

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Palermo is a mosaic’: cosmopolitan rhetoric in the capital of Sicily

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Abstract

The political messaging of Leoluca Orlando, who served five terms as mayor of Sicily’s capital, Palermo (most recently, until 2022), articulates a cosmopolitan vision of local identity. Orlando seeks to emphasise Palermo’s ‘tolerant’ values, invoking the city’s history to foster this image, as well as using a variety of rhetorical strategies. He portrays Palermo as having a true ‘essence’, which is necessarily multicultural. I analyse Orlando’s pronouncements on his official Facebook page, as well as observing his audience’s reactions to his messaging, both supportive and critical. I examine how Orlando articulates the narrative that Palermo has historically been a ‘mosaic’ of various cultural influences, proposing that the contemporary city is the ‘true’, welcoming face of the Mediterranean. As well as exploring the political utility Orlando sees in such arguments, I analyse the risks inherent in this essentialising project.

Keywords: Sicily; Palermo; multiculturalism; cosmopolitanism; rhetoric; Mediterranean

Introduction

Sicilians often emphasise the intricate cultural ‘mixture’ of their island, resulting from its history as a locus of invasion, and its long experience of emigration and immigration. In recent decades, this history has been amplified by Leoluca Orlando’s political messaging. Orlando has served five non-consecutive terms as mayor of Palermo, Sicily’s capital, with his most recent term ending in 2022. He is one of Sicily’s most recognisable politicians. In this article, I use digital anthropological methods to explore how Orlando describes Sicily to his primary audience: his electorate, i.e. other Palermitans. By analysing Orlando’s political messaging, as well as his audience’s reactions to that messaging, we obtain a vivid picture of how Palermitan identity is being constructed and redefined.

From his first tenure as mayor of Palermo (1985–1990), Orlando became well known throughout Italy for his high-profile campaign against the mafia (Schneider and Schneider 2003; Santino 2009). With some partial exceptions (see e.g. Puccio-Den 2002; Barber 2013; Kron and Leuhn 2020), less scholarly attention has been paid to another dominant strain in Orlando’s political thought: an outspoken commitment to cosmopolitanism¹ and free movement, and an opposition to anti-immigration rhetoric and

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policies.² As I will argue, Orlando understands the two struggles – against the mafia, and against intolerance – to be linked and mutually reinforcing, despite a popular perception that his priorities have shifted over his career.

Since 2012, Orlando has written over 5,000 posts on the social media platform Facebook, where he has over 85,000 ‘followers’.³ He has secured positive international coverage of his city: one *Guardian* headline introduces him as the mayor who ‘fought the mafia and won’ (Van der Zee, 2017). Since the 2010s, social media has been one of Orlando’s most immediate means of communication with his electorate, and with supporters (and detractors) elsewhere. Accordingly, I focus on Orlando’s use of Facebook, still the world’s most widely used social media platform (DataReportal 2023).

My qualitative study analyses data that is fully accessible to the public.⁴ While my research focuses on Orlando’s posts themselves, I also refer to public comments by other Facebook users, to understand how Orlando’s messages are interpreted, and contested, by his audience.⁵ When tailored to suitable research questions, digital ethnography is no mere ‘fallback’ for when in-person fieldwork is impractical, although it can circumnavigate such challenges. In the present case, social media analysis improves our understanding of a political discourse that has developed over a sustained period, and demonstrates the importance of digital mass-media for the construction of an identity narrative.

There is extensive scholarship on the idea of a ‘Mediterranean’ identity, and the Mediterranean has been used to stand for a number of (sometimes contradictory) characteristics (see e.g. Herzfeld 2005b). I focus on one particular understanding of the Mediterranean, put forward by some (but not all) in this transnational region: the idea that it ‘evokes a continual intertwining of diverse roots and routes’ (Chambers 2008, 34). For some, certain versions of this Mediterraneanism ‘romanticise the Mediterranean as an idealised space of cosmopolitan interconnection’ (Palma 2021, 147), or amount to mere ‘multicultural ... “branding”’ (Giglioli 2018, 66). My research takes these criticisms seriously, while also recognising that this vision of Mediterranean identity can be affectively powerful, and is felt by its proponents to be a politically useful tool for opposing the dominant xenophobia of mainstream European discourse.

I interrogate the political effects of this cosmopolitan imaginary in Sicily, asking questions more frequently posed elsewhere in the European Mediterranean. In Granada, for instance – another city with a strong cultural memory of its multi-religious past – Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar has investigated how residents ‘mobilise historical narratives ... to navigate renewed ethnic and religious pluralism in the city today’ (2017, 3); Charles Hirschkind examines the development of a ‘critical reflection on the norms of European politics’ rooted in Iberia’s multi-religious histories and legacies (2021, 3). This article demonstrates that ideas of multicultural history are central in Sicilian political discourse, too. It sheds light on how one of Europe’s political ‘outliers’ – an electorally popular, pro-immigration mayor, in a continent dominated by xenophobic rhetoric and policies – has crafted his political messaging.

My first section focuses on how Orlando uses history to portray Palermo as having a true ‘essence’: one that is necessarily tolerant and open to cultural syncretism. I build on the observation that communities use a variety of ‘scripts’ about Mediterranean history (Ben-Yehoyada 2017), showing how these are developed, and contested, in political debates on social media. I then examine how one of Palermo’s patron saints is used to symbolise ‘tolerance’, before analysing an argument I term the ‘fascist-mafia parenthesis’, which insists that the city is only now rediscovering its ‘true’ identity. My question is not whether these narratives are entirely supported by historiography; in many cases, this is far from clear-cut. Instead, building on the approach of scholars like Claudio Fogu (2006; 2020), I focus on the political work these ‘imaginaries’ carry out.

In my second section, I examine the rhetorical strategies employed by Orlando to articulate his cosmopolitan vision. I analyse the metaphor of the mosaic, often used to bolster arguments that Palermo is a ‘city of solidarity’ (Carney 2021, 102). Rather than taking these declarations at face value, I critically assess the effects of such metaphors, asking what tensions arise when they are used in this way. I then interrogate the biological essentialism implicit in political arguments that foreground ancestry. I conclude this section by arguing that Orlando’s rhetoric proposes that Palermitans – perhaps unlike other Europeans (or even other Italians) – are ‘*brava gente*’, or ‘good people’: both an aspirational assertion of local identity and a potentially self-exculpatory formula.

My final section examines how Orlando employs cosmopolitan rhetoric to argue for concrete policies. As I emphasise, using historic discourses to address contemporary social issues remains fraught, both from a historical and political perspective, and not only in Palermo. Nonetheless, Orlando clearly sees a value in developing narratives that connect past, present, and future in this way. I propose that he appropriates pre-existing ideas of the Mediterranean as a form of ‘strategic essentialism’: taking a stereotype, regardless of its historiographical accuracy, and employing it in the service of political aims.

There are good reasons to study the language of the far right, as a growing number of scholars are doing (see e.g. Wodak 2015; Berti 2021), and indeed, to examine the phenomenon some call ‘populism’ in Italy (see e.g. Bracciale and Martella 2017; Agnew and Shin 2020; Maccaferri and Mammone 2022). With some exceptions, however (see e.g. Però 2007), liberal ‘cosmopolitan’ rhetoric in Italy has until recently been studied in less detail. Camilla Hawthorne demonstrates the value of examining how the left invokes the Mediterranean ‘to challenge racism, xenophobia, and border fortification’ (2022, 118). My research builds on her approach: taking her emphasis on the ‘fraught and politically ambiguous’ nature of this practice (120), and applying it to social media discourse at Italy’s southern border, where the Mediterranean is felt both as a geographical reality and a political imaginary. By critically examining political language intended to oppose xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment, and the popular reception of this language, we gain a better understanding of what work this kind of rhetoric does, and how.

