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Translation as a Vehicle for Social Change:
Justin Baldoni's *Man Enough* Translation Proposal

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A mia mamma che, liberandosi, mi ha insegnato la libertà.
Grazie.

Alle donne che, se si fossero educati gli uomini, sarebbero ancora qui con noi.
Leggilo un’altra volta.

The seeds, if transplanted, flourish.

Edwin Gentzler
(Bassnett&Lefevere 1998: xix)

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the translation of two chapters from actor, director and speaker Justin Baldoni's debut book, *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity*. Published in 2021, not only is this autobiography a personal journey through the author's life, but it is also an opportunity to rethink and question the concept of masculinity as we conceive it in our Western society.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: overview of the main topics tackled in this work, translation proposal and translation commentary. The first chapter provides context on the current sociopolitical landscape in Italy, emphasizing the challenges in establishing a productive dialogue between Italian feminist movements and Italian institutions. Within this framework, translation is seen as a naturally revolutionary practice and a necessary act of disobedience capable of fostering social change.

The second chapter consists of the translation into Italian of the *Introduction* and fifth chapter of the book, *Privileged Enough*, which delves into the concept of intersectionality, an essential analytical tool in contemporary feminism. The key aspect of the Italian translation is the use of the schwa symbol (ə) as a graphic device to ensure gender inclusivity in the text.

The third chapter offers a technical commentary on both the final translation and the translation process, highlighting the problems and challenges encountered and explaining the techniques and solutions implemented to resolve them. In addition to discussing the schwa as both an intra- and extratextual choice, particular attention is given to an extratextual issue concerning the author's personal conduct, which raised ethical questions regarding the validity of the translation proposal.

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INTRODUCTION

At the outset of their translation training, students are often asked the question: “What is translation?” Regardless of their response, they will soon come to understand that there is no definitive answer. Translation is a dynamic and malleable practice that has assumed various forms throughout history and will continue to evolve in diverse ways.

One aspect, however, will always remain constant: both a translation and its translator are deeply and inextricably linked to the cultural context in which they exist.

Translation is not merely a linguistic act but a cultural one. As a tool of communication, it bridges cultural, intellectual, and political divides, shaping the global exchange of ideas. Translation can act as a mechanism for social change, creating spaces for new narratives to emerge, or it can perpetuate established power dynamics and reproduce exclusionary ideologies.

In moments of political and cultural regression, as seen in the rise of ultraconservative movements worldwide, the role of translation becomes especially critical. It is within these contexts that the work of the translator takes on an ethical dimension, as their decisions—about what to translate, how to translate, and the values they align themselves with—become acts of resistance or complicity.

By engaging with the work of scholars such as Yuri Lotman, who emphasized the deeply cultural nature of human interactions and expressions, Itamar Even-Zohar, who drew parallels between historical periods and the status of translations within literary systems, and Susan Bassnett, who coined the term “cultural turn in translation studies”, this thesis highlights how translation functions as a bridge between cultures and as an active participant in the ongoing process of cultural transformation. Through these theoretical lenses, it demonstrates that the history of translation is not merely a record of linguistic transfer but a chronicle of the ways in which translation has shaped political ideologies, revolutions, and movements for social justice.

With this awareness, this thesis examines and contrasts the sociocultural contexts of Italy and the United States, focusing particularly on their patriarchal structures and how they perpetuate inequality. The persistence of regressive ideologies, gender-based violence, and systemic barriers for marginalized groups reveals striking similarities between the two. The mechanisms that sustain gender-based discrimination in both countries include the institutionalization of exclusionary policies, the commodification of feminist rhetoric by powerful male figures, and

the persistent underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups in positions of political, economic, and cultural power.

In the United States, the political environment under the administration of President Donald Trump exemplifies the rise of regressive ideologies that center racial, gender, and LGBTQIA+ intolerance. The embodiment of a toxic, exclusivist form of masculinity that thrives on personal profit and the exclusion of marginalized communities has deeply impacted the academic and cultural landscape. Under this administration, federal initiatives such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs have been shut down, and policies that once supported research on LGBTQIA+ issues and ethnic diversity have been reversed.

Linguistic censorship has emerged as a direct result of this cultural shift, manifesting in the exclusion of terms such as "LGBTQ", "non-binary" and "gender non-conforming" from academic and government discourse.

This linguistic erasure underscores the significance of language as both a tool of resistance and a mechanism for cultural preservation. It highlights the pivotal role translation plays in resisting efforts to homogenize discourse and suppress marginalized voices. As oppressive ideologies attempt to redefine the boundaries of acceptable language, translation becomes a powerful counterforce, facilitating the introduction of alternative perspectives and ideas from other cultures that challenge dominant narratives.

The political and cultural shifts in Italy over recent years reflect the broader global trend of the rise of regressive ideologies, particularly with the emergence of ultraconservative leaders such as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Under her administration, Italy has experienced significant setbacks regarding gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights. Meloni's government has actively resisted feminist demands, such as opposing the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in schools and redirecting funds from gender equality initiatives toward pro-natalist programs. These actions expose a deeper issue within Italy's political landscape: a systematic minimization of gender equality as a crucial political priority. The government's rhetoric, which frames issues like gender-based violence and the fight against patriarchy as "ideological" concerns, effectively dismisses the tangible and pervasive realities of systemic inequality.

In this context, the role of translation becomes critical. As cultural and political ideologies shift, translation offers a potential means of resistance. It enables the exchange of ideas from different cultures, challenging the dominant narratives that seek to suppress marginalized voices. Through translation, feminist ideas and gender equality initiatives can transcend borders, spreading awareness and pushing back against regressive forces.

In light of this, Justin Baldoni's *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity* (2021) emerges as a crucial work within the discourse on gender stereotypes. The book actively challenges traditional norms surrounding masculinity, delving into the rigid expectations placed on men by society and seeking to redefine what it means to be "man enough". Baldoni counters the conventional association of masculinity with dominance, aggression and emotional repression, advocating instead for qualities such as vulnerability, emotional intelligence, and openness. In doing so, *Man Enough* addresses a significant gap in male-written, male-destined literature by presenting an alternative narrative to patriarchal ideals, one that champions a more inclusive and progressive vision of manhood. This exploration of masculinity positions the book as a catalyst for social change and a necessary and timely translation into Italian, where it holds the potential to reshape contemporary discussions about gender and offer an alternative framework to dominant, patriarchal ideologies.

In December 2024, however, a critical event involving Baldoni's personal conduct prompted a significant reevaluation of his work and raised questions about the authenticity of his advocacy. This incident led to a reconsideration of the values embedded within *Man Enough*, reshaping the direction of this thesis and prompting a broader reflection on the ethical dimensions of translation, with a particular emphasis on the translator's role in navigating the cultural, political, and social implications of their choices.

As the debate about the separation of an author from their work continues, translators are faced with the ethical dilemma of how to engage with authors whose personal conduct contradicts their own values. This raises fundamental questions: should a work be judged independently of its author? Does the author's personal behavior undermine the cultural impact and integrity of their work? This dilemma forces a reassessment of both which works are translated and how they are translated, weighing their artistic or intellectual merit against the broader ethical implications of their origins.

The translator's role, therefore, extends beyond linguistic fidelity to encompass reflections on the political and social implications of the work being translated. These reflections should lead to decisions that also align with the translator's ethical boundaries.

In this sense, translation becomes not only a linguistic endeavor but also an ethical act, one that should be articulated through an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent, clearly outlining the translator's ethical stance when undertaking a translation task.

In response to the revelations surrounding Baldoni's conduct, this thesis concludes that the proposed translation, which was initially intended for submission to publishing houses, will not be pursued.

This decision reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that the work promoted in intellectual spaces aligns with values of respect, accountability and social justice. By choosing not to amplify voices that perpetuate harm, translators can continue to play a critical role in reshaping cultural narratives and ensuring that intellectual spaces are free from toxic power dynamics.

The translator's ethical responsibility is not only to the text but also to the communities whose voices are being represented or silenced through the translation process. As cultural agents, translators must continuously reflect on their power to shape cultural narratives and the implications of their work.

CHAPTER I:
FRAMING THE DEBATE ON MASCULINITY

The Italian context

Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity

Translation as a revolutionary practice and the cultural importance of translators

FRAMING THE DEBATE ON MASCULINITY

The Italian context

It is widely acknowledged that the Western literary canon has historically been dominated by male voices. Only in recent years have women writers begun to receive due recognition for their contributions, which in the past were often overlooked or even obscured and succeeded in claiming a rightful place within the literary sphere while asserting their freedom of expression.

Before the 18th and 19th centuries, the presence of women in academic fields was rare and sporadic. Despite a widespread consensus supporting pseudoscientific theories of women's biological inferiority, this absence was not due to any inherent intellectual deficiency compared to men, but rather to restrictive societal structures that confined women to domestic roles.

Although female contributions were not systematic—and would not become so until the 20th century—women thinkers and writers such as Mary Astell (1666–1731), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) laid the foundational groundwork not only for the First Wave of feminism and feminist theory, but for the very advancement of women's rights, beginning with the fundamental right to education. However, despite the significant contributions of numerous women writers across successive generations who have, in various ways, shaped the modern and contemporary literary landscape, only a select few have managed to enter the literary canon.

The pioneering efforts of early proto-feminist figures, who challenged prevailing notions of women's social roles, provided the first analytical tools that enabled women intellectuals to critically examine femininity as a socially constructed condition within the rapidly evolving capitalist society that emerged after the Second Industrial Revolution.

