. At the same time, this view of the aristocratic sector of Florence as a threat to the republic is particularly at odds with Machiavelli's ancient examples of republicanism, in which the moderate forces would always emanate from the aristocracy so as to control the irreverence of the people [44]. In this Florentine example, on the contrary, the figure of Michele, a member of the Florentine 'working class,' acts as the savior of moderation and republican competence [45]. At the same time, his 'moderate' position also places him against the most radical sector of the Ciompi, who now become a serious challenge to his rule [46].

By the end of the revolt, Machiavelli writes that the plebs perceived that Michele « in reforming the state had been too partisan toward the greater people ». For this reason, the radical Ciompi decided to take up arms once again « with their usual boldness » and « presumption » after all the « dignity they had given [to Michele di Lando] and the honor they had done him [47] ». Having failed to obtain total control of the government through legal means, the radical factions of the Ciompi then attempted to employ force against Michele's regime. Their arrogance and ambition, much like that of the old aristocrats, is now highlighted as detrimental to the order of Florence [48]. Michele's response exemplifies those characteristics Machiavelli praised before: « mindful more of the rank he held than of his low condition, it appeared to him that he must check this *extraordinary insolence* with an extraordinary mode […] [49] ». Again, Machiavelli remarks the difference between the poor origins of di Lando and his capacity as the

reformer of the republic. The plebs, much like their aristocratic counterparts, shows no limits in terms of their political voracity. Di Lando employs « extraordinary methods » –or extra-legal violence- on the envoys of the plebs, though only after the implementation of the political reforms that included the lesser guilds within the newly reformed Florentine republic [50]. The confrontation in Machiavelli's account, stung by his low birth, makes Michele more noble, in the sense that di Lando holds neither the 'will to power' of those that 'want to oppress' nor the boldness and arrogance of those that 'want not to be oppressed [51]'. Michele, in Machiavelli's view, is not merely a positive or moral figure, but an exemplar of a man of state, whose deeds and interests (the common good of the republic) lie ahead of any partisan or *modo privato*. On the other hand, whereas the most favored by birth were unable to cope with their sense of ambition, the poor and uneducated ones were merely driven by their thirst for revenge and contingency. Michele di Lando, unlike these two groups, led by his sense of « spirit, prudence, and goodness », becomes himself the symbol of the reformed and much more republican regime, and stands alone as the defender of the republic of Florence against all forms of private subjugation.

Thus, Machiavelli tells us, Michele symbolizes Florentine society and those of the new 'mixed government' in its entirety: he is a true 'noble' character (not in origins but in skill), a moderate republican, and a humble *Ciompo*, barely clothed and barefoot, all at once. By observing the various uses of historical sources on the part of Machiavelli to construct his own version of Michele di Lando as a statesman and reformer it can be seen that, despite Machiavelli's pessimistic perception toward political action, he did not thoroughly dismiss it. More important, perhaps, is the fact that Michele di Lando takes action against all factional allegiances and is able to transcend his origins and status to the level of what Najemy has defined elsewhere as the 'perfect heroic figure:' « a wise, good, and powerful citizen…who re-order[ed] the city, quiet[ed] the factions [and] re-establish[ed] good *ordini* […] [52] ».

At first sight, the peak of the radicalization of the *tumulto* is presented in a derogative fashion, as led by the arrogance and ambition of those who, just weeks before, lacked guilds of their own and access to the higher spheres of Florentine politics. Yet, this *tumulto* appears in the *Histories* as an exemplar of the radicalization and the possible outcome of such uncontrollable type of *disordine* [53]. After the radical Ciompi eliminate the aristocracy from the centre of power, they show that they are not 'satisfied' with their political representation that results from Michele di Lando's political reforms. This radical character of the anti-Michele-Ciompi, added to the reactionary portrayal of the *Eight of War* as the representatives of the former patrician rulers, make of Michele a much more heroic (and solitary) *founding figure* of a republic that is threatened with death [54].