Using historical narratives to construct Palermitan identity

A feeling that values exemplified by a certain period in history persist in the present – or that one *ought* to embody such values, because betraying them would betray one’s very essence – is powerful in many identity narratives. This is especially true in contemporary Sicily, where political rhetoric is infused with descriptions of a tolerant, vibrant past. I do not examine these histories from the perspective of historical accuracy, although few historians depict a golden age of Sicilian tolerance (see e.g. Cassarino 2013, 123). Rather, I explore how they function as tools for constructing a past that is ‘usable’ in the present,⁶ especially in light of the so-called ‘migrant crisis’.⁷

To construct a vision of Palermitan local identity, Orlando draws connections between periods in Sicilian history and Palermo’s contemporary reality, arguing that these demonstrate characteristics inherent to Palermo and its inhabitants. I take Orlando’s most developed historical interpretations chronologically, concentrating first on what he and others term the ‘Arab-Norman’ period. His version of that period is reinforced and at times contested by his audience, in a social media back-and-forth that serves, I argue, to develop ‘scripts’ recited in Sicily about the island’s medieval history, reflecting various power positions and attitudes towards present political circumstances. I then show how Orlando seeks to use one of Palermo’s patron saints to represent the city’s openness, despite the selectiveness of this interpretation. Moving on to his portrayal of twentieth-century history, I argue that Orlando perceives not only fascism, but also the mafia, as

an ‘aberration’ in a Palermitan history, which in his conception otherwise tends towards liberal cosmopolitanism. I then explore how Sicily’s historical marginalisation is used as evidence of an innate propensity for empathy and solidarity; although as the subsequent section will show, this narrative merits close critical attention.

‘The Arab-Norman’

The 2015 inclusion of ‘Arab-Norman Palermo’ on the UNESCO World Heritage list increased the visibility of the term ‘Arab-Norman’, which Orlando invokes frequently. UNESCO’s definition refers to the Norman kingdom of Sicily *only*, beginning in 1130 (UNESCO 2015), without encompassing the preceding centuries of Islamic rule (831–1091). ‘Arab’ instead refers to what some call the ‘Norman Synthesis’: the idea that this Norman period saw the creative fusion of Christian Latin, Byzantine Greek, and Muslim Arabic cultures (Granara 2019, 147).

As Naor Ben-Yehoyada notes in his study of Sicilian and Tunisian fishing communities, his interlocutors invoked a past Mediterranean to narrate their identities, but each invoked a *different* history depending on their circumstances. Accordingly:

The more recent medieval past of Arab and Arab Norman Sicily offered a more tangible and resonant repertoire of relationships. Sicilians and Tunisians were forging a bond not of brotherhood but of affinity. Present-day Sicilians and Tunisians cast themselves as descendants of their respective medieval predecessors (Ben-Yehoyada 2017, 153).

Both his Christian and Muslim interlocutors referred to historical precedents ‘in which Muslims and Christians had cohabited on the island’, harking back to a ‘script that they derived from that common golden age’ (2017, 222). However, that golden age is not ‘one and the same’ for Christians and Muslims: ‘The Tunisian side mentioned Arab Sicily of the ninth century, and the Sicilian side replied by recalling Arab-Norman Sicily of the eleventh century’ (222). Evoking a ‘golden age’, therefore, does not elide inter-religious power dynamics. Instead, it reformulates or reasserts them, depending on the speaker’s present-day position. Foregrounding the *Norman*, therefore, is not ideologically neutral either. Notwithstanding the supposed peaceful *convivenza*, or ‘co-existence’,⁸ between religious groups during some of the Norman period, its rulers were Roman Catholic kings, and Europeans.

Orlando seizes the opportunity to ‘charge’ the UNESCO declaration with political significance. He writes that the declaration:

Reminds us that different cultures and religions, like the Arab, the Norman and the Byzantine, can coexist [*convivere*] together, influencing and contaminating one another reciprocally, as they did in the past, and as they do today in Palermo, city of peace and of dialogue between peoples.⁹

The present is therefore interpreted as ‘echoing’ an idealised past *convivenza*. For Orlando, ‘the inclusive spirit of our city has ancient roots’.¹⁰ The ‘hospitable’ present, moreover, is not a weak vestige of a past high-water mark. On the contrary, hospitality and *convivenza* are ‘values alive today more than ever’, belonging specifically to ‘our people ... the Sicilian people’.¹¹ Multicultural heritage is promoted to remind Sicilians of their ongoing tolerant ‘essence’.¹²

Nonetheless, ‘reviving’ Palermo’s Arab-Norman history, imbuing it with fresh political significance, is a work in progress. What Orlando calls *l’Arabo-Normanno* ‘must become more and more a part of life in the city’.¹³ It must be ‘lived’, practised by Palermitans,

as part of the ‘recuperation of the city’s soul’.¹⁴ Some commentators imply that, as historic tolerance produced masterpieces of Sicilian art – when Palermo was ‘capital of the Mediterranean’, as one put it – so present tolerance is the key to its future success. Referring to Palermo’s architectural heritage, one commentator writes that ‘we should be thanking Islamic civilisation for leaving us so many artistic treasures’. ‘In Palermo, al-Idrisi [a Muslim Arab] wrote one of the world’s most important geographies’. What would Sicily be, it is implied, without these cornerstones of its cultural identity?

For some commentators, Palermo’s history as a locus of cultural syncretism determines its current ability to ‘integrate’ recent arrivals. ‘Everyone who comes to Palermo “Palermitanises” themselves, and often the Indians and the Senegalese speak our dialect better than we do’, one commentator celebrates, after citing the historic collaboration between Muslims, Jews and Christians under Roger II (who also commissioned al-Idrisi’s *magnum opus*) as evidence of Sicily’s inherent propensity for multiculturalism. Some imply that those who negate Sicily’s multicultural history are merely demonstrating their ignorance. ‘Anyone who denies that Sicily, especially Palermo, is Muslim and Jewish as well as Catholic, should go back to school’, writes one.

Not everybody accepts that Sicily owes a ‘debt’ to its multicultural past. One commentator emphasises that any *convivenza* in medieval Sicily was short-lived: Frederick II (1198–1250) expelled Sicily’s remaining Muslims to the mainland. It is by no means straightforward, in other words, to determine what lessons, if any, can be learnt from Sicilian history. Another regrets that the comparatively ‘intolerant’ reign of Frederick II had not lasted longer: ‘perhaps if it had lasted longer, we would have more German blood and a less chaotic society!’ As well as reflecting internalised *meridionalismo* – a constellation of stereotypes and anti-southern attitudes – this reading interprets ‘mixture’ not as an asset, but as a problem, and the source of Sicily’s incompletely ‘European’ (i.e. civilised) character (see e.g. Dainotto 2007). As François Hartog and Jacques Revel put it, conflicting interpretations of history are ‘also argument-based narratives which often mobilise the same resources for conflicting ends’ (2002, 4).