The first formal Women's Rights Convention, held in Seneca Falls in 1848, is widely regarded as the starting point of the First Wave of feminism, a movement that is generally considered to have ended in the 1920s, when the US and UK governments granted women the right to vote. During this period, women campaigned for social and constitutional equality with white men, aiming to obtain the right to vote, access to higher education, property ownership, and legal recognition of civil independence from their husbands. Women in Western countries progressively saw their right to vote granted. Unfortunately, despite this success, gender equality remained—and remains—unattained in Western societies, as structural inequalities

and cultural barriers continued to persist, limiting women's opportunities and maintaining disparities in power and representation.

Issues such as the redefinition of womanhood beyond the role of women as stay-at-home mothers, along with reproductive rights, financial independence, workplace equality and domestic violence became central to the agenda of Second Wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and spanned two decades. A foundational influence on this wave was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), in which the French philosopher examined the sociocultural and political reasons for women's subordination, while at the same time rejecting the idea that biology determines gender differences and challenging traditional notions of femininity. Despite expanding broadly on the legacy of the first wave, second wave feminists were rightfully criticized for overlooking the struggles of black women and women of color.

Innovative thinkers such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis and bell hooks enriched the feminist discourse with new critical perspectives on race, class and sexuality, influencing the so-called Third Wave of the 1990s. During this period, feminist theorists began to draw extensively on insights from postcolonial, gender, and queer studies, reframing the concept of womanhood as a complex and multi-dimensional experience, and marking an evolution in feminist thought, which began to move beyond the experiences of white, liberal women to adopt a more inclusive approach.

Within this framework, the American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw published *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (1989). In her article, Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1989: 140), a concept that elevated the discourse on female oppression by emphasizing the coexistence of multiple layers and forms of oppression faced by women at the intersections of gender, race, class, and other social categories.

Based on what has been outlined so far, it could be argued that women have long felt the urge to discuss their condition within society and engage in dialogue on the matter, an urge rooted in the necessity to assert themselves as autonomous individuals and to finally subvert their subordinate relationship to their male counterparts. Despite only recently gaining the rights and space to challenge traditional gender paradigms, within the span of approximately two centuries, women have succeeded in producing a vast body of work that supports their project of liberation, with contributions in numerous fields, such as literature, history, applied sciences, and social studies. While asserting themselves and thriving in numerous new fields, these revolutionary women set new examples for the generations that followed them, reshaping the structures of Western societies. Such a process involved an invaluable work of self-reflection,

which allowed hundreds of women worldwide to gain profound awareness of their condition and provided them with the tools to subvert it. Once a new pathway toward transformation was illuminated, the feminist revolution was already underway.

Unfortunately, although significant improvements have been achieved in Western societies since the first proto-feminist contributions, and despite the fact that a fourth wave of feminism is currently underway—one characterized by its focus on intersectionality, inclusivity, and digital activism—inequalities continue to permeate our daily lives. As Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director at the World Economic Forum, wrote on the Global Gender Gap Report 2024: "In 2024, gender parity inches slowly forward — the pace of travel is such, however, that full parity remains beyond the reach of another five generations."[1]

If we examine the Italian context specifically, the report shows a decline compared to 2023, with Italy ranking 87th out of 146 countries—a drop of eight positions. These statistics represent an invaluable tool for different reasons. First, they provide measurable insights into the progress of gender equality and the advancement of women's rights. Secondly, they serve as a reminder of the ongoing necessity to prioritize this issue, as the political and civil landscapes are constantly evolving, with lawmakers reshaping societies according to their shifting political agendas. This means that, unfortunately, rights gained at one point in time can successively be eroded.

The latest developments in the Italian sociopolitical landscape regrettably point in this direction. In its annual report, Human Rights Watch documented a concerning situation in 2024 in far-right-led Italy, where the "Parliament approved a law criminalizing seeking surrogacy[2] abroad, and harmful policies and rhetoric about the reproductive rights of women and girls and about LGBT people contributed to a hostile environment". In the same report, the paragraph specifically dedicated to women's rights highlights that

> Sexual and gender-based violence remains a serious concern. Government statistics published in July showed a steady increase from 2021 to 2023 in cases of domestic violence against women, sexual assault, and other acts of gender-based violence and harassment. [...] In April, parliament passed a government-sponsored measure to facilitate access by anti-abortion groups to family counseling centers where many pregnant people go seeking advice and access to abortion. Abortion is legal in Italy within the first trimester, and later in some circumstances, but people often face significant obstacles due to high numbers of healthcare professionals who invoke conscientious objection and refuse to participate in the procedure.[3]

[1] Cf. https://www.weforum.org/publications/gender-gap-report-2024/ (last accessed: January 26, 2025)
[2] Surrogacy has been illegal in Italy since 2004 under Law n. 40/2004. Italian parents could, however, have children through surrogacy abroad, and legally register their children in the country before October 16, 2024.
[3] Cf. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/italy (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

The institutional response to the growing concerns about the backsliding on gender policies is troubling. On November 12, 2024, Italy's first female Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, proudly declared: "Despite the feminists, who think that equality is achieved when one refers to herself as 'Madam President' or 'Councilwoman', I want to say that I willingly and simply ask to be called 'President', but I'm proud to have achieved the highest female unemployment rate under the first government led by a woman, because this is equality"[4]. While "highest female unemployment rate" was undoubtedly a slip of the tongue, female employment rates in Italy remain the lowest in Europe.[5]

Meloni's stance reflects a broader sociopolitical issue in contemporary Italy, i.e. the difficulty in establishing a productive dialogue between Italian activists, feminist movements and intelligentsia, who advocate for equal rights and social change, and Italian institutions, which persistently downplay the importance of effective measures to fight gender inequality and gender-based violence. Feminism is often ridiculed by the people in power, who systematically dismiss feminist solutions to pressing social issues as merely ideological and politically correct. While political correctness is inherently a positive concept, it has come to be perceived by the general public as a derogatory term. This is the result of a decade-long rhetorical battle against the left and left-leaning voters, who are often depicted as being detached from the country's reality and overly focused on what are considered trivial matters, such as the proposals for adopting neutral language—a cause supported by many Italian linguists and writers, and one that will be analyzed further on in this thesis.

An example of this unproductive dynamic can be observed in the institutional response to the growing demand for the introduction of sexuality education and/or social and emotional education into the formal curriculum of Italian schools. This demand was inspired by the commendable practices of several EU countries, and culminated in the creation of a legislative proposal initiated by the citizens (in Italian, *proposta di legge ad iniziativa popolare*) that rapidly reached the quorum with over fifty thousand signatures[6]. In response, the Italian government initially announced that €500,000 in the 2025 financial plan would be allocated

[4] My translation. The occasion for President Meloni's intervention was a rally in support of a candidate for the presidency of the Emilia-Romagna region, Elena Ugolini. Meloni joined the event online. A few days later, on November 15th, she joked about her unfortunate declaration during another rally in Perugia. Videos are available on the major social networks, such as https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNeExjdWh/.

[5] Cf. Italy: lowest female employment rate in Europe - Edify Edu Project and 7 Causes of the Gender Wage Gap in Italy - The Borgen Project (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

[6] Cf. Referendum - Statistiche - Iniziativa undefined (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

for sexuality education projects in schools, only to redirect the funds toward fertility courses for primary and secondary school teachers just weeks after the announcement.[7]

Minister of Education and Merit, Giuseppe Valditara, recently addressed the issue of gender inequality and gender-based violence during the launch of *Fondazione Giulia Cecchettin*[8] on November 18, 2024. On this occasion, Valditara maintained that the fight against patriarchy is the "ideological" approach pursued by those who aim to solve the "female question"[9] by imposing a personal worldview, adding that patriarchy in Italy was juridically dismantled with the Family Law Reform (in Italian *Riforma del diritto di famiglia*) in 1975[10]. Unfortunately, the data show another picture. According to EU.R.E.S, the Italian Research Institute for Employment and Social Studies, in 2024, a woman was killed every three days.[11]

Valditara's statement, however, inadvertently reveals an important truth about the struggle for gender equality: gender-based violence continues to be treated as a "female question", despite the undeniable fact that its perpetrators are men. This raises a critical question about the broader phenomenon: where are the men in this fight?

This brief analysis illustrates that, at least over the past two centuries, women have tirelessly worked to close the gap between them and their male counterparts. While it is important to recognize that not all women identify as feminists and that not all supposedly feminist advocates fight for the rights of all women—the exclusionary stance of the TERF movement, for instance, disregards the rights of trans women—the significant advancements in women's rights have been made possible predominantly through the efforts of women themselves.

However, since men and women do not live in isolation and the social fabric is constantly reshaped by the interaction between people of different genders, it is safe to assume that the gradual transformation of women's roles has also produced a shift in the roles of men—particularly given that the relationship between the two parts has historically been one of subordination, with men asserting dominance, authority, control, and privilege over women.