In the end, Machiavelli is quite certain that Michele di Lando must be recognized as a hero of his *patria*, for « had his spirit been either malign or ambitious, the republic would have lost its freedom altogether and fallen under a greater tyranny than that of the duke of Athens [55] ». Michele is in fact *an outcome* of the Ciompi tumults, for he arises from the core of the revolt of the wool carders. Yet, his high virtue allows him to avoid the use of his political position for private ends –which is quite at odds with the attempts of both the oligarchic and the radical Ciompi sectors. More importantly, his power (though necessarily solitary) is not tyrannical, as his transparent, impartial and fair political actions allow him to transcend all partisan and factional domination. Michele di Lando is the man of poor origins and spectacular noble capacities: he is a man, or at least Machiavelli so makes us believe, that could leave his mark in the history of the city, yet free of the effects private interests and violent factionalism.

Machiavelli's portrayal of Michele as a great political figure, configured as a mixture of political concreteness, humble origins and *naturalvirtù,* make of him a man « to be numbered among the few who have benefited their fatherland [56] ». This final scene in the story of Michele recalls the substantive and recurrent problem that Machiavelli highlights throughout the *Histories*, as in the introductory section to Chapter III: the irremediable « natural enmities that exist between men of the people and the

nobles [57] ». Machiavelli portrays Michele di Lando as someone who transcended his obscure and humble origins by simultaneously transcending partisan and factional allegiances. Although a member of the Ciompi, upon assuming power he struck an independent path, trying to find a way to unify the city. The defeat of both social forces in the hands of Michele highlights the importance of the individual character as a promoter or facilitator of the reconstruction of a political system that accommodated all of the city's competing forces rather than one that prioritized the Ciompi or the patricians [58].

IV

In this work, I have presented a sensitive analysis of Machiavelli's use of history as exemplified by the narration of Michele di Lando's political actions in Book III of the *Florentine Histories*. I have shown that Machiavelli judiciously reworks the historical accounts of his predecessors in the form of what could be referred to as 'reproduction and reappropriation' of history. Machiavelli employs the historical accounts of his predecessors and refines them by adding his own dramatic and violent representation of the events. Thus, Machiavelli's « dramatic representation » combines Bruni's humanist historical writing with « his medieval predecessors' vivid and emotional descriptions [59]». In so doing, Machiavelli engages in a dual act: first, he reproduces humanist forms of history meant to draw ideal images of the past in order to move the reader to public action guided by moral virtue. Secondly, Machiavelli reframes the linguistic context of humanist history and adds his own political character to it, based on political actions as reflected in the violent and 'extraordinary' modes employed by Michele di Lando.

For Machiavelli, then, the republican impetus need only be recognized and protected from individual domination of particular societal elements and their interactions; Michele di Lando -as represented in his heroic metamorphosis- came to appreciate this complexity and gravity of social

divisions and public affairs [60]. Michele's 'new modes and orders' bring about a republican consciousness of complexity and sophistication of political affairs, which perceives political participation as a means to facilitate political accessibility. Michele, then, is someone who recognizes the need for what is sorely lacking throughout Machiavelli's view of Florentine history: transparent, impartial, and fair laws and political institutions. By emphasizing Michele's origins and his *virtù*, Machiavelli bridges the 'political' aspect of the *Florentine Histories* with a practical and historical appeal to political foundation. Machiavelli's historical narrative comes at its summum in his account of the deeds of Michele, for the judicious rhetorical view of this humble man shows the reader how those who strive against tyranny and factionalism deserve to be remembered, while those who attempt to eliminate opposition as the path toward political unity and domination are condemned to historical oblivion for their foolish hopes [61]. Machiavelli was urging the Florentine leaders precisely that, to reject the city's defective traditions and refound the republic, all under the tutelage of his republican hero, Michele di Lando.

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Notes

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[2] Niccolò Machiavelli, « The Life of Castruccio Castracani », in Allan Gilbert (ed. and trans.), *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1989, p. 533.

[3] The literature on Machiavelli's view of Michele di Lando and the Ciompi revolt has grown rapidly in the past decades. See for instance, Mark Phillips, « Barefoot boy makes good », *Speculum* 59 (1984); Ana Maria Cabrini, « La storia da non imitare: Il versante negativo dell'esemplarità nelle Istorie Fiorentine », in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1997), p.197-220; Timothy Lukes, « Descending to particulars: The palazzo, the piazza and Machiavelli's republican new modes and orders », *The Journal of Politics* 71 (2000); Marina Marietti, « Une figure emblématique: Michele di Lando vu par Maquiavel », *Chroniques* 69-70 (2002);Martine Leivovici, « From fight to debate: Machiavelli and the revolt of the Ciompi », Philosophy and Social Criticism 28 (2002); Sverre Bagge, « Actors and structure in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine* », *Quaderni d'Italianistica* XXVIII (2) (2007), p. 45-87.