Anti-immigration commentators dismiss Orlando’s insistence that ‘lessons’ from Sicilian history can be applied in the context of twenty-first-century immigration. They refer to this as ‘*buonismo*’: a naive, do-gooder attitude, suggesting that emotional appeals to a shared, tolerant Sicilian history come across as condescending. In Antonio Sorge’s studies of the Sicilian island of Lampedusa (2018; 2021), many islanders disputed the idea proposed by activists that welcoming immigrants is ‘inherently’ Lampedusan behaviour. So too in the digital sphere, some Palermitans resist their own interpellation into a regional narrative of historic and present ‘openness’.

What Ben-Yehoyada calls the ‘script’ is neither fixed nor solely informed by historical scholarship. On the contrary, my analysis demonstrates the importance of public discourse – specifically, social media discourse – for the use of historical reference points to claim an essential Sicilian cosmopolitanism. As I have shown, this script is constantly recited and tweaked in the public sphere, not just by high-profile figures like Orlando, but also by his audience, who add details to bolster this narrative, drawing explicit connections between Sicily’s distant past and its contemporary diversity. Their constant back-and-forth with those who do not accept this interpretation shows that this narrative develops through conflictual dialogue, but also that plenty of Sicilians nonetheless do not recognise themselves in this story.

Saints and symbolism

Hagiographies surrounding Palermo’s patron saints also contribute to a shared civic identity, and Orlando specifically invokes them as symbols of openness and tolerance. One of

the city's patron saints, Saint Benedict of San Fratello, also known as *San Benedetto il Moro* (Saint Benedict the Moor) or *Santu Scavuzzu* ('Saint Slave'), was born in Sicily to enslaved African parents in around 1524 (Fiume 2012, 145). Orlando calls Benedict a 'symbol of peace and of interculturality';¹⁵ a 'son of a slave, and ... confirmation of the culture of harmonious co-existence [*convivenza*] [and] of diversity in the name of equality, which makes Palermo a city of peace and of rights'.¹⁶ It is indeed remarkable that a Black African has been a patron saint of an Italian city for over four centuries. Using Benedict to symbolise Palermo's capacity for racial justice, however, relies on a selective interpretation of the saint's history. After all, if Benedict's example shows that Palermo has always been a city of 'peace and rights', how could his parents have been legally enslaved on Sicilian soil by Sicilian families (Fiume 2006)?

Orlando describes Benedict's parents as having arrived at Palermo 'like the thousands of migrants who arrive today at Palermo's port'.¹⁷ This not only draws a false equivalency between enslaved Africans in the sixteenth century and migrants arriving in contemporary Italy. It also elides Sicily's own role as an active protagonist in European slavery, rather than a 'multicultural' safe haven. By invoking Benedict as a 'symbol of ... tolerance and of Palermo's generous hospitality towards those who flee their own countries to save their own lives',¹⁸ Orlando downplays Sicily's historic involvement in Europe's enslavement of Africans. Slavery, after all, was not merely something other Europeans did on Sicilian soil (see e.g. De Lucia 2020).

In Deborah Puccio-Den's account of Orlando's earlier use of Benedict as a symbol of 'mixture' (2002), Orlando admits to the author that he relied on rhetorical sleight of hand. However, overlooking complexity in the service of a neat narrative, linking a supposed past *convivenza* to a present tolerance, is not only historically suspect. It also serves an exculpatory role, sidestepping a necessary reckoning with Europe's past, which is also Sicily's past. It therefore reinforces an idea that Europe, or at least its Mediterranean edge, is 'innocent of its imperialist histories and present complicities' (Danewid 2017, 1676). By constructing a selective historical narrative – even (or especially) one that celebrates a supposed history of 'welcome' and 'tolerance' – aspects of Orlando's liberal, multicultural rhetoric contribute to what Ida Danewid calls the 'erasure' of a 'constitutive history of empire, colonial conquest, and ... slavery' (1679), and of Sicily's place within that history.

The fascist-mafia parenthesis

Benedetto Croce famously proposed that fascism was a brief 'interregnum': a twenty-year blip in Italy's trajectory towards liberality (1963, 102). The idea of an historical parenthesis, I argue, can be as powerful for constructing a local identity as it is for national mythology. Such a structure features in Orlando's conception of twentieth-century history, although it lasts longer than Croce's two decades. I call this Palermo's 'Fascist-mafia parenthesis'. As for Croce, this begins with fascism, viewed as inimical to Sicily's anti-racist traditions: 'in Palermo, one breathes the air of a city that has always been anti-fascist and anti-racist, which is particularly evident today'.¹⁹ Orlando, like Croce, interprets fascism as an invasion. This is reinforced by a popular perception that fascism 'was a northern Italian political development, with less resonance in the south or Sicily' (Schneider and Schneider 2003, 50). Its imposition is therefore understood as the beginning of an historical 'blip', even though not all Sicilians were uniformly against fascism. For Orlando, however, this parenthesis did not die with Mussolini. Instead, it bled into Sicily's postwar 'mafia rule', characterised by fear, introversion, and intolerance. It only retreated with the 'Palermitan spring': the anti-mafia activity in the 1980s that overlapped with Orlando's first mayoralty.

Consequently, Orlando sees contemporary Palermo as a city shedding the vestiges of this interregnum, and undergoing a renaissance.

Fascism, for Croce, represented a corruption of Italy's 'essence'. Croce saw Italians first as victims of fascism, then as rebels against it. Orlando describes the mafia in strikingly similar terms. 'The Sicilian mafia is born by perverting values like honour, family, friendship, and Catholic faith. It is the perversion of an identity. Who is the worst enemy of a Sicilian if not a mafia boss?'²⁰ According to this understanding, the mafia is not of Sicily, despite being on Sicilian soil. Instead, it contravenes Sicily's very essence. Some perceive Orlando as having 'developed' from an anti-mafia politician into a pro-immigrant politician (Puccio-Den 2002), but I argue that he understands these to be inseparably linked. During the 'suffocating fundamentalist, intolerant mafia hegemony', Palermo was a 'migrant city that remained without migrants'.²¹ It follows, then, that migration should return as the mafia stronghold is weakened. 'Today we are grateful to the many migrants who, by coming and living in Palermo, have restored the harmony between [its] monuments and [its] people', he continues.²² For Orlando, Palermo's monuments represent its historic cultural diversity, which should also be reflected in its present demographic composition.

If the mafia is believed to thrive on a code of silence, or *omertà*, then a diverse population, with multiple interests, value systems and social networks, should weaken this code. 'Immigrant shopkeepers have enabled the arrest of certain Palermitan *mafiosi*, which makes it impossible to keep railing against immigrants', writes Orlando.²³ This argument, however, suggests that solidarity could be conditional upon immigrants 'integrating', or 'proving themselves'. One should not need to endanger oneself by taking down *mafiosi* to be welcomed into a city's social fabric.