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[7] Cfr. Dietrofront sull'educazione sessuale a scuola: fondi dirottati sui corsi per la fertilità and Il governo dirotta i fondi dall'educazione sessuale alla fertilità. Le opposizioni: "Retromarcia gravissima" - La Stampa (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

[8] Born in the wake of Giulia Cecchettin's tragic femicide through the initiative of Cecchettin's father and siblings, *Fondazione Giulia Cecchettin* is an organization that seeks to create awareness on gender inequality, fight gender-based violence and promote radical societal change through education, while providing support for gender-based violence victims and their families. Website: Fondazione Giulia Cecchettin

[9] My translation and summary of Minister Valditara's speech. Videos are available on the major social networks, such as https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNeE93MKG/ (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

[10] The Law 19 May 1975, No. 151 set forth an important transformation in the Italian legal system. Among other changes, it established equality between spouses by abolishing the patriarchal figure of the "head of the family". Il diritto di famiglia dopo la riforma: regole generali (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

[11] Cf. Eures: 99 donne uccise nel 2024. In calo gli autori di femminicidio stranieri - Educare alla parità - Ansa.it (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

Thus, modifications to one part of the equation have inevitably affected the other, leading to a reconsideration of male roles, identities, and behaviors in an effort to adjust to evolving social structures. Have men actively responded to this call for change? Have they initiated a discourse on masculinity and gender roles that meaningfully contributes to the improvement of their gender? While women founded a universal movement rooted in self-reflection to carry out a social critique that effectively worked against discrimination, were men undertaking a parallel journey to dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality?

In his *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996, 2006), sociologist and gender studies scholar Michael S. Kimmel examines how evolving social standards have led to frustration among men. Through a series of examples, he illustrates how American men's behavior tends to be more reactive than active in the face of societal changes that challenge traditional masculine norms, highlighting how definitions of manliness have evolved in response to women's movements. Kimmel's analysis could thus be seen as disproving and ultimately subverting the traditional dichotomies that associate femininity with passivity and masculinity with activity.

Although Kimmel's analysis primarily focuses on American men in the 19th century, this mechanism remains relevant and applicable to Western societies in general, particularly in today's globalized world where the U.S. has imposed itself as the cultural compass for Western nations.

While it would be interesting to devote more space to a critical analysis of male responses to feminist movements throughout the centuries, as well as to the numerous ways in which feminism has been distorted and misrepresented as a tool to affirm female superiority over men, this is not the main purpose of this thesis. Nor is it intended to explore feminist literature or provide an exhaustive analysis of female contributions.

Instead, its primary goal is to highlight the concerning absence of male-led, systematic inquiry into the drawbacks of gender stereotyping and prejudice, with the hope of spreading awareness on the importance of creating discussions around masculinity that originate within male-populated environments and focus on male-driven initiatives.

Feminist movements have contributed over two centuries of academic research, literary production, sociological analysis and historical counternarratives aimed at redefining the social paradigms that have functioned as molds for centuries in Western societies. As a result, women in contemporary society have inherited and can benefit from a rich legacy of studies that support societal transformation and offer a robust intellectual foundation for their arguments.

On the contrary, a comparable initiative is conspicuously absent from men's collective efforts. This absence has placed a dual burden on feminist movements, which have had to incorporate reflections on masculinity into their activism. It is no coincidence that men who actively challenge and seek to redefine traditional paradigms of masculinity often identify as feminists. A critical reflection on the "cage" of masculinity—certainly a privileged condition, yet still a restrictive one—has emerged relatively recently and remains sporadic at the moment. In his *Introduction* to the collection *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (1987, 2015), Harry Brod acknowledged the intellectual debt men's studies owes to the women's studies scholarship and criticized the simplistic tendencies of early-stage men's studies. Brod strongly suggested a more complex approach to masculinity, urging a departure from the singular notion of "*the*[12] male sex role" toward a recognition of "the multiplicity of male roles" (Brod 2015: 7). In his own work, Professor Todd W. Reeser quotes Brod's essay *The Case for Men's Studies* directly, highlighting a difference between men's and women's studies that is still relevant. Brod argued that "while women's studies corrects the exclusion of women from the traditional canon caused by androcentric scholarship's elevation of man as male to man as generic human, the implications of this fallacy for our understanding of men have gone largely unrecognized" (Reeser 2015: 15).

Another crucial challenge to expanding the discourse on equality to include men lies in the significant resistance that efforts to debunk male stereotypes often encounter from men outside the feminist bubble. The majority of these men tend to adopt a dismissive or even mocking posture, belittling and denying not only women's struggles but also the problems they themselves face. This pervasive dismissiveness not only hinders progress but also perpetuates inaction.

Nonetheless, some progress is being made. In 2020, a group of young people with diverse academic backgrounds founded *Micamacho*[13], a collective designed to foster conversations on masculinity online and offline, and dismantle gender stereotypes by promoting alternative conceptions of manhood beyond traditional patriarchal constructs. In 2023, the collective published their first book, *Cosa vuol dire fare l'uomo?* (lit. "What Does It Mean to Act Like a Man?"), described as "a collective guide to redefine masculinity"[14]. More than a decade earlier,

[12] Emphasis in the original.

[13] The name *Micamacho* is a pun. By combining the word *mica*, meaning 'not', and *macho*, the pun plays on the idea of rejecting the rigidity of traditional gender stereotypes surrounding masculinity, reclaiming the right to explore alternative expressions of manhood and promoting a healthier understanding of gender roles.

[14] My translation of "una guida corale per ridefinire il maschile". Cf. Cosa vuol dire fare l'uomo? - Edizioni Sonda (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

a heterogeneous group of men established *Maschile Plurale*, an association based in Rome that operates toward a society free from sexism and gender-based violence. The organization engages in educational initiatives and collaborates with local anti-violence community centers to promote gender equality. In 2024, Gino Cecchettin, father of 22-year-old Giulia Cecchettin, who was brutally murdered in 2023 by her ex-boyfriend, published *Cara Giulia* (lit. "Dear Giulia"). The biography, as Cecchettin explained, is "part of a wider project"[15], one that culminated in the creation of *Fondazione Giulia Cecchettin*. The book serves both as a means to generate revenue for Italian organizations combating gender-based violence and as a tool to facilitate connections with professionals who can deliver educational talks on the topic to middle and high school students.

The aforementioned initiatives have played a significant role in successfully raising public awareness about issues such as toxic masculinity and sexism. The increasing engagement of men both in and out of social networks, many of whom have shown interest in adopting a fresh perspective on gender issues, suggests that society is ready for deeper and more nuanced conversations.

Unfortunately, this growing awareness is not matched by the availability of accessible material for the general public, which remains insufficient. In this context, virtuous examples of male-led initiatives from abroad could bridge the gap between the growing demand and the currently inadequate offer. For instance, in 2021, actor and speaker Justin Baldoni published *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity*, a "vulnerable exploration of manhood written by someone who sits at an intersection of power and privilege" (Baldoni 2021: 1). The book shares its name with the *Man Enough Podcast*, where Baldoni and his co-hosts hold meaningful conversations about manhood, fatherhood, vulnerability, gender stereotypes and sexism with guests from diverse backgrounds, including celebrities, activists and academics.

The following section will explore the nature of Baldoni's book, a work that has the potential to significantly enrich the discussion surrounding men and masculinity, and effectively deliver a necessary message: it is high time men took action, reflecting critically on their position in society and initiating systematic and academically-informed dialogues.

The concluding section of this chapter will focus on the importance of translation as an inherently revolutionary practice, one that is capable of contributing to profound social change. In order to achieve this, translators must gain awareness of the power of the translation practice, while remaining committed to address the ethical challenges that inevitably arise when

[15] My translation and summary of Gino Cecchettin's brief interview for Rizzoli. Available at: https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNeKKc2qp/

translating a text. These challenges may include intratextual and extratextual factors, such as, for instance, the translation of a racially-charged term (intratextual) or the biographical dimension of the author (extratextual).

The body of this study will center on the translation of two chapters from Baldoni's autobiography: the *Introduction* and the fifth chapter, titled *Privileged Enough*. The two selected chapters exhaustively present the general framework of the author's perspectives (Introduction) and effectively examine gender inequality through an intersectional lens (*Privileged Enough*). Moreover, the selected pages are particularly dense with linguistic challenges, which will be thoroughly analyzed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Finally, the third chapter of this thesis will be a technical commentary on the translation and the translation process. Drawing on Christiane Nord's functionalist approach, the commentary will provide a detailed analysis of translation issues, dividing them into four macrocategories: pragmatic translation problems, cultural translation problems, linguistic translation problems and text-specific translation problems. Additionally, significant attention will be dedicated to the ethical implications of translating a work amid controversy surrounding the author's conduct. The result is a portrayal of translation as a complex interplay between the languages and cultures involved, the intent of the author, the intent of the translator and the unpredictability of the extratextual circumstances that inevitably influence the translation process.

A section of the final chapter will specifically address the decision to use the *schwa* symbol (ə) in the Italian translation, which represents a graphic innovation proposed by Italian linguists, academics, writers and activists as a means to offer a solution for the absence of gender-neutral suffixes in Italian grammar. This choice reflects a deliberate effort to align the translation with contemporary discussions of inclusivity and equality, making it linguistically and culturally relevant within the context of the target culture.

Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity

As highlighted in the previous section, there is a significant lack of accessible material for the general public that addresses the limits of contemporary conception of masculinity in Western societies, as well as the effects of this conceptualization on the broader network of social relationships.