[4] Delmo Maestri, "Dalla *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* Alle *Istorie fiorentine*: L'ultimo Machiavelli » *Rivista di studi italiani* 16.1 (1998), p. 129-30.

[5] For instance, Gennaro Sasso argues that « ...le Istorie Fiorentine offriranno nuovi problemi, nuove prospettive...ma al fondo di queste pagine, la nota dominante sara ancora una volta quella della rinuncia pratica, il senso della conclusione definitiva di tutta una fase della storia italiana ». [The *Florentine Histories* will offer new problems, new perspectives…but in the end, the main subject will be once again the abdication of practice, as a conclusion to an entire stage of Italian history] Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del Suo Pensiero Politico,* Naples : Instituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1958, p. 496. Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Cecil Grayson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, p.220. Felix Gilbert,« Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*: an Essay in Interpretation »,in *Choice and Commitment*, ed. Franklin L. Ford, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1977, p. 85. John Najemy,

« Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History », *Renaissance Quarterly* 35(4), p. 550. Salvatore di Maria, « Machiavelli's Ironic View of History: The *Istorie Fiorentine*», *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992), p. 259.

[6] Felix Gilbert, art. cit., p. 85-6.

[7] John Najemy, *Arti and Ordini*, *op. cit.,* p.160-162. Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 236-8.

[8] Delmo Maestri, art. cit., p. 130 and 142.

[9] As already suggested by John Najemy, in the *Proemio* to the *Histories*, Machiavelli criticizes his humanist predecessors, most notably Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini, for not having discussed "in detail" the internal enmities and civil discords in the history of Florence. Machiavelli's critique is certainly true with respect to Poggio's *Historia Fiorentina*, but it is somewhat unfair to the efforts of Bruni. John Najemy, *Arti and Ordini*, *op. cit.*, p.162-165. For the decisive difference of foci between Machiavelli and Poggio, see, for instance, Poggio's Book II of *Historia Fiorentina*, trans. Iacopo di Messer Poggio, ed. Eugenio Garin, Arezzo, Biblioteca della Città di Arezzo, 1980, p. 102-115. Also, Phillips has already presented an examination of the role of Michele di Lando in the *Histories*, but, contrary to my reading, he claims that Michele exemplifies Machiavelli's acceptance of the need of a tyrannical ruler as political reformer (Mark Phillips, art. cit., p. 585).

[10] Other scholars have presented proof of Machiavelli's distinctive narrative *vis-à-vis* the original sources of historical events; yet, most, if not all, have overlooked the importance of such characterization as a 'political tactic' on the part of Machiavelli. See, Gilbert, *Machiavelli's Istorie Fiorentine*, p.135-6. Gisela Bock, « Civic Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*», in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, eds. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.193-194. Mark Phillips, art. cit., p. 587-590.

[11] For a study on Machiavelli's use of sources in his *Histories*, see Ridolfi, p.197-99. Also, Gisela Bock, p. 183.

[12] Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York, Vintage Books, 1989), p.190 and 285. In line with this argument, Bock states, « Machiavelli presents…a gloomy picture of the history of Florence, a city of which, a century earlier, Bruni had written not merely a glorifying history but even a *Laudatio* […] ». Gisela Bock, p. 182

[13] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine histories*, trans. Laura Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 6. Unless noted, all translations are from this edition. I used the Mario Martelli *Tutte le opere* to verify the quality of the translation. Mario Martelli, ed. *Machiavelli: Tutte le opera*, Florence, Sansoni Editore, 1971. For a discussion on the chroniclers of the Ciompi revolt, see, Louis Green, *Chronicle into History,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 107-110. For an analysis on humanist history and the *Ciompi*, see John Najemy, *Arti and Ordini*, *op. cit.*, p. 161-163.

[14] Athanasios Moulakis claims, « Machiavelli himself, though much indebted to [the civic humanist] tradition, departs from it in such salient ways that he cannot be simply identified with it ». Athanasios Moulakis, *Republican Realism in Renaissance Florence: Francesco Guicciardini's Discorso di Logrogn*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998, p. 41. Anglo states that the *Florentine Histories* « …is a highly selective, idiosyncratic, and often wilfully-inaccurate narrative serving as the raw material with which Machiavelli illustrates his politico-historical preconceptions ». Sydney Anglo, *Machiavelli: A Dissection*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969, p. 166.