The trajectory 'from capital of the mafia to capital of hospitality'²⁴ is characterised as a renaissance, and every renaissance needs a dark age to precede it. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Orlando does not view all of Palermo's past as irredeemable. 'I stood as a candidate', Orlando explained before the 2012 mayoral election, 'to turn Palermo back into the city it once was'.²⁵ If most of the twentieth century represented a 'blip' in Palermo's trajectory, Orlando's stated mission is to bring it back on track; to make Palermo great (again). Orlando's campaign is founded on a form of nostalgia, but not the kind we typically expect from a European politician promising a return to the past. Orlando calls his project a 'path of identity reappropriation', the rediscovery of a city which 'for centuries was a crossroads of diverse cultures, a place of encounters and of clashes whose result is a harmonious syncretism between the West and the Middle East'.²⁶

Orlando portrays renaissance as a process, reliant on his political project. The mafia is in retreat, but he emphasises that it has not been vanquished.²⁷ So too does the contemporary city retain ideological vestiges of former dark ages: the introversion that enabled both intolerance and illegality during the fascist-mafia parenthesis. The paradox of the tolerant city in which intolerance remains present is resolved by temporal displacement:

Palermo has always been the city of hospitality and of peaceful *convivenza*, but we still have a lot of work to do in order that the culture of integration might establish itself, first and foremost among the youth, and in order that the fear of the other does not win out.²⁸

Orlando's Palermo is fighting to recover from the fascist-mafia parenthesis, but the battle is not over. The intolerance that remains, in his conception, can safely be dismissed as an aberration, a perversion, a relic from recent history, which is ever-closer to being eradicated. It is not the 'real' Palermo of the distant past and of the multicultural future.

Sicily on the margins

Some commentators on Orlando's Facebook posts criticise others who disavow Sicily's diverse heritage. 'We are the product of many cultures mixed together, and that's the way it will always be'. 'You wouldn't exist if the Muslims hadn't been in Sicily millennia ago', writes one commentator; 'you too are an Arab', insists another. Such comments argue that, whether they like it or not, Sicilians are the product of cultural syncretism: they will never be like those in the north (of Italy, or of Europe), who value ethnic 'purity'. 'To Salvini, you'll always be a *terrone*', quips one commentator: a xenophobic slur used in Italy to denigrate southern Italians, sometimes alongside attempts to characterise them as 'Africans', or 'no better than' foreigners (Cole 2005, 20).

Responding to the news that thousands of Palermitans had joined a demonstration demanding safe passage for boats carrying migrants across the Mediterranean, one commentator writes: 'long live my city of Palermo! The South is demonstrating its humanitarian, moral and ethical values, in spite of its poverty, and in spite of all the prejudices it experiences! Those who have less give more'. It is not only the experience of poverty that is supposed to make Sicilians especially empathetic, but also the experience on the receiving end of prejudice, which is compared to the prejudice experienced by immigrants to the island in the twenty-first century. 'Even if one or two of them might not be perfect, they can't all be tarred with the same brush', argues one commentator. 'When we leave Italy, too, Sicilians are all [viewed as] *mafiosi*, and it's horrible the way we're all marked like that'.

I contend that a form of cultural intimacy is at play here: Michael Herzfeld's idea that, paradoxically, 'stereotypes or signifiers of identity that embarrass a social group in the face of outside observers may also be the factors that most strongly create a sense of community within the group' (Herzfeld 2005a). The very things that have historically been used to marginalise Sicilians (Schneider 1998) – proximity to North Africa; poverty; assumptions that Sicilians are tainted by organised crime – become repurposed as catalysts for empathy and therefore a stronger sense of shared humanity. Insisting that the Sicilian experience necessarily leads to greater empathy, and solidarity with those in need, both strengthens and valorises a sense of Sicilian identity. By implication, it is the rest of Italy, with its mainstream anti-immigration political climate, which is found wanting in this view.

Orlando is not the only mayor of a European city to argue in favour of migration. Some, like Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, celebrate the fact that their city was 'built by migrants' (Khan 2023), or like Mayor of Naples Luigi de Magistris, claim that theirs is a 'city of shelter' (De Magistris 2017, 48). But few use historical arguments as intricate and developed as Orlando's to do so. Luigi de Magistris, for example, employs the abstract idea of a virtuous history, but without the detail and texture of Orlando's narrative, arguing that 'in Naples, we are either all illegal or no-one is illegal. This is the history of our city, but it is also our political vision'. He portrays solidarity, in other words, as an active political choice, more than an historic inevitability. Orlando, in contrast, offers an unusual and instructive case study for pro-immigrant political rhetoric that is firmly rooted in particular interpretations of the *longue durée*, and in specific narratives about periods in local history.

Rhetorical strategies

Having shown how Orlando employs historical narratives, from Norman rule to the anti-mafia movement, this section focuses on key discursive strategies that reinforce his cosmopolitan messaging. First, I discuss a metaphor of which Orlando is particularly fond: comparing Palermo to a 'mosaic', an important art form for the city's cultural

identity. I then examine rhetorical references to blood and familiarity, both literal and metaphorical. I conclude the section by arguing that elements of this rhetoric – as we have already seen with the discussion of Saint Benedict, and as the following section will emphasise – overlook or disavow historic and contemporary racism.

The mosaic metaphor

The mosaic is perhaps the single most vivid and important metaphor Orlando uses to describe Palermo. Orlando was not the first to employ this term to describe multiculturalism.²⁹ Nonetheless, he extends this metaphor to an unusual extent. He explains his fondness for the mosaic with reference to the ‘different tiles, the diverse colours and dimensions’ that comprise it.³⁰ The apparently contrasting shapes and colours of individual tiles are indeed an apt metaphor for the kind of multiculturalism to which Orlando aspires. Each tile makes a distinct and necessary contribution to the whole. The whole, in turn, is not only capable of incorporating contradictions, differences and tensions, but requires contrasts to convey the desired artistic effect: the whole mosaic is greater than the sum of its parts.

Significantly, the mosaic is a distinctly Palermitan artistic form, at the core of the city’s cultural identity.³¹ As well as being rooted in Sicily, the mosaic represents in microcosm the plurality of influences that contribute to Palermo’s artistic heritage. Orlando describes Palermitans as ‘Arabs and Normans at the same time’, much as Sicily’s medieval mosaics are juxtaposed alongside Islamic artistic elements.³² The mosaic allows Orlando to argue that diversity is a Palermitan ‘value’, leading to an ‘inexhaustible richness born of the contrast between colours, cultures and ways of being’.³³ This diversity must nonetheless be ‘managed’ (*gestita*), implying that political leadership (Orlando’s) is necessary to make a success of this multicultural vision.

As the mosaic incorporates contrasting tiles, so too can Palermo incorporate ‘ethnicities, habits and customs which differ greatly from one another’.³⁴ Orlando refers to Judaism; to Islam and the Arab world; and to non-Roman-Catholic denominations of Christianity, as important components of the ‘mosaic of Palermo’ (Orlando 10 September 2017; 11 May 2013; 8 August 2013). He is careful to emphasise, however, that this mosaic is not a static, finished piece, but a work in progress waiting to be embellished with additional tiles. He uses the verb *impreziosire*, ‘to make [more] precious’, to describe this (Orlando 28 July 2015).

Close-up, a mosaic’s individual tiles can be distinguished from one another. They retain their specificity – their colour, size and lustre – and contrast with neighbouring tiles. The mosaic city is precisely *not* a ‘melting pot’, a place of fusion between cultures that become blended and lose their distinctive characteristics. Nonetheless, Orlando oscillates between acknowledging this central feature of the mosaic form, and valorising syncretism. In one instance, he writes that ‘Palermo has always been *meticcio*, it has always been a mosaic of diversity and equality, a meeting place between cultures which have never been opposed to one another’.³⁵ In this case, I contend, Orlando uses the mosaic metaphor for a purpose for which it is ill-suited. The point of the mosaic is that its tiles *can* contrast with one another. Orlando’s use of the word *meticcio*, on the other hand, implies the opposite.