However, this does not imply a complete absence of scholarly analyses of masculinity. Todd W. Reeser's *Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies* (2015) offers a comprehensive overview of significant contributions to men's studies, incorporating perspectives from literary

criticism, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Reeser identifies several foundational works in the field, including Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985), which popularized "homosocial" as a staple term in gender studies, Joseph Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981), which reinterprets sex role stereotyping and proposes the "sex role strain paradigm" as an alternative to biological determinism in male aggression, Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996, 2006), which uses historical analysis to demonstrate that men's behavior changes across different time periods, and Robert Staples' *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (1982), which pioneered the practice of inclusion of non-white masculinities into the broader analysis of masculinity. These works, among others, have been instrumental in restoring complexity to the term and analysis of masculinity as a whole. As Reeser argues, "[o]ne element of the coming of age of men's studies was the idea that masculinity had to be made visible, to be brought out as an object of study, and to not be considered an unmarked category" (Reeser 2015: 16). This concept of male 'invisibility' is particularly significant to understand both the trajectory of academic approaches to masculinity and broader societal attitudes. Until at least the 1980s, a central issue in men's studies was the idea that the male body was not a "gendered body":

> Masculinity's traditional invisibility, it was widely thought, was one way in which it maintained its power: by denying implicitly or explicitly that men were gendered, they could escape close scrutiny and resist critique or the need to change. As Antony Easthope wrote: "Social change is necessary and a precondition of such change is an attempt to understand masculinity, to make it visible." For this to take place, various questions about masculinity would have to be explicitly asked, including questions about the male body, history, and cultural images. As Michael Kimmel asked in his essay "Invisible Masculinity": "If the pursuit of manhood has been a dominant theme in American history, at least rhetorically and metaphorically, why do American men still have no history?" For him, the response was: "In part because they do not even know what questions to ask." (Reeser 2015: 16)

Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity is a valuable contribution to contemporary explorations of masculinity, one that does ask numerous questions to modern men about their roles in society. The book effectively combines emotionally engaging autobiographical accounts with data and references to academically relevant studies, making it a perfect product for the general public. Although not an academic work, it includes several references to academic research, using the author's personal experiences as real-life examples for a culturally relevant examination of the mechanisms that define modern-day notions of Western masculinity without falling into anecdotal oversimplifications.

Published in 2021, the 368-page volume was authored by American actor, speaker, social activist, and filmmaker Justin Baldoni. It is structured into ten chapters (*Brave Enough*, *Big*

Enough, *Smart Enough*, *Confident Enough*, *Privileged Enough*, *Successful Enough*, *Sexy Enough*, *Loved Enough*, *Dad Enough*, and *Enough*), framed by a preface, an introduction, and concluding acknowledgments.

The title is particularly worthy of attention, as it foreshadows the core message of the book, immediately prompting a series of questions. By employing the neologism "undefining", formed by the prefix *un-* and the verb *define*, it defies conventional linguistic rules and presents the reader with an innovative concept, inviting reflection on how this linguistic novelty translates into practice. What does it mean for the author to be 'man enough'? Why is there a need to 'undefine' one's masculinity? And what does it mean to 'undefine'? While reflecting on the linguistic implications of this choice, the readers simultaneously start a parallel reflection on its cultural implications.

Following a precise 'adjective+*enough*' structure, the word "enough" recurs throughout the chapter titles, creating a thematic connection between the individual sections and the book's overarching title. Exceptions to this pattern include the chapters *Dad Enough*, where *dad* is a noun, but the two-word structure is preserved, and *Enough*, where the word arguably shifts from an adjectival to an adverbial function, modifying the implied state of *being*. Now, *enough* no longer refers to single, fragmented personality traits but to the man as a whole. Additionally, the repetition of *enough* serves to empty the word of its traditional meaning, creating space to imbue it with a new one. The title successfully encapsulates the author's invitation to abandon old frameworks of masculinity to embrace a new form that feels authentic to one's true self.

The introduction situates the book within the contemporary U.S. context, providing an overview of how the concept of masculinity is constructed in American society. Baldoni reflects on the socialization of boys to conform to rigid expectations, and critiques how valuing performativity over authenticity hinders emotional growth and fosters harmful relational dynamics.

The subsequent chapters focus on different aspects of masculinity, each foreshadowed by its title. *Brave Enough* examines the stigma surrounding male vulnerability and the role of peer-pressure to performativity. *Big Enough* addresses the burden to attain aesthetically idealized bodies. *Smart Enough* highlights the conditioning that equates male worth with all-knowingness, even in the absence of genuine understanding. *Confident Enough* analyzes the societal expectation for men to project unwavering confidence, even in moments of insecurity or self-doubt. *Privileged Enough* introduces the concept of intersectionality to unpack the various layers of privilege, emphasizing the importance of representation. *Successful Enough* critiques the conventional benchmarks of success, such as wealth, power, and professional

status. *Sexy Enough* explores the pressures men face regarding physical appearance, sexuality, and desirability, as well as the role of media and pop culture in perpetuating unrealistic standards. *Loved Enough* directs the reader's attention to superficial portrayals of love and underscores the necessity of building relationships rooted in authentic connection and intimacy, expanding the idea of love beyond romantic partnerships. *Dad Enough* challenges concepts of fatherhood that center exclusively on being a provider, protector, and disciplinarian, highlighting how these limited expectations can hinder men's ability to be emotionally nurturing and present. *Enough* serves as the culmination of Baldoni's exploration of masculinity. In this chapter, the author addresses the core question of how societal standards of manhood lead to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, ultimately offering a more compassionate and inclusive definition of what it means to be 'enough'—one that is not based on conforming to external ideals of masculinity, but rather on embracing one's authentic self. The chapter concludes with a powerful call to action for men to collectively redefine masculinity in a way that includes vulnerability, empathy and emotional openness.

The literary, the psychological and the autobiographical journey are finally completed in the last chapter. However, the conclusion of the book marks not an end, but the beginning of a new journey—one that actively involves the reader, one that is both personal and collective, one that is, in other words, inherently cultural. Arguably, the "necessary work", the importance of which is reiterated numerous times throughout the book, is not done by merely reading the book. Rather, the most significant work begins once the book is closed.

This autobiography falls into multiple categories. It can be viewed as a social commentary that, while referencing academic work in the field, aligns with gender studies in a more accessible, non-academic format, and/or as a self-help memoir that provides a roadmap for embracing a more holistic definition of masculinity.

The language used throughout the book reflects this complexity and deserves special attention. The inclusion of numerous real-life conversations results in an informal, colloquial style, and the book itself is structured as a conversation with the reader. Reflecting the patterns of spoken language, it tends to be repetitive. However, this repetition is a strength rather than a weakness, as it helps memorization and reinforces new concepts. By presenting ideas multiple times in different contexts, the language facilitates the internalization of the book's core message.

The language also frequently mirrors the tone of religious discourse, which is no coincidence given the significant influence of the Baha'i faith on the author's life. This spiritual undertone aligns with the overarching message of the book: advocating for the creation of new

masculinity paradigms rooted in self-discovery, a practice frequently associated with spirituality.

The author adopts a simple, informal communicative style characterized by generally short, non-elaborate sentences. This approach effectively bridges the gap between complex sociological concepts and the general public, making the text both approachable and widely accessible while helping to establish a strong connection with the readership. By the author's own definition, the book is apolitical and free of judgement, which further contributes to its inclusivity.

As previously noted, the book establishes a clear focus, addressing the reader in a direct yet sensitive manner. Its informal and engaging prose is particularly well-suited for individuals who identify as male—or those who feel compelled to conform to conventional masculine behaviors—and who are beginning to question the validity of traditional gender stereotypes or seeking alternative perspectives on social roles, regardless of age, race, or sexuality. Despite being written by a cisgender, able-bodied, white, privileged and affluent man, the book incorporates a wide range of diverse narratives coming from different masculinities.

Gifted to the men in our lives, read in book clubs, used as source material for male self-help groups, *Man Enough* responds to the need for more male-sourced and oriented literature on the male experience. The volume holds the potential for sparking broader, more informed discussions on gender stereotypes, ultimately contributing to the ongoing effort to create a more equitable society by encouraging men to rethink traditional masculinity.

While the book was originally intended for an American audience, its broad applicability lends itself to discussions that involve men in the wider context of Western societies. For instance, the unrealistic standards perpetuated by American media and pop culture that are mentioned in the book have been widely absorbed across Europe, as the historical development of globalized Western societies is profoundly interrelated.

Aside from a few exemplary cases of gender equality, most notably in Icelandic culture but also in other Northern European countries, Baldoni's analysis remains extremely pertinent to all Western readers.

As for the Italian audience specifically, as discussed in the previous section, the topic is receiving significant public attention. For these reasons, this volume could be of considerable interest to the Italian publishing industry.

In this context, as part of a study group within the Ethics, Professional Deontology and Team Working course held by Professor Linda Rossato in the broader framework of the Translation and Interpreting Master's Degree at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, a translation proposal

(Appendix B of this volume) intended for publishing houses that focus on socially relevant issues in contemporary Italian society was developed.

Among the Italian publishing houses that could potentially consider publishing this translation are: *Accento Edizioni*, an independent publisher with a focus on ultra-contemporary prose; *Edizioni Tlon*, known for publishing translated works by authors such as bell hooks, Judith Butler and Angela Davies; *Effequ Editore*, which aims to publish "books that weren't there"[16], including modern and non-traditional non-fiction centered on social issues; *Edizioni Altravista*, an independent publisher specializing in popular science and academic non-fiction, covering fields such as cultural anthropology, political and social sciences, ecology and environmental studies.

The interest in *Man Enough* beyond American culture is exemplified by the publication of its Spanish translation in 2021, under the title *Lo suficientemente hombre: Cómo desdefiní mi masculinidad*. Given the potential reach of Latin America's large Spanish-speaking population, the linguistic overlap with U.S. Spanish, and the proximity of the two regions, the translation was rendered into Latin American Spanish rather than European Spanish by translator Eric Levit Mora.