[15] Albert Russell Ascoli, « Machiavelli's Gift of Counsel», in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Victoria Kahn, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 199, p. 219.

[16] This refers to the tumults against Messer Lapo di Castiglionchio, the leader of the Guelf party, who was believed to be the enemy of the

plebeians. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 121-122. Alamanno Acciaioli's *Croniche* presents a similar understanding of the act. G. Scaramella, ed. « Chroniche dei Tumulto di Ciompi di Alamanno Acciaioli», in *Raccolta degli Storici Italiani: dal Cinquencento al Millecinquecento*, Bologna, Nicola Zanichelli, 1934, p. 15.

[17] The discourse is not only Machiavelli's creation: it is also similar in character to the speech presented by the so-called 'republican citizen' before the tyrant Walter de Brienne or Duke of Athens in Chapter II of the *Histories*. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 70. My emphasis.

[18] *Ibid*, p. 122.

[19] Marina Marietti, art. cit., p. 132.

[20] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.,* p. 127.

[21] G. Scaramella, *Croniche di Alamanno Acciaioli*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[22] G. Scaramella, ed. « Cronaca Prima D'Anonimo », in *Racolta degli Istorici Italiani: dal Cinquecento al Millecinquecento*, Bologna, Nicola Zanichelli, 1934, p. 75.

[23] Leonardo Bruni, *Istoria Fiorentina*, trans. Donato Acciaiuoli, Florence, F. Le Monnier, 1861, p. 429. Poggio's *Historia* thoroughly dismisses the event, something that, as I already mentioned, seems to add proof to Najemy's theory of Machiavelli's critique in the *Proemio* of the *Histories*. Poggio Bracciolini, *op. cit.,* p. 102-120.

[24] Bruni's account gives no importance to the imagery of Michele, since he merely states that Michele was a member of the « infima plebe » ['smallest' pleb]. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.,* p. 429.

[25] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 127.

[26] Mark Phillips, p. 590.

[27] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 127. Timothy Lukes, art. cit., p.9. For Bruni, on the contrary, Michele di Lando is not '*naturally* sagacious and prudent': his political skills are the result of a « divina permissione » [divine 'grace']. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 430-431.

[28] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 127. Italics are mine. Bruni states that Michele « ...sempre s'oppose alle disoneste cupidità del popolo minuto e della moltitudine... » [always opposed the dishonest greed of the lowest plebs and the multitude]. As we get to observe, Bruni's main interest is not Michele's political skills, but the ubiquitous violent *ethos* of the mob. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

[29] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 127-128.

[30] Besides, whenever Bruni speaks of Michele di Lando, he employs the official and neutral term « il gonfaloniere » [the Gonfalonier], something that gives less weight to Michele's importance in the events of the Ciompi. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

[31] G. Scaramella, *Cronaca prima d'anonimo*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[32] G. Scaramella, *Croniche di Alamanno Acciaioli*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[33] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

[34] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 26-27.

[35] Bruni refers to Michele's « virtù e costanza » as a 'divine grace'. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

[36] Machiavelli began this pseudo-biographical text during his stay at the city of Lucca in 1520, where he was sent by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici to resolve a bankruptcy case in which some Florentine merchants were involved. The similarity of the mythical recreation of the origins of Castruccio and Michele, though striking, lies beyond the scope of this work, and then should be treated separately. James Atkinson and David Sices,

Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1996, p. 322-323. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

[37] Wayne Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Man*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 117-122.

[38] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.,* p. 128. Italics are mine. Bruni states that Michele always tried to put a stop at the multitude's ambitions, « confortando, ammonendo e riprendendo i loro maligni desideri » ['consolating,' admonishing and repressing their malicious desires]. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.,* p.431. Again, this argument on the part of Bruni is quite in line with Bruni's interest in recounting the ethos of the mob rather than the individual deeds of Michele di Lando.

[39] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 128. Italics are mine.

[40] G. Scaramella, *Croniche di Alamanno Acciaioli*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[41] Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 431. Hence, for both Acciaioli and Bruni the centre of gravity of the event is the Eight and not Michele, who is relegated to a secondary role as one of the 'due capi'.