The adjective *meticcio*, a cognate of the Spanish *mestizo* and the Portuguese *mestiço* (‘mixed’) implies hybridity. It has historically carried derogatory implications (see e.g. Battaglia 1994), but not exclusively (Hawthorne 2022), and there have been fraught attempts to ‘reclaim’ the term in Italy (Hawthorne 2021). It is the historical product of the racialisation of colonised peoples (see e.g. Forbes 1993), and of a fixation on blood ‘purity’ (Whitten 2007). *Meticcio* was used to describe African Italians during Italian colonial rule in the Horn of Africa, and was employed in racist laws enforced there in the fascist period (Barrera 2002). The pejorative use of the word suggests ‘bastardisation’

or ‘impurity’. Although Orlando does not intend the adjective pejoratively – on the contrary, he seeks to valorise it – it nonetheless implies blending, syncretism, or ‘in-between-ness’. This could not be more different from the mosaic form, in which differences between tiles are only apparently elided, and only when viewed from afar. On closer inspection, the component parts of a mosaic retain their individuality, complementing neighbouring tiles rather than merging with them.

Blood and familiarity

A number of commentators supportive of Orlando’s positions refer to genetic ancestry to celebrate Palermo’s *meticcio* qualities, although Orlando does not himself prioritise such language. One commentator writes that ‘Palermo has multicultural and multi-ethnic DNA; our city cannot be host to any kind of racism, Islamophobia or antisemitism’. Such comments draw a tight nexus between, on the one hand, the presumed literal multi-ethnicity of Sicilian DNA, and on the other hand, the figurative idea that ‘tolerant DNA’ is present in Sicilians. This points to a certain biological essentialism, suggesting that, regardless of nurture, Sicilians are *born* tolerant by nature. Orlando, too, celebrates the ‘link of brotherhood’ between Palermo and Tunisia, for example.³⁶ Without denying that such declarations are sincerely felt, I share Naor Ben-Yehoyada’s critique of the ‘assumption that the only kinship idiom applicable to transnational situations is fraternity’ (2017, 146). There is a ‘platitudinal aftertaste’, as Ben-Yehoyada notes (224), to such declarations of pan-Mediterranean brotherhood. Not least, they do not reflect the present ‘uneven power relations’ between Sicilians and Arabs (Giglioli 2018, 69).

What assertions of a shared distant ancestry imply, and what declarations of direct ‘brotherhood’ preclude, is the possibility of a relation that ‘permits varying degrees and kinds of difference, familiarity, misunderstanding, and structural distance’ (Ben-Yehoyada 2017, 147). Ben-Yehoyada locates this possibility in the underutilised metaphor of cousinhood. Cousins can lose touch, in the same way that, as a commentator on Orlando’s Facebook page writes, Sicilians might ‘forget’ the Arab contribution to their distant family history. Cousinhood ‘does not impose identity or amity on the cousined parties, but rather allows them to be both somewhat different and even in conflict with each other, while still related’ (Ben-Yehoyada 2017, 147). While brotherhood still carries force in Sicilian pro-immigration rhetoric, I propose that the idea that *sicilianità* (‘Sicilian-ness’) is a composite identity – a mosaic – might still leave open the possibility for more nuanced and less platitudinal conceptions of Mediterranean relatedness.

Palermitani, brava gente

Italiani, brava gente (literally, ‘Italians, good people’) – the ‘proverbial myth of Italian kindness ...’ (Re 2010, 1) – is a cornerstone of postwar Italian national identity.³⁷ For Lucia Re, the resulting idea that racism is ‘un-Italian’ ignores the ‘considerable role that various forms of racism have played in the history and even in the formation of Italy as a nation’ (2010, 2). Rather than reinforcing a presupposed innate ‘goodness’, it instead precludes critical engagement with the reality of racism. The same can be true, I argue, for local identities like *palermitanità* (‘Palermitan-ness’). Orlando’s vision of *palermitanità* seldom relies on the idea of Palermo as an *Italian* city. On the contrary, he often compares Palermo favourably against the rest of Italy, contrasting it with the ‘egoism of Europe’.³⁸ Nonetheless, I argue that Orlando employs a localised exculpatory myth, different in shape from *italiani, brava gente*, but comparable in effect. I term this *palermitani brava gente*: the idea that Palermitans, unlike many other Europeans, and unlike many other Italians, are ‘(the) good guys’, both historically and in the present.³⁹

Orlando sometimes condemns racism in Palermo alongside a positive ‘spin’. When he condemns a brutal attack on a Gambian boy, for instance, the ‘main story’ becomes the quick work by local authorities to ensure that his parents could visit their son: a demonstration of the ‘real’ Palermo. ‘Palermo confirms that it is a city of hospitality’, Orlando insists, although we could draw quite a different conclusion from the attack itself.⁴⁰ Orlando also uses news of racist violence in Palermo, perhaps counter-intuitively, to emphasise the contrast between Sicily and mainland Italy. In a video interview, Orlando condemns ‘fascist-style’ attacks as part of ‘a spiral that began in other parts of Italy which runs the risk of contaminating Palermo[, which] is a stranger to these [kinds of] episodes’.⁴¹ To the extent that Palermo is a locus of xenophobia, therefore, it is as host to a foreign tendency, inimical to Palermo’s anti-racist values. Orlando thus displaces the blame onto the Italian mainland.

‘When anybody asks me how many immigrants there are in Palermo, I respond, “none”, because anyone who lives in Palermo becomes Palermitan’.⁴² an optimistic description of life for recent arrivals, which also overlooks the possibility that one could be both an immigrant *and* a Palermitan. Conversely, Orlando also approaches ‘migrant’ as an identity that can be adopted at will, arguing that Palermitans ‘acknowledge themselves to be, and choose to be, migrants themselves’.⁴³ Many Sicilians do have a family history of emigration. Nonetheless, this formulation elides the important structural advantages of privileges like an Italian passport, inaccurately implying that recently-arrived immigrants and Italians born in Palermo operate on a level playing field.

Pro-immigrant Sicilians often invoke the history of discrimination against Sicilians – within Italy, within Europe, and in diaspora – to encourage empathy with the oppressed. ‘We are a land of emigrants’, writes one commentator on Orlando’s Facebook page. ‘We’ve had enough hatred, enough racism. Let’s show that we’re different.’ Jeffrey Cole describes a university professor using the same argument to negate the possibility of racism in Sicily, in spite of evidence to the contrary: ‘we can’t be racist because we’ve been emigrants for so long!’ (2005). Unlike Cole’s professor, this Facebook commentator implicitly acknowledges that Sicilian tolerance is *not* innate, but a choice to be made. Nonetheless, both formulations conflate the historic experience of emigration from Sicily with the contemporary experience of trans-Mediterranean migration, in the service of a political argument about empathy and tolerance.