When considering the Italian context, the cultural parallels between Italy and Latin America become apparent. Both regions share a history heavily influenced by Catholicism, which has played a significant role in defining and perpetuating traditional gender roles. Additionally, both regions are marked by a deeply rooted *machismo* culture, where masculinity is often associated with dominance, emotional restraint, and the suppression of vulnerability. Such striking similarities suggest that the challenges and critiques addressed in *Man Enough* would similarly resonate with Italian readers.

The Italian readership has a clear need for recent texts on masculinity that reflect the rapidly changing dynamics of modern society. While existing academic research provides a solid foundation in the field of men's studies, many of these texts are often outdated. Globalized societies are evolving at an unprecedented pace, with social media and the tech industry taking the lead in driving these changes—and are these ultrabillion-dollar companies not run and owned by the most powerful white men on the planet?—but, while the discourse around femininity continues to progress actively and rapidly, studies on masculinity have not kept up with the same rhythm.

[16] My translation of "Effequ è una casa editrice indipendente che pubblica libri che non c'erano." Cf. Effequ - toscanalibri - Il portale della cultura toscana (last accessed: January 26, 2025)

Consequently, the body of research on masculinity is not only significantly smaller but also more dated. Furthermore, academic research, though invaluable, often adopts a retrospective perspective on societal phenomena, offering a *post factum* analysis rather than an immediate response to ongoing cultural shifts. This creates a pressing need for male-led initiatives that are both current and responsive. *Man Enough* possesses these characteristics, effectively filling a critical gap by offering narratives and solutions that directly address today's societal challenges.

Surprisingly, the section dedicated to the extratextual translation issues in the closing chapter of this thesis will address the reasons why this book should not be translated into Italian, with particular emphasis on the role and importance of the translator's personal ethics. These considerations stem from recent developments concerning allegations of misogynistic behavior against the author, which call into question the congruence between the book's central message and the author's personal conduct.

Translation holds the potential to drive significant change. Yet, the practice of translation must not disregard the important ethical questions that inevitably arise during the translation process. The revolutionary essence of translation as an inherently cultural practice will be explored in the following section.

Translation as a revolutionary practice and the importance of translators

In the *Introduction* to the third edition of her *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, Mona Baker addresses a widely acknowledged consensus within the field of translation:

> Throughout its long history, translation has never really enjoyed the kind of recognition and respect that other professions, such as medicine and engineering, have enjoyed. Translators have constantly complained that translation is underestimated as a profession. (Baker 2018: 2)

Although translation training programs have become a widespread academic reality globally, and laws protecting translators' rights—despite national differences—have been enacted worldwide[17], translators are still often regarded as ancillary professional figures.

[17] In Italy, translators' rights are strongly protected under Law 633/1941, which explicitly establishes the right of attribution. This right applies to all published or publicly distributed translations. The same right is granted in the following English-speaking countries: United Kingdom (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988), Canada (Copyright Act, 1985), Australia (Copyright Act, 1968), New Zealand (Copyright Act, 1994), India (Copyright Act, 1957), Ireland (Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000), Singapore (Copyright Act, 2021). In contrast, the Copyright Act of 1976 in the United States does not explicitly establish a right of attribution.The texts of the laws governing the rights of translators are accessible through official legislative sources (see *References*).

This issue persists despite numerous scholars successfully emphasizing the importance of translated texts as original works of creation rather than secondary textual products. One of the pioneers in analyzing this phenomenon was Lawrence Venuti, who effectively summarized the multiple reasons translators are regarded as secondary professional figures, and translation as a derivative activity[18], under the provocative (yet highly factual) concept of "invisibility" (Venuti 1986: 179–180).

Consequently, professional translators frequently experience frustration stemming from the disparity between the high level of expertise expected of them, for which they are thoroughly trained, and their actual economic and reputational status. Baker revisits this frustration further in her introduction, arguing that

> Those entering the profession now have to demonstrate that they can reflect on what they do and that they have invested in acquiring not only the vocational but also the intellectual skills required to undertake such a complex and highly consequential task, one that has a major impact on the lives of the many people who rely on them as mediators. (Baker 2018: 2)

With this powerful statement, Baker highlights not only the struggles faced by translators, who operate within a market that affords them minimal recognition—and which may offer even less in the future with the advent of advanced AI systems such as ChatGPT—but, more significantly, the importance of translation as a practice that, by its very nature, exerts considerable influence on the lives of all those involved in the process: the original authors, who are afforded the opportunity to engage with a different culture (and generate income from it); the commissioners and the professionals in the publishing sector; and the recipients of the translation, who gain access to an entirely new body of knowledge and information.

What is crucial to emphasize in this complex network of relations is that the participants in this process, which could easily be defined as a 'transaction', are all operating within the context of culture. Here, 'culture' should not be intended "in the narrower sense of man's advanced intellectual development [...], but in the broader anthropological sense to refer to all *socially*

[18] In *The Translator's Invisibility* (1986), Venuti examines the causes of this "self-annihilation", arguing that "[o]n the one hand, readers usually respond to the translation of a foreign text, whether prose or poetry, as if the text had been originally written in their language, as if it were not in fact a translation; on the other hand, a translation is judged acceptable (by editors, reviewers and readers) when it reads fluently, when the absence of any awkward phrasings, unidiomatic constructions or confused meanings gives the appearance that the translation reflects the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the original text. What is so remarkable here is that both attitudes completely efface the translator's crucial intervention in the text: the more "successful" the translation, the more invisible the translator, and the more visible the author or meaning of the original text. The corollary drawn from these attitudes, and often asserted by translators themselves, is that the work of translation should be effaced, that the discovery of this work during the reading process is undesirable because it means that the translated text fails to meet the criterion of fluency."

conditioned[19] aspects of human life" (Snell-Hornby 1995: 39). As Ward H. Goodenough puts it, culture is

> whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, [...] what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage [...]: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term. [...] As such, the things people say and do, their social arrangements and events, are products or by-products of their culture as they apply it to the task of perceiving and dealing with their circumstances. (Snell-Hornby 1995: 39-40)

This means that culture permeates society. Culture shapes society. Culture *is* society. Or, if reversing the assumption makes it easier, society is fundamentally a cultural matter. Societies are structured, organized, and even made possible because they are based on cultural constructs that are transmitted across generations or imposed through ideologies, narratives and structures of thought.

In 1971, the semiotician Jurij M. Lotman argued that "[t]he fundamental "task" of culture [...] is in structurally organizing the world around man. Culture is the generator of structuredness, and in this way it creates a social sphere around man which, like the biosphere, makes life possible; that is, not organic life, but social life" (Lotman 1978: 213). In the same essay, Lotman introduces the concept of culture as a "semiosphere", which he defines as a "system of signs" (Lotman 1978: 211) that individuals must learn to interpret in order to navigate the environment in which they exist. Within the semiosphere, anything that conveys meaning is called a "sign", and a set of signs forms a "text", that is, any element of culture—such as a monument, a work of art, a culinary tradition, a piece of clothing—not just written texts.[20]

What stands out in Lotman's definition of culture is precisely the movement that characterizes the semiosphere. Using biological imagery, Lotman argues that the system has an internal core, where signs interact to form a recognizable alphabet and a self-sustaining structure, as well as external components surrounded by a membrane (much like cells), which encompasses new elements from outside the system. Its propensity for change is, therefore, a fundamental aspect of cultural development, as culture is not fixed or identical to itself but is constantly evolving.

Another significant assumption in Lotman's theory of culture as a semiotic concept is that culture functions as a secondary modeling system, with language serving as the primary one. Lotman asserts that language provides the foundational framework for interpreting the world:

[19] Emphasis in the original.

[20] Lotman further posits that "[c]ulture can be presented as an aggregate of texts; however, from the point of view of the researcher, it is more exact to consider culture as a mechanism creating an aggregate of texts and texts as the realization of culture" (Lotman 1978: 218). In practical terms, culture is a heterogeneous entity composed of various texts that can change depending on their interactions.

through language we name, describe, and understand the world around us. Each language, with its unique structure and vocabulary, creates a different world. As a result, certain concepts may exist in one language but remain absent in another, simply because the words to name them do not exist. In essence, human beings create worlds through words—which are linguistic signs shared by members of the same culture.

Culture, according to Lotman, functions analogously to language: just as letters combine to form words, which then combine to create linguistic texts, cultural systems consist of signs that combine to form "texts", broadly understood as cultural artifacts or objects.

As a semiotic system, culture requires individuals to continuously translate signs to decipher and construct their reality. From this perspective, it could be argued that while all individuals are (to varying degrees) capable of decoding signs at an intralinguistic level, translators hold a particularly crucial position because they can decode signs at an interlinguistic level. They act as constructors, building bridges between languages. And, since languages and cultures are so inextricably intertwined, they also build bridges between cultures. Most importantly, translators also serve as agents of cultural transformation. By introducing concepts from peripheral or external regions of the semiosphere, they create movement within the semiosphere itself, contributing to its constant reshaping while also steering its evolution in specific directions.