[42] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 128. Acciaioli gives no personal merit to Michele for forming the new *Signoria*. (see G. Scaramella, *Croniche di Alamanno Acciaioli*, *op. cit.*, p. 34). Bruni gives Michele a minor role in the creation of the new government, for he states that « la plebe niente dimeno e la moltitudine in ogni cosa dominava » [notwithstanding, the plebs and the multitude dominated every affair]. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

[43] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 128.

[44] Timothy Lukes, art. cit., p. 6.

[45] *Ibid*, p. 6-7. Lukes is right to notice the novelty of the role of the aristocracy in Machiavelli's republican perspective. Nevertheless, I believe Lukes overlooks Michele's political metamorphosis, since he is not simply a « cadre of the common people »: his origins underscore his transformation, but his political moderation represent both the revolt of the plebs and the republican moderation needed to safeguard Florence's republic.

[46] Whereas Acciaioli, the *Squittinatore* and Bruni's accounts seem biased toward one of the social sectors, Machiavelli's account seems mostly 'biased' toward Michele's governmental reforms.

[47] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 128-129.

[48] If we compare Machiavelli's conclusion to that of Bruni, we can observe that, whereas Machiavelli highlights the role of Michele, Bruni merely criticizes the Ciompi's violent means and ambition. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

[49] *Ibid*, p. 129. My emphasis.

[50] *Ibid*, p. 129. Mark Phillips, art. cit., p. 601. Acciaioli's account, on the other hand, lacks the theatricality employed by Machiavelli.« Il gonfaloniere, uomo animoso con lo coltello che aveva a canto dette loro delle ferrite; poi gli fece anco mettere in prigione » [The spirited Gonfalonier injured the man with his knife and ordered to send him to prison]. G. Scaramella, *Cronache di Alamanno Acciaioli*, *op. cit.*, p. 38-39. Bruni's retelling of the event not only lacks all theatricality but also dismisses the role of Michele in its its entirety. Leonardo Bruni, *op. cit*, p. 431-2.

[51] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 17. Compare this characterization of the class antagonisms between the nobles and the plebs with the abovementioned speech of the anonymous plebeian.

[52] John Najemy, *Arti and Ordini*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

[53] *Ibid*, p. 177.

[54] Delmo Marietti, art. cit., p. 137.

[55] The events of the tyranny of the Walter de Brienne, the Duke of Athens are recounted in Book II of the *Histories*. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[56] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p.130-131. Also, John Najemy, *Arti and Ordini*, *op. cit.*, p.179.

[57] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, *op. cit.*, p.105.

[58] As Franco Gaeta states in his introductory essay to the *Florentine Histories*, « …al Machiavelli non rimaneva che transferire al passato quella ch'era stata l'aspettativa d'un imminente futuro » [Machiavelli did not have another choice but to transfer to the past the events that he thought will happen in an imminent future]. In other words, even though Machiavelli did not have a contemporary figure at hand so as to present his characterization of the individual political 'facilitator', he still attempted to recreate the idea of individual political action through the historical figure of Michele di Lando. Cited in Delmo Maestri, art. cit., p. 129.

[59] Sverre Bagge, « Actors and structure in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine* », *Quaderni d'Italianistica* XXVIII (2) (2007), p. 58.

[60] Timothy Lukes, art. cit., p. 11. John Najemy, *Machiavelli and the Medici*, *op. cit.,* p. 565.

[61] In his *Discursus Florentinarum Rerum Post Mortem Iunioris Laurenti Medices*, Machiavelli reminds his reader and commissioner, Pope Leo X, that one of the problems that the republic of Piero Soderini suffered was that fact it never satisfied "all the parties among the citizens." Then, speaking of the functions of the for-life Gonfalonier of the last Florentine Republic (Piero Soderini), Machiavelli recalls a subject that he had already discussed with respect to his mythological characterization of Michele di Lando: "[The Florentine republic] was so defective and remote from a true republic that a Gonfalonier for life, if he was intelligent and wicked, easily

could have make himself prince; if he was good and weak [as Soderini], he could easily be driven out, with the ruin of the whole government." Though somewhat speculative, it is probable that the Florentine secretary perceived the last two Medici leaders, Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio di Giuliano, as the potential facilitators of a 'republican solution' similar to the one exemplified by Michele di Lando. Niccolò Machiavelli, « Discursus Florentinarum Rerum Post Mortem Iunioris Laurenti Medices », in Allan Gilbert (ed. and trans.), *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1989, p. 103, 130-1.

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