Palermitani, brava gente has specific local characteristics, but is similar in effect to its national counterpart. Camilla Hawthorne observes that ‘common assertions about Italy’s status as a *meticcica*, or hybrid/mixed, Mediterranean nation’ are prevalent ‘particularly among white leftists’ (2017, 165). This fosters a ‘romanticised vision of Mediterranean mixing that minimises the harsh realities of Italian racism’ (165). This might suggest one possible answer to Michael Herzfeld’s question: ‘why does it matter to people to “be” Mediterranean ...?’ (2005b, 51). Some popular understandings of a cosmopolitan Mediterranean identity set a scene against which the existence of racism can be overlooked; they offer, to use Herzfeld’s terminology, a form of ‘excuse’. Sicily is far from the only place where past mixity is employed to deny present racism (Hawthorne 2022). Critically analysing this particular case study highlights the tensions inherent in some celebrations of diversity, and their often under-emphasised effects.

The practical possibilities of *convivenza*

Orlando undoubtedly understands that some of his celebrations of multiculturalism are symbolic. His practice of conceding ‘honorary citizenship’ to immigrants, for example, provides no concrete advantages, but it works as a spectacle and as a statement of intent.

At other times, however, his rhetoric promotes concrete political platforms aimed at improving the material conditions of immigrants to the city.

Orlando mobilises his vision of the city's traditions – its tolerant 'essence' – in support of a campaign to abolish the residence permit system, which restricts the lives of migrants to Italy (Cantisani and Greco 2006). A mayor cannot unilaterally rewrite national immigration policy. Orlando can nonetheless attempt to shift or expand the so-called 'Overton Window': the range of ideas considered acceptable to the public, which might be considered politically viable (see e.g. Russell 2006).

Abolishing a foundation of Italy's immigration system may sound 'unthinkable', but until recently, so did the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States, which is now a reality. From the vantage point of an optimist, therefore, a sustained public discourse that questions the need for residence permits, on the basis that this system goes against who 'we' 'really are', could conceivably have a similar effect. In support of this policy, Orlando quotes a commissioner in his mayoral team, calling the proposal a 'path which begins in the city of Palermo and which is in line with its history, made of immigration, contamination, cultural stratification, which could lead to the abolition of the residence permit'.⁴⁴ For Orlando too, this path is part of Palermo's 'natural vocation',⁴⁵ the inevitable conclusion of its 'climate of hospitality ... in which citizens from diverse cultures and religions live together peacefully'.⁴⁶

There is a *telos*, in other words, a 'higher aim', towards which Orlando's *convivenza* rhetoric is projected. A particular understanding of Palermitan history is instrumentalised with the specific purpose of mobilising popular support for policy positions like these. In part, Orlando has seized an opportunity offered by the broader re-evaluation of Palermo's multicultural heritage. Claims about local identity invoking UNESCO's celebration of 'Arab-Norman' Palermo, for example, provided Orlando with rhetorical support for stances such as his refusal to give effect, in Palermo, to a 2018 national law prohibiting asylum seekers from registering at an Italian registry office (the provision was later declared unconstitutional).⁴⁷

While Matteo Salvini and other Italian politicians sought to criminalise life-saving assistance to migrants crossing the Mediterranean, Orlando insisted that Palermo was prepared to host boats involved in rescue efforts. He reasoned that Palermo's name derives from the Greek Πάνορμος, '*Panormos*', meaning something like 'universal port', or in Orlando's rendering, 'all one port'.⁴⁸ It is natural, he suggests – in keeping with the city's foundational purpose – that Palermo should take an active role in migrant rescue efforts. As the traditional stereotyped image of Mediterranean hospitality dictates that guests should feel 'as in [their] own house' (Herzfeld 1987), so too does Palermo's vocation for hospitality carry the obligation to make recent immigrants 'at home', as Orlando puts it.⁴⁹

Strategic essentialism

Orlando's narrative is sometimes used to make pro-immigration arguments that are far from universally popular in Italy. But as I have shown, a certain essentialism is at play in Orlando's characterisation of Palermo as a tolerant city *per se*. This assumes that such a thing as 'local character' exists in the first place. Dorothy Louise Zinn makes a similar observation in respect of the Italian sociologist Franco Cassano. Cassano's celebration of *pensiero meridiano*, or 'southern thought' (Cassano 2011), bears more than a passing resemblance to Orlando's vision of Palermitan identity. Zinn echoes Bernardino Palumbo's concern that the 'essentialising rhetoric' of Cassano and others – and we might now add Orlando to this list – 'naturalises and de-historicises an identity somehow held to be "authentic"' (Zinn 2007, 202, citing Palumbo 2001).

The risk is that ‘such forms of identity can be open to political manipulation’ (Zinn 2007, 202), not least because they are potentially self-exculpatory. Essentialised forms of identity are based on shaky epistemological foundations. As Deborah Puccio-Den puts it: ‘some have criticised that [Orlando’s] politics are nothing more than a trick, an artifice, a bluff.’⁵⁰ She goes on to ask, however: ‘is the manipulation of the symbolic not a characteristic of politics?’⁵¹ Echoing Zinn’s description of Cassano’s work, I argue that Orlando engages ‘strategic essentialism’, a tactic advocated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among other subaltern studies theorists, but which Spivak later abandoned (Eide 2016, citing Spivak 1996). Although strategic essentialists know that essentialism lacks theoretical backing, they nonetheless inherit stereotyped discourses imposed from elsewhere. They can choose either to waste time arguing against this essentialism, or to embrace elements of it, and to manipulate those elements to the subaltern’s own political advantage.

Some assumptions about southern Italy’s supposed ‘character’, constructed over centuries, originate from outside, but some are also advanced by southern Italian thinkers (Schneider 1998). Why bother arguing that Sicilians are *not*, for example, any more ‘mixed’ in heritage than other Italians; that they have *not* inherited an age-old Mediterranean vocation for hospitality; that they are *not*, in summary, better-equipped to deal with the realities of twenty-first-century immigration than anybody else? All of these characteristics can be reclaimed as assets, and employed for pragmatic political purposes. As we can observe from analysing public reactions to Orlando’s rhetoric, Orlando’s readings of Sicilian history can be affectively powerful. A person of cosmopolitan sympathies, critical of contemporary anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe, might look for a glimmer of hope in ‘counterhistories’ such as these.

Conclusion

Michel Foucault describes ‘counterhistory’ as ‘the reappropriation of a knowledge that has been distorted or buried’ (Foucault 2003, cited in Hirschkind 2021, 6). Orlando too, I argue, participates in such a project: the search for a ‘usable’ hidden past, against the grain of hegemonic narratives of European secular-Christian modernity. The counterhistories put forward by Orlando promise political benefits. They also, however, risk precluding a sustained critical engagement with the realities of racism, in Sicily and elsewhere in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Ilaria Giglioli observes that the rhetoric of ‘Mediterraneanism’ in Sicily tends to focus on ‘simply celebrating hybridity and interconnection’, rather than on challenging ‘uneven power relations across the Mediterranean’ or ‘the assumption that the boundaries of European-ness are “given” and immutable’ (2018, 5). Nonetheless, she stops short of dismissing Mediterraneanism *per se* as a potential ‘means to advocate for more just and equitable cross-Mediterranean relations’, or as a ‘counter-narrative to ideas of the Mediterranean as a “fault line” in the clash of civilisations’. Just because such narratives are not, at present, used primarily in this way, it does not mean that they might not be applied to emancipatory ends in future.