Around the same period, Itamar Even-Zohar postulated that literature, like other cultural activities, must also be viewed as a dynamic system, and that translated literature should be integral to any literary system, as it often serves as a conduit for innovation and change. In particular, he conceptualized literature as a "polysystem — a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent" (Even-Zohar 1979: 290). In his view, any system is characterized by a series of oppositions, such as the opposition between the center, which dictates norms and models to the entire polysystem, and the periphery, as well as the opposition between translated and non-translated literature. Even-Zohar asserted that literary systems cannot be studied in isolation, as their structures are the result of the interactions with other systems within the same polysystem or across different polysystems. Susan Bassnett summarizes his groundbreaking theories as follows:

> Having stated his belief in the fundamental importance of the role of translations in a literary system, Even-Zohar then endeavoured to define the circumstances in which translations might assume particular importance. He pointed out that, as literatures evolve, their need for translations fluctuates; hence a well-established literary system might translate less than one

> that is undergoing changes and upheaval. Newly evolving literatures would, according to Even-Zohar's theory, translate more texts [...] The historical situation, he suggested, would determine the quantity and type of translations that might be undertaken, and the status of those translations would be greater or lesser according to the position of the receiving culture. So a work could be fundamentally important in the source culture, and could then be translated and have no impact at all in the receiving culture or, vice versa, a translation could alter the shape of the receiving literary system. (Bassnett 2008: 16–17)

These assumptions laid the foundation for a translation theory characterized by its target-orientedness, marking a complete departure from earlier translation theories that were centered exclusively on the source text. Unlike these previous paradigms, this groundbreaking approach focused on the translated texts themselves—their position and role within the target culture, as well as their relationship with original texts of that culture—and greatly influenced subsequent translation theories. For instance, in his *Descriptive Translation Studies—and beyond* (1995), Gideon Toury suggested that "translations be regarded as facts of the culture that would host them, with the concomitant assumption that whatever their function and systemic status, these are constituted within the target culture and reflect its own systemic constellation" (Toury 1995: 18).

Building on Lotman and Even-Zohar's semiotic approach to languages, cultures, literature and translation, each participant in the broader translation process—previously referred to as a 'transaction'—not only manipulates cultural objects containing cultural content, but also brings their own cultural baggage into the exchange. These cultures are brought into contact by translation, which becomes an intercultural interaction, or as Mary Snell-Hornby defined it, a "cross-cultural event" (Snell-Hornby 1995: 39).

Therefore, it is crucial for translators to recognize that translation is not merely a mechanical transfer of linguistic content but a deeply cultural practice. This awareness will necessarily lead to greater attention to the ethical considerations that invariably arise when translating any text. The importance of translation as a cultural practice, with its potential to generate cultural movement and shape new horizons in the receiving culture (much in the same way that source texts shape the culture in which they are produced), has been extensively investigated by translation scholars following the so-called "cultural turn" in translation studies. This term, coined by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere in their seminal work *Translation, History and Culture* (1990), refers to "a massive intellectual phenomenon" (Bassnett 2008: 15-16) that unfolded across the humanities during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the context of translation studies, Bassnett and Lefevere suggested that

> a study of the processes of translation combined with the praxis of translating could offer a way of understanding how complex manipulative textual processes take place: how a text is

> selected for translation, for example, what role the translator plays in that selection, what role an editor, publisher or patron plays, what criteria determine the strategies that will be employed by the translator, how a text might be received in the target system. (Bassnett 1998: 123)

From these observations, it becomes evident that translation is intrinsically tied to power dynamics, as the act of choosing what to translate and how to translate it inherently involves the exercise of power. This further underscores the critical need for translators to be acutely aware of the power they hold as central agents in shaping these dynamics. In this scenario, the importance of the ethical principles guiding translators' decisions and practices proves indispensable for a responsible execution of their work.

The concept of translation as a 'manipulative' process occurring within the cultural systems in which texts are embedded was introduced by the seminal collection of essays *The Manipulation of Literature* (1985), edited by Theo Hermans. This work ultimately gave rise to the designation of a group of contributing scholars, including the aforementioned Theo Hermans, Susan Bassnett, and André Lefevere, as "The Manipulation School". In the foreword to Bassnett and Lefevere's *Constructing Culture*, Edwin Gentzler writes:

> translation studies scholars were beginning to show that translations, rather than being a secondary and derivative genre, were instead one of the primary literary tools that larger social institutions — educational systems, arts councils, publishing firms, and even governments — had at their disposal to 'manipulate' a given society in order to 'construct' the kind of 'culture' desired. Churches would commission Bible translations; governments would support national epic translations; schools would teach great book translations; kings would be patrons for heroic conquests translations; socialist regimes would underwrite socialist realism translations. (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998: X)

The scholarly contributions that came after to support these theoretical positions are countless. Harish Trivedi's scholarly work, for instance, centers on the relationship between translation and postcolonialism, placing significant emphasis on the function of translated literature as a medium for cultural transmission. In his *Response by Trivedi to "Betraying Empire: Translation and the Ideology of Conquest"* (2014), the scholar provides examples of "a whole cosmos of far-reaching translation and profound transformation that has felt no need of conquest, and has no record even of any kind of armed conflict" (Trivedi 2015: 105) referencing exchanges across Asian countries.

Similarly, In *Translation and Conflict* (2006), Mona Baker examines how the role of translators and interpreters in shaping and challenging narratives that foster violent conflict and social tensions is not neutral, highlighting how they can both facilitate the spread of these narratives and/or resist them.

Luis Von Flotow, a scholar of feminist translation studies and a member of the Canadian feminist group, emphasized that the discourse surrounding the value difference between the "original" and its "reproduction" (i.e. translation) has historically mirrored the gender power dynamics. In her essay *Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories* (1991), she argues that "[f]eminist translation seems to have developed as a method of translating the focus on and critique of "patriarchal language" by feminist writers in Quebec" (Von Flotow 1991: 72).

In the context of Italian literary translation, Maria Pia Casalena's *Tradurre nell'Italia del Risorgimento. Le culture straniere e le idee di nazione* (2021) offers a compelling and exhaustive diachronic analysis of the role of translated literature in shaping Italian national identity during the *Risorgimento*. This was a period in which not only a new political project was taking shape, but also a new cultural apparatus rooted in nationalism and national pride was being elaborated to support political and economic change on an ideological level. Translated literature played a crucial role in 19th-century Italian culture. The selection of works to translate—particularly novels, a genre capable of reaching beyond elite circles—was often strategic and facilitated the introduction of Romantic ideals coming primarily from Germany. At the same time, Casalena highlights the significant role of censorship as a tool for political powers to control the flow of foreign ideas and manage their potentially subversive impact—a dynamic that, one could argue, is still at work today as it was in the past, and in many places around the world, albeit in different forms.

The list of scholarly contributions demonstrating the inextricable link between translation and culture, as well as the transformative power of translation in shaping new cultural horizons, could fill hundreds of pages, with the evidence supporting this relationship being so extensive and compelling that, six years after coining the term "the cultural turn in translation studies", Susan Bassnett wrote an essay that provocatively—yet very factually—subverted it: *The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies*. She writes:

> [...] a translation always takes place in a continuum, never in a void, and there are all kinds of textual and extratextual constraints upon the translator. These constraints, or manipulatory processes involved in the transfer of texts have become the primary focus of work in translation studies [...] (Bassnett 1998: 123)

Further down, the scholar also emphasizes that, as discussed throughout this thesis, "[a] writer does not just write in a vacuum: he or she is the product of a particular culture, of a particular

moment in time, and the writing reflects those factors such as race, gender, age, class, and birthplace as well as the stylistic, idiosyncratic features of the individual" (Bassnett 1998: 136). This notion can, and indeed should, be extended to all participants in the 'translation/transaction' process, as well as to the translated text itself, which is both produced and marketed within a specific cultural context. Each of these participants exerts distinct forms of decisional power over the translation, and the mechanisms by which this power operates are concealed to the recipient. Translation thus functions as a vehicle for imposing meaning "while concealing the power relations that lie behind the production of that meaning" (Bassnett 1998: 136), including the power exercised by censorship on the translator or deliberate censoring practices enacted by the translator. Quoting Bourdieu directly, Bassnett adds that "every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own symbolic force to those power relations" (Bassnett 1998: 136).

Consequently, it can be argued that translation is a manifestation of power in multiple ways. First, it is an activity that inherently involves the manipulation of language, and, in Sapir-Whorfian terms, language gives shape to the world we inhabit—that is, in Lotmanian terms, our culture. Second, translation is shaped by the power dynamics present in both the source and target cultures, dynamics that dictate what messages are to be conveyed and how to convey them. Drawing on the Aristotelian dichotomy of 'potentiality vs. actuality', each translator is a 'changemaker in potentiality'. The potential impact of translators through their translations—or of translations through their translators, as the two are essentially different embodiments of the message intended to be delivered—holds profound implications and should always be put at the center of discussions surrounding translation.

Having highlighted the power dynamics at work throughout the translation process, how translators choose to operate becomes a matter of translation ethics for different reasons.

First, translators are the only participants in the 'translation/transaction' process who possess an in-depth understanding of the text, as they are the ones responsible for conducting both linguistic and biographical research on the author. Moreover, they are the ones who manipulate language to render the text into another language. This entails a significant degree of trust on the part of the recipient of the translation, as "when a text is offered as a translation, it is quite readily accepted bona fide as one, no further questions asked" (Toury 1995: 20). In this context,

honoring the trust[21] that readers place in a translator becomes an ethical issue strictly tied to the translator's sense of responsibility.

Second, translators' sense of responsibility should extend to themselves. A frequently overlooked aspect is that translators have ethical obligations not only to the source and target culture, but also to their own personal and professional integrity. This includes the agency and ability to decline projects that conflict with their personal beliefs or make them uncomfortable.

Third, academically and professionally trained translators—presumed to have developed a critical awareness of power dynamics through their studies and practice—should reflect on the cultural responsibilities they bear, and consider making their intentions explicit, explaining the rationale behind their decision to engage with the translation of a particular text or volume (this is particularly relevant when working with non-technical texts).

