

Leoluca Orlando's political career intertwines indissolubly with major Italian political, social and judiciary events, not only but especially from Palermo, the capital of the island of Sicily, from the mid-1980s until the present time.

The first part of Leoluca's life takes place in his hometown, Palermo. He comes from a high-society family of the city, whose origins are in the countryside around the small town of Corleone, about 70 km from Palermo; as a result of a strange, geographical paradox, Corleone is the same town where the mafia bosses Salvatore Riina and Bernardo Provenzano were born. Orlando's father was Dean of the Faculty of Law in the University of Palermo, where Leoluca himself, after his graduation, was a professor.

Close to Corleone, the young Leoluca Orlando founded an intellectual movement that united both politics and culture, alongside Catholic thinkers, both clergymen and secular.

After enjoying a prominent university career, Orlando, as of 1985, held the position of Mayor of the City of Palermo on several terms until 2022, for a total of 22 years.

Leoluca Orlando's political footprint has always been marked by the ever-growing opposition to the main Italian party of his days, Democrazia Cristiana, of which he was a member for many years, only to then to leave it later and start an independent political movement in 1991, "La Rete". During that time, Orlando adopted an attitude characterized by an open "fight" against secretive, conniving, compromising logics deriving from the large national and international diffusion of the criminal mafia organization, called "Cosa Nostra", thus marking the political and social basis for the beginnings of what is still known today as "the Spring of Palermo".

The political "fight", both social and ideological, pursued by Orlando, contributed to the surfacing and consolidation of a common consciousness opposed to such criminogenic logics, initially rooted and spreading within Palermo, but later founding ramifications in the national and international political and economic contexts.

In 2022 Leoluca Orlando issued with Rizzoli the book "Enigma Palermo", written in collaboration with the German journalist Constance Reuscher. Constance has lived in Italy for several years, where she married a Sicilian journalist, Antonio Roccuzzo, who has

written, among other things, several books dedicated to judicial affairs related to mafia crimes.

“Enigma Palermo” can be defined as a sort of “journey” made by the book’s main “character,” Leoluca Orlando himself, who, however, also lingers on some aspects of the actual “person” Leoluca Orlando – not least -: His main electoral successes but also some of his chief political uncertainties.

Above all, the most significant aspects of Orlando’s political life, about which the book is full of anecdotes and personal considerations, are based on two main strands: The fight against the mafia and the policies promoted by Orlando aimed at welcoming migrants, given Sicily’s a primary role with respect to migratory fluxes from Africa and Asia, due to its geographical location at the center of the Mediterranean Sea and its multicultural history.

The ‘plot’ of the book consists in an interview: After a brief introduction by Constance Reuscher, Orlando recounts the sequence of events following the end of his latest term as Mayor of Palermo, which coincided with the affirmation of a new center-right coalition in the national political elections of 2022. From the very beginning of the text, Leoluca does not hide his deep disappointment and concerns for the advent of a conservative political trend that is very far away

from his own ideology. The book has a compelling and lively development, thus it favors the dialogical form over a more formal, structured one; Yet, it ensures clarity of exposition to the entire volume and makes it easy to read. Probably, the most evident quality emerging from this account is Orlando’s disarming intellectual honesty, given his candid approach to the political defeats that he has suffered, as well as the many moments of genuine fear for his own safety and that of his family.

Indeed, the first years in which Orlando was Mayor of Palermo coincided also with the most ferocious period of the Sicilian mafia’s economic and political strategy. In particular, a previous mayor of Palermo had greatly contributed to disfiguring the layout of the city, allowing the Corleone mafia to win lucrative contracts for many construction projects through threats, open violence, and much corruption. In the 1960s and 70s, entire neighborhoods of Palermo were built, destroying many historic gardens, villas and other

significant parts of the eighteenth/nineteenth-century fabric of Palermo.

Especially in the early 1980s, Palermo was plagued by murders; there were violent deaths on the streets occurring almost daily. Several gangsters, many police officers and judges were killed. The role of mayor of a city like Palermo was certainly a very complicated and dangerous task, in that period.

The dramatic peak of that goulsh scenario was reached in the early 1990s, in the so-called massacres of Capaci (a small town near Palermo) and via D'Amelio (a city street), in which the two most prominent magistrates in the fight against the mafia were killed: Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.

Sometimes, in that terrible period, Leoluca Orlando himself blamed some judges, including Falcone, of hiding the names of Italian politicians who acted in collusion with the Mafia. A famous Sicilian writer, Leonardo Sciascia, joined him in proffering publicly those serious accusations. In this book, Orlando explains his political and ideological positions about those times and themes, which caused him to be seen as if he was somehow in opposition to Falcone and the other judges. In the following years, Orlando and Falcone became much closer, but Orlando's suspicious statements against the prudence or protection towards politicians put him in a bad light and cost him more than a modicum of political trust.

During the years in which Orlando was Mayor of Palermo, he focused his mandate on the development of the hospitality of migrants and, in general, he paid attention to the most disadvantaged minorities. In 2015, he drafted the so-called "Charter of Palermo", which recognizes the right of human beings to mobility. His visionary nature led him to consider Palermo as a laboratory where coexistence between people of various geographical, ethnic, and religious origins is synonymous with tolerance and cultural ferment.

Orlando's ideological campaign was extended also to the death penalty on an international level: In 1997, when an American prisoner, Joseph O'Dell, was sentenced to death, Orlando, along with many other politicians and intellectuals, publicly opposed the sentence. Tellingly, O'Dell was granted the honorary citizenship of Palermo, where he was eventually buried.

This universal vision and activism led Leoluca to meet political representatives from all over

the world, to spread the idea that borders are pseudo-geographical entities to be abolished, to the point of – provocatively – declaring himself “a racist.” As he wrote: “I am racist because I defend the only race, the human one”.

Orlando’s lively, intellectual energy and his undoubted need to be a political protagonist show manifestly throughout the book. Thus, Orlando has been, among other things, President of the

Italian Federation of American Football. Above all, Leoluca Orlando has been a Member of the European Parliament since July 2024, when he was elected as the representative of an Alliance of between Italy’s Greens and several Leftist parties, where he continues his political battles against all forms of discrimination and violence.

Reading this book allows for a deeper understanding of the contemporary political and social dynamics of the city of Palermo and Italy as a whole, narrated in first person by a leading protagonist of the same.