It is not my intention to ask whether Orlando’s cosmopolitan rhetoric is a ‘good thing’. Does it primarily argue for an inclusive vision of local identity? Or is it instead self-congratulatory, or even exculpatory, proclaiming a uniquely Sicilian tolerance, while obscuring the xenophobia that persists on the island? It is quite possible that it does both things at the same time. The *convivenza* narrative in Palermo is constructed both as a ‘model of’ and a ‘model for’ the city (cf. Geertz 1993, 93). This narrative may be an imperfect model of the city; it certainly does not tell Palermo’s whole story. Whether it can become a sufficient model for the city is a separate question entirely.

Many seeking to divert Europe from its present trajectory – to tear down the barbed wire along its militarised frontiers – are looking for stories, usable histories, imaginable futures, which articulate a cosmopolitan vision for the continent. These stories do not necessarily have to look like the narratives told by Orlando. Nonetheless, local and transnational narratives like the ones I have described here, with all their contingencies and imperfections, are otherwise rare in the European political mainstream. Rarer still are vocally pro-immigration politicians who, like Orlando, have enjoyed considerable electoral success in the twenty-first century.

The 74-year-old Orlando did not stand in the 2022 mayoral elections. On 12 June 2022, Palermo elected Roberto Lagalla as its new mayor, supported by a ‘centre-right’ coalition. The absence of a successor who shares Orlando’s vision for Palermo indicates another limit to the electoral resonance of his messaging. Liberals do not have a monopoly on ‘Mediterraneanism’ in Sicily, and Lagalla has also described the Mediterranean as a ‘bridge of exchange’.⁵² However, he consciously breaks with Orlando’s emphasis on heritage, encouraging Palermitans to ‘ward off the temptations of dark appeals to the past’.⁵³ Whereas Orlando celebrated Palermo’s ‘Middle-Eastern’ characteristics (see e.g. 22 January 2018), Lagalla accuses street vendors of turning the city centre ‘into a *suq*’ (Ditta 2022). This restates the centuries-old orientalist (and sometimes, auto-orientalist) fear that Sicily is insufficiently European (Schneider 1998, 287); that, as Auguste Creuzé de Lesser put it at the start of the nineteenth century, the island ‘belongs to Africa’ (cited in Moe 2002, 37). Nonetheless, Orlando was not the first to claim Sicily’s proximity to the Middle East and North Africa as an asset, and will not be the last. This identity narrative will continue to be articulated, reshaped and contested over the coming decades, whether or not elected representatives continue to play an active role in promoting it.

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Notes

1. ‘The simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence’ (Appiah 2006).
2. Including opposition to Italy’s *ius sanguinis* approach to citizenship (Zincone 2010), and to its restrictive ‘residence permit’ (*permesso di soggiorno*) system (Cantisani and Greco 2006).
3. Facebook does not break this down by location. For context, however, 125,913 Palermitans voted for Orlando in the 2017 mayoral election.
4. I downloaded all 5,709 of Orlando’s public posts, from his first post on 30 March 2012, until 8 July 2021, my ‘reference date’. Firstly, I read through these to ‘flag’ relevant posts about Sicilian and Palermitan history, migration, tolerance, multiculturalism, and religious life. Secondly, I considered these with reference to my research question: how does Orlando seek to promote an understanding of Palermitan local identity as tolerant and open to external influences, on the basis of its history and geographical position? Thirdly, I identified the dominant themes, patterns, and tensions, which inform my analysis.
5. This study remains non-sensitive compared to much digital anthropological research, but I have adopted a careful approach out of an abundance of caution. Whereas I cite Orlando’s posts themselves directly, and by date, I have translated comments by members of the public into English, paraphrasing these using non-cognate synonyms, without citing the original Italian. I do not cite these by date, to ensure greater anonymity.
6. The idea of a ‘usable’ past builds on an essay by Van Wyck Brooks (1918).
7. See Loftsdóttir, Smith and Hipfl (2018) for a critique of this term.

8. *Convivenza* is a cognate of the Spanish *convivencia*. Américo Castro (1948) popularised this term to describe peaceful co-existence and productive syncretism between Muslims, Jews and Christians in medieval Iberia: an image that is influential but not universally accepted by historians.
9. '[C]i ricorda che culture e religioni diverse, come quella araba, normanna e bizantina, possono convivere insieme, influenzandosi e contaminandosi reciprocamente, così come accadeva nel passato, e così come accade oggi a Palermo, città della pace e del dialogo fra i popoli ...' (Orlando 3 July 2015b). All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
10. 'Lo spirito inclusivo della nostra città ha radici antiche, recentemente sancite dall'inserimento di PalermoAraboNormanna nella lista del World Heritage Unesco' (Orlando 23 October 2015).
11. 'Questi monumenti rappresentano e sono espressione certamente della storia e dell'architettura di questa parte del nostro paese, ma sono anche simboli dello spirito e dei valori del nostro popolo, del popolo siciliano ... il risultato della nostra storia, fatta di accoglienza e convivenza, valori oggi più vivi che mai' (Orlando 29 October 2016).
12. Not all of Orlando's attempts to instil 'Arab-Norman pride' are well considered. A video circulated by Orlando features the mayor in a headscarf, 'dressed as an Arab' ('vestito da arabo' (Orlando 15 December 2016)), teaching children about Palermo's 'Arab-Norman treasures' ('tesori arabo-normanni').
13. 'Credo che l'Arabo-Normanno non sia semplicemente una delibera formale dell'Unesco, ma invece è, e deve sempre più diventare, parte della vita della città' (Orlando 14 September 2016).
14. '[I]l riconoscimento Unesco deve essere vissuto come una grande occasione di recupero e innovazione dell'anima della città' (Orlando 8 November 2016).
15. 'San Benedetto il Moro, simbolo di Pace e di interculturalità' (Orlando 24 June 2012).
16. 'San Benedetto il Moro, figlio di uno schiavo e da secoli compatrono di Palermo, conferma della cultura della armonica convivenza di diversità in nome della eguaglianza, che fa di Palermo una città di pace e di diritti' (Orlando 8 July 2013b).
17. 'San Benedetto il Moro, africano, figlio di schiavi giunti al porto di Palermo come quelle migliaia di migranti che oggi giungono nel nostro porto' (Orlando 5 December 2015).
18. 'Il nostro copatrono, infatti, veniva dal mare ed è un perfetto e attuale simbolo di riscatto, della tolleranza e della generosa accoglienza che Palermo mostra verso coloro che fuggono dal proprio Paese per salvare la propria vita' (Orlando 28 June 2015).
19. 'A Palermo si respira l'aria di una città che da sempre è stata antifascista e antirazzista e oggi in particolare evidenza ...' (Orlando 10 February 2018).
20. 'La mafia siciliana nasce pervertendo valori come onore, famiglia, amicizia e fede cattolica. È la perversione di un'identità. Chi è il peggior nemico di un siciliano se non un boss mafioso?' (Orlando 19 November 2015).
21. '[U]na città migrante rimasta senza migranti durante un tempo non lontano di soffocante egemonia integralista, intollerante, mafiosa' (Orlando 5 December 2015).
22. 'Oggi siamo grati a tanti migranti che venendo e vivendo a Palermo hanno restituito armonia tra monumenti e persone' (Orlando 5 December 2015).
23. '[I] negozianti immigrati hanno fatto arrestare alcuni mafiosi palermitani, fatto che rende impossibile continuare a inveire contro gli immigrati' (Orlando 13 October 2016).
24. '[D]a capitale della mafia a capitale dell'accoglienza' (Orlando 4 February 2018).
25. 'Mi sono candidato per far tornare Palermo la città che era' (Orlando 2 May 2012).
26. 'La nostra città ha saputo trasformarsi attraverso un percorso di riappropriazione identitaria ... Palermo è stata per secoli crocevia di diverse culture, luogo d'incontro e di scontro il cui risultato è un armonico sincretismo tra occidente e medioriente' (Orlando 22 January 2018).
27. 'Oggi la mafia esiste ma è una tessera deviata, culturalmente marginale nella nostra società, la mafia non governa più Palermo' (Orlando 29 August 2019).
28. 'Palermo è sempre stata la città dell'accoglienza e della pacifica convivenza, ma bisogna ancora lavorare molto affinché si affermi, soprattutto nei ragazzi, la cultura dell'integrazione e non vinca la paura del diverso' (Orlando 10 June 2012).
29. See e.g. Gibbon (1938) for an earlier use of the metaphor in Canada.
30. 'Lo spirito, la storia e i valori di quello che chiamo 'Mosaico-Palermo', un mosaico fatto di differenti tessere, di colori e dimensioni diverse' (Orlando 3 July 2015a).
31. See e.g. Tronzo (1997) and Kitzinger (1990) for analyses of two exemplary mosaics.
32. 'Palermo, Cefalù e Monreale sono, allo stesso tempo, città mediorientali ed europee. Io penso che l'arabo-normanno significhi esattamente quello che sto dicendo, perciò vi ringrazio e vi dico venite a vedere come è possibile vivere in pace essendo arabi e normanni allo stesso tempo' (Orlando 3 July 2015a).
33. 'Palermo si qualifica ancora una volta un bellissimo mosaico dove la diversità è un valore Il nostro passato e la nostra storia ci hanno insegnato a essere tolleranti, a percepire chi è diverso da noi non come una minaccia o