While it is standard practice in translation to include commentary on the linguistic challenges posed by a text or on the stylistic choices made to adapt it to a specific target audience, such commentaries would benefit from a deeper exploration of the selection process that underpins the decision to translate a specific work. Translators might reflect ethically on questions such as: Why did I choose this text? What message do I want to convey to my target audience? In what ways do I believe this text will contribute meaningfully to the target culture? Why does the target culture need this specific text at this specific time?

These reflections would not be driven by an outdated obligation of 'faithfulness' to the source text—a notion that has long been deconstructed as translation theory has moved beyond an exclusively source-oriented approach. Instead, they would represent an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent aimed at bringing clarity to the translator's work and building trust with readers in the target culture.

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[21] Andrea Rizzi, a scholar of early modern literary and translation history at the University of Melbourne, expands upon the concept of trust by framing it as both an object of study and an analytical tool for understanding intercultural mediation, emphasizing that trust is not an 'innocent' concept, but one that demands closer empirical and theoretical scrutiny.

Trust both describes and constructs social practices, including translation, and any historical inquiry into the transfer of texts and knowledge is fundamentally an investigation of practices of trust or distrust. Translation history, therefore, becomes a history in which translators, interpreters, diplomats, traders, and other figures engage in strategies and discourses of trustworthiness. These interactions initiate responses from the audience, who are called to express their opinion on the translator.

The mechanism of trust only starts working when a direct relationship exists between the person who is being trusted and the person who trusts. While trust might seem a rational process, it is often grounded in emotions, irrational beliefs, and assumptions. At the same time, it is influenced by numerous factors, thus offering significant insights into the culture being examined. Analyzing a product also entails analyzing the dynamics behind it. These dynamics reveal what is truly at stake: in the past the risk was war, whilst in present times the risk is misinformation.

This brief digression on Rizzi's approach to trust in translation is derived from my summary of a talk delivered by the scholar at Ca' Foscari University in November 2022.

The primary motivation for an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent would thus stem from the understanding that producing a truly neutral text is impossible. First, translations are always embedded in their sociocultural and political context. Second, they are shaped by the translators' personal cultural background, as the translators themselves are embedded in their sociocultural and political context. Third, they are influenced by the demands and expectations of all participants in the 'translation/transaction' process, each with their own requirements.

In this scenario, an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent would articulate the translators' ethical stance, offering a transparent and honest framework for the entire translation process and enabling the final, fully informed recipient to decide whether or not to engage with the translation. In a book or collection of shorter texts, such a declaration could be embedded in a foreword, preface, introduction or afterword written by the translator, or presented as a separate section in an appendix.

As it pertains to this thesis and the decision to translate Baldoni's *Man Enough*, the reasons behind this choice have been discussed throughout this chapter, with further aspects to be expanded upon in Chapter III.

However, what initially began as the draft of an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent to justify the choice of proposing this book's translation for publication ultimately evolved into an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent explaining the decision not to proceed with this translation.

As mentioned in the previous section, this shift in direction during the translation-making process—and really this thesis-making process—was prompted by recent developments concerning allegations of misogynistic behavior against the author, which cast doubt on the alignment between the book's central message and the author's personal conduct.

Translators may encounter such dilemmas, and it is only fitting that ethical concerns arise, questioning the value of the work they are translating. This is an integral part of maintaining awareness and prioritizing an ethical stance.

The importance of translators as individuals and professionals fully aware of their disruptive potential is paramount, not only because, like modern-day Prometheus Plastikators, they manipulate the substance of languages and thus hold in their hands the power to deliver a message filtered through their own perspectives, but precisely because they hold the power to decide which message they will ultimately convey. Even when their contributions remain unmade.

CHAPTER II:
TRANSLATION PROPOSAL

The source text

The target text

TRANSLATION PROPOSAL

The source text

The following sections include the two original chapters of Justin Baldoni's *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity* that were translated into Italian in Chapter II of this thesis. These chapters are reproduced here in their original form to provide reference for the translation; however, the formatting does not follow the original publication.

For clarity, the corresponding pages in the original work (see *References*) are as follows:

- *Introduction*, pp. 1–15
- *Chapter Five: Privileged Enough*, pp. 141–174

INTRODUCTION

I'm not sure if there is anything really revolutionary in this book. Unique maybe? But let's get real. This whole thing is a messy, vulnerable exploration of manhood written by someone who sits at an intersection of power and privilege and who historically probably wouldn't willingly choose to get this vulnerable, as there would seemingly be no benefit. Why try to tear down the walls in a system that has benefited me my entire life? I think partly because I know it's right. Partly because I feel a deep responsibility to. Partly because I am now a father and I believe our children are our main source of hope and they deserve a better future. And partly because I feel I'm stuck in the matrix and really, really, really want to get out.

This book is about my own struggles with being "enough," particularly about a definition of masculinity, about being a man, that rests on being X enough. Now, "X" can mean anything. For many men—for me—it's meant being enough of all those traditionally alpha male traits: strong, sexy, brave, powerful, smart, successful, and also good enough as a father and as a husband. I am not saying these things are negative, or that we shouldn't aspire to be these things. That is not what this book is about. Being a "good enough" father or "good enough" husband can be pretty damned wonderful—but "good" is subjective, and we've got to stop trying to prove how "good" we are and just be it, live it, revel in it, and celebrate it without putting others down in the process.

So let's get a couple of things straight: I'm straight. I'm also cisgender. And white. While I will share the experiences of other men throughout the book, it is largely based on my experience and therefore I write from the lens I was raised in. Throughout this book, when I say "men" (or any form of the gender) I am including anyone and everyone who identifies as a man, and when I say "we" I am including myself in that group. This book is not a comprehensive course on gender studies, nor is it a case for the gender binary. Also, and perhaps most important, this book is absolutely NOT an attack on men or on masculinity. I believe men are good: inherently, intrinsically good. That YOU are good. And there are tons of aspects of the traditional definition of masculinity that I connect to and that I'm grateful for. I'm 100 percent not ashamed to say I love being a man. I am also not apologizing for being a man. But that is not to say that I won't be apologizing for the ways in which my interpretation of masculinity has hurt those around me. Those positive traits that have been associated with

being a man—traits such as being resourceful and accountable, honest and trustworthy, loyal, a present father and husband, or even down to simply being strong, smart, and brave—are all good traits that I aspire to live by. But they are also traits that I believe every human should aspire to live by; they are not traits unique to men. They are universal. The key is not the trait. It's that voice in your head, in my head, that tells us we aren't X *enough*. Enough is enough. Enough with enough.

Call me naive, but I believe that overall, humans are good. And it is from that deeply rooted, foundational belief that this journey, and this book, begins and ends. I am not pushing any partisan belief system or agenda here. As a registered Independent, I don't subscribe to any political ideology, and though I absolutely vote and participate in elections, I don't talk publicly about who I am voting for. In my life I do my best to have empathy and compassion for those I don't agree with or who don't agree with me. So if I use a word that triggers you or makes you think I am pushing a political agenda on you, I ask you to keep reading, as I assure you I am not. My desire to be private and not participate in partisan politics stems largely from my personal faith.

As a quick reference, the faith I practice and will at times refer to in this book as it relates to the choices I have made is the Bahá'í Faith. If you are uncomfortable with religion, or maybe even reading a book from someone who practices a religion different from yours, then just imagine any quotes or analogies I throw out coming from either the "universe," an activist you like, or your own religion. I don't share my faith in an effort to convert or change your beliefs, but in sharing such personal stories, I write from what I know, what guides me and my decisions, and for me, faith is central to all I do and who I am. Bahá'ís essentially believe in the unity of all religions and the eradication of prejudices of any kind. We believe in the oneness of humanity and that every soul on Earth has been created noble and has its own relationship with God. That said, this is not a book about religion, and in fact, many in my own faith may find its content confrontational and uncomfortable. And for that I say, good! One of the fundamental beliefs of the Bahá'i Faith is the independent investigation of truth. We all must find what is true for ourselves and not ignorantly follow any faith or teaching without investigating it for ourselves. If there is a purpose to faith, I believe it to be the unification of the human race, and that our mission as humans (if we choose to accept it) is to simply be of service and create unity wherever we can. Perhaps one of my favorite aspects of my faith is the practice of unconditional love, nonjudgment, and the fight for gender equality and racial justice. As a Baha'i, I am asked in my daily life to be a "defender to the victims of oppression" in whatever form that takes and to never exert my beliefs on another individual as God's love and

mercy are far exalted beyond my limited reptilian brain. So even if I don't subscribe to a belief or ideology or lifestyle myself, it's my duty as a human to love and to rush to defend anyone who is being unjustly treated or oppressed. All that to say, as it relates to our country's political system and my ensuring this book does not jump into what is currently considered "woke" for the sake of wokeness, all I aim to write about are my beliefs as they relate to my own experiences as a man. I believe that more than anything right now we must find a way to stop the "otherizing" of our friends, family, and neighbors due to ideological and lifestyle differences, and instead find the common, human ground of empathy, respect, and love. It is from this place that I believe, as it relates to this book and masculinity, that we have to separate the masculinity conundrum from political agendas to do the nuanced self-work and necessary healing to successfully create space for the conversations to be had. The victims of masculinity, when it becomes unhealthy, as it has for so many of us men, are not just our friends, wives, girlfriends, and partners, but also ourselves. It's me, it's you, it's the men we interact with daily who are suffering and may never admit it. It's the hundreds of thousands of good, hardworking, kind, and loving men who take their lives each year because their pain has become too much to bear and they feel it's the only way out. It's the millions of others who suffer from depression and can't or won't or are unable to see a therapist. It's our own brothers, teammates, coworkers, and fathers, and for some of us, it's our sons. It's from that place of wanting to help stop and prevent so much unnecessary pain and suffering that I attempt to write this book.