un ostacolo, ma come una ricchezza inesauribile che nasce dal confronto tra colori, culture e modi di essere' (Orlando 25 June 2014).

34. '[Q]ui coesistono etnie, usi e costumi diversissimi fra loro' (Orlando 4 June 2013).
35. 'Palermo è da sempre meticcìa, è da sempre mosaico di diversità ed uguaglianza, luogo di incontro fra culture che mai si sono contrapposte' (Orlando 25 June 2013).
36. 'Fra Palermo e la Tunisia c'è sempre stato un legame di fratellanza ...' (Orlando 22 March 2015).
37. On the *italiani, brava gente* myth, see Del Boca (2005).
38. 'Questo spirito di accoglienza di cui siamo orgogliosi contrasta però con l'egoismo dell'Europa' (Orlando 15 April 2015).
39. Reformulating Gaetano Savatteri's use of *siciliani brava gente*, which describes the tendency to portray Sicilians as essentially peaceful and tolerant (2017, 150).
40. 'Palermo si conferma città dell'accoglienza' (Orlando 21 April 2016).
41. 'Una spirale che è partita in altre parti d'Italia che rischia di contaminare Palermo. Palermo è estranea a questi episodi' (Orlando 22 February 2018).
42. 'Quando qualcuno mi chiede quanti migranti ci sono a Palermo, io rispondo: "nessuno", perché chi risiede a Palermo diventa Palermitano' (Orlando 23 October 2017).
43. '[N]on soltanto accolgono, ma si riconoscono e scelgono di essere essi stessi migranti' (Orlando 5 December 2015).
44. '[U]n percorso, che parte dalla città di Palermo e che è in linea con la sua storia fatta di immigrazioni, contaminazione, stratificazione di culture, che possa portare ad abolire il permesso di soggiorno' (Orlando 9 March 2015).
45. '[V]ocazione naturale della Sicilia e di Palermo ad essere "Ponti fra le culture del Mediterraneo" ... per l'abolizione del permesso di soggiorno' (Orlando 8 July 2013a).
46. '[C]lima d'accoglienza della nostra città, dove cittadini di diverse culture e religioni vivono insieme pacificamente e dove abbiamo approvato la Carta di Palermo, che prevede l'abolizione del permesso di soggiorno, strumento di schiavitù dei nostri giorni' (Orlando 9 July 2015).
47. See *Sentenza* ('Sentence') 9 N. 186 (31 July 2020).
48. '[L]a città che a partire del proprio nome è "tutta un porto"' (Orlando 10 June 2018): *ορμος* (*ormos*) meaning port, and the prefix *πάν* (*pan*) meaning 'involving everyone', 'all-embracing', or 'universal'.
49. '[A] casa propria' (Orlando 28 April 2017).
50. '[O]n a reproché à sa politique de n'être qu'une tromperie, un artifice, un bluff' (Puccio-Den 2002, 25).
51. 'Mais n'est ce pas le propre du politique – et pas seulement celui de Leoluca Orlando – que de manipuler le symbolique?' (Puccio-Den 2002, 25).
52. 'Ponte di interscambio' (*PalermoToday* 2023).
53. 'Teniamo lontane le tentazioni che vengono da bui richiami al passato' (Live Sicilia 2023).

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Appendix: Facebook posts cited (all accessed 11 March 2024)

2 May 2012	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/451656724849896/
10 June 2012	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/479346522080916
24 June 2012	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/488399894508912
11 May 2013	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/646472015368365/
4 June 2013	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/658940660788167
25 June 2013	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/671036319578601/
8 July 2013a	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/678705605478339
8 July 2013b	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/678389255509974
8 August 2013	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/697049323643967
25 June 2014	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/899328720082692/
9 March 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1059386864076876
22 March 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1067915083224054
15 April 2015	https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1082606291754933
28 June 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1125111657504396
3 July 2015a	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1128171160531779
3 July 2015b	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/1128072920541603/
23 October 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1190889240926637
19 November 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/1204191042929790
5 December 2015	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/1215173288498232
21 April 2016	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1314627985219428
14 September 2016	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1433750833307142
13 October 2016	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1463618083653750
29 October 2016	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1481691981846360
8 November 2016	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/photos/a.422899234392312/1493057874043104/
15 December 2016	https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1541164845899073
28 April 2017	https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1706955445986678
10 September 2017	https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1864890770193144

23 October 2017 <https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/1907665115915709>

4 February 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/2022253924456827>

10 June 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandopalermo/posts/2171431362872415>

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Italian summary

La retorica politica di Leoluca Orlando, eletto sindaco di Palermo cinque volte (da ultimo fino al 2022), esprime una visione cosmopolita dell'identità locale. Orlando cerca di sottolineare la 'tolleranza' di Palermo, invocando la storia della città per promuovere quest'immagine e utilizzando varie strategie retoriche. Descrive Palermo come una città dotata di una vera 'essenza' multiculturale. Quest'articolo analizza le dichiarazioni di Orlando sulla sua pagina Facebook ufficiale, e osserva le reazioni, sia favorevoli che critiche, del suo pubblico. Orlando interpreta Palermo come un 'mosaico' di varie influenze culturali, proponendo che la città contemporanea sia il 'vero' volto accogliente del Mediterraneo. Oltre ad esplorare l'utilità politica che Orlando vede in tale narrazione, quest'articolo analizza i rischi inerenti a questo progetto essenzialista.

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