Why me?

Look, I got lucky. I grew up privileged, middle class, and in a home with parents who love each other, their children, their community, and the world fully. Now, they weren't perfect; they came with their own set of complicated and deep wounds, history, and trauma, without much guidance on how to heal that in themselves. But there was love. Always love. I'm so damn blessed to have been, and to continue to be, so loved. And even still, when I look back on my childhood, right beside all of the abundance of love sits the belief that something is lacking, the belief that I was lacking, that I was missing the mark.

But not necessarily because of something my parents said or did. I never felt like I was failing in their eyes. And it's not because of our faith; in fact, as Baha'is we believe that each of us is noble. As it turns out, that mark I was missing was the invisible, impossibly high and

unachievable mark of masculinity: the mark of being a man. It wasn't enough that I was born and identified as a man, or that I walked and talked like a man-the world was telling me I was missing the mark, and because of it, I wasn't a man. It was as if the bar were set too high and I couldn't reach it, or more like the box was built too small and not all of me could fit inside it.

For as long as I can remember I've been an emotional and sensitive boy wrapped inside an energetic, testosterone-filled, creative tornado that can't sit still and needs to be physically doing something all the time. Sports were both my meditation and my medication. As I grew into my teenage years, I thrived in competitive sports but at the same time felt like I didn't fit in with my teammates. I was bullied, picked on, and celebrated, while simultaneously bullying and picking on other guys. One minute my teammates were making fun of me or calling me "Balboner" (good one, right?), and the next I could be tackled in celebration for scoring the game-winning goal or helping break the school record anchoring the four-by-one-hundred-meter relay team. One day I could be chased down and tied to a goalpost on the soccer field by the upperclassmen, and the next I would be tying someone else, someone younger than I was, to the goalpost. I was a confused and conflicted kid mostly because, like many male teens, underneath it all, I felt a mounting sense of urgency—pressure—to be accepted, to be one of the guys. So I taught myself to suck it up, play it off, be cool, and effectively hide my emotions and dismiss my feelings in an attempt to fit inside a box that was built long before my friends and I were born. I began putting on the armor that I eventually would forget I had on, armor I would think I needed to function as a man in this world.

Over the next decade, this complicated and confusing relationship I had with my masculinity manifested itself in broken relationships, poor choices, immense pain, inner conflict, and tons of wasted time, but most importantly, it manifested itself in shame. It was from this place of rising shame that I began the long and tumultuous journey to figure out how to get from my head to my heart, the journey from inside the box to inside myself. The journey of becoming man enough. To human enough. To just being fucking enough. But maybe the problem isn't that I wasn't and am not "enough," but that "enough" is a myth, a mirage, always eluding our grasp, always just out of reach, always receding toward the horizon. That feeling of "if only…" that this concept of "enough" produces has put so many of us in a trap. If only I were stronger, faster, smarter, richer. If only my biceps were an inch bigger, my dick an inch bigger, my brain forty points more on an IQ test. If only I had more money, more friends, more stuff. If only I did this, or had this, or was this, then it would be enough. Then I would be enough. And yet it never is. And it never will be.

An invitation

If you are here to learn about the history of masculinity and how we got here, how to fix your life, or how to be a certain way to impress someone, then you picked the wrong book. This isn't an academic treatise or a motivational self-help book. I don't need to tell you to start your day off with a victory by making your bed when you wake up in the morning, although I love those books and always thought that my first book would be just that. But instead of writing a motivational book, I am writing an invitational one. I am sharing my story in hopes that it invites you into yours. I am asking questions of myself in hopes that together the collective "we" can ask those same questions. Like, "Why did I say that?" "Why did I react that way when she said that to me?" "Why the hell am I so pissed?" "Will they ever find out I'm full of shit?" "Why am I unhappy when my life is awesome?" "Why did I keep asking after she said no?" And the hundreds more questions I have asked myself over the course of my thirty-six years on Earth. To this day, asking questions of myself is the tool I use the most to dig deeper, to learn, to discover, and to navigate roadblocks on the path from my head to my heart.

If you had told me a few years ago that I would be writing this kind of book, with a focus on masculinity, I would have laughed. Not at you, but at the prospect of me. After all, it was only a few years ago that I even began my public and private journey to explore masculinity. The truth is, none of it was planned, and it still boggles my mind that we live in a world where simply by changing our Instagram bios, we can stumble onto our purpose. Here's the short version of how I got here. After my daughter, Maiya, was born, I found myself with a lot of thoughts, ideas, and questions and nowhere to really share them. So, like many, I turned to social media and used it as a public diary of sorts. Instead of just posting pretty pictures and sharing the highlight reel of my life, I wrote long captions and waxed poetic about life and love. I talked about my wife and how in awe of her I was, and got real about marriage and the challenges that come with it, as well as all the hopes and dreams I had for my daughter.

It didn't take long for various (female-facing) press outlets to pick up my posts and to quickly label me as a feminist fighting for gender equality. In fact, it happened so quickly that I hadn't even realized that's what I was or was trying to do. At first this was honestly just me sharing my heart, but it became clear that while men take up our fair share of space in the world, the sharing of hearts and feelings was an area that could certainly benefit from having more men in it. Shortly after, I decided to go all in and create the show *Man Enough*, where I gathered a bunch of friends together and had public conversations on camera that I had never

seen men have—conversations I wish I had had a chance to watch as a young man. When I started asking those questions of myself a little more publicly, that's when I got the big call: the invitation to do a TED Talk. But not just any TED Talk, a speech about masculinity at TED Women. The invitation alone was more than humbling; it was daunting, and one that I wanted to turn down. My wife was pregnant, my son was due just a week before I would be scheduled to give the talk, and I was acting full-time in *Jane the Virgin*. My first instinct? Say no. What do I have to offer? I should step back and make space for a woman, right? It is a conference about the power of women, after all, and a woman I'm not. I wanted to turn it down because I was at the beginning of my journey, not the middle and not the end, and I was not ready to share my thoughts because I didn't even know what thoughts were! At the time, so many people were putting me on a pedestal like I had some secret ingredient that could help men become better, and that in turn could help women, but that pedestal made me extremely uncomfortable because I was honestly just doing the bare minimum yet that was still separating me in some ways from other men. I was so confused; how could I help other men when I was having a hard time even helping myself? And more than anything else, I was aware the higher that pedestal gets, the harder the fall. I hate pedestals.

But what's most true is that I wanted to turn it down because I didn't think I was good enough.

Boy, did that feel familiar. I had spent the better part of my life becoming good friends with that feeling of inadequacy. I knew it well—what it felt like, what messages it told me, how it always traveled with shame. And I had started learning what it had to teach me. For me, fear, inadequacy, and shame are the ultimate challenges; they are invitations to lean in, to get closer, and to practice being comfortable in the uncomfortable.

What did it look like to lean in? In this situation, it meant saying yes to a TED Talk when shame and fear wanted me to say no. And that “yes” meant that I was also telling myself it was okay to not have all the answers, it was okay to not have read all of the research, and it was okay to be learning in real time.

It was enough just to be me. To speak from where I was in that moment in my journey without offering any solutions, just my story.

And yet I wanted to quit multiple times and almost did, because I felt that the risks were greater than the rewards. I was nervous I would actually hurt the women's movement by saying something wrong or offensive, plus I knew my work was with men and not women. I also knew that few men would even find the talk unless a woman in their lives showed it to them. It wasn't until I finally reframed doing the talk as a challenge to myself—was I man enough to take this

risk?—that I actually committed to not quitting. How messed up is that? To use a term historically used to put down and keep us in a socially constructed box, a phrase that encourages unhealthy competition, unhealthy relationships with other men, and ourselves. To use that same phrase to get myself to show up for a talk where I dismantled and repurposed that phrase to challenge men to be better than I was being in that very moment. But that's okay because it taught me what I knew I needed. It taught me that my socialization, my baggage, the programming and lessons that have come from all over the world and have been ingrained in me for as long as I can remember weren't my fault and could be used for good as well if we are willing to say yes to the invitations. The poison when repurposed can also become the medicine.

I just realized that I'm talking a lot about a speech that you have probably never seen. Since so much of this book is inspired by it, here is my 2018 TED Women Talk in a nutshell:

- As a man I realized much of my masculinity was performative, and for years I had been acting and pretending to be a man I'm not.
- I believe in the “radical” idea that women and men are equal.
- As men we shouldn't be afraid of the parts of us that society deems “feminine,” aka “weak.”
- Much of what I learned as it relates to performative masculinity I learned from my dad, who I realized learned it from his dad. Or I learned it from my male peers, who learned it from their dads. We pass down scripts generationally. We must break the cycle.
- As men we need to use our strength and bravery and other traditionally masculine traits to explore what's in our hearts. Basically, all the other parts of ourselves we probably wouldn't put on our résumés or social media profiles. Things such as being sensitive, vulnerable, and good listeners.
- Let's just shut up and finally listen to the women in our lives.
- Oh, and my dad, whom I secretly resented for years because of his predisposition to sensitivity, is also the reason I learned how to use my heart in place of my fists as a boy and now as a man. So while he's not perfect, which I will unpack in later chapters, he's pretty damn special, and I couldn't be more grateful he'smy dad.

Well, I did it. The feedback was instant, and it was mostly very encouraging and affirming. From women. Men? Not so much. But it was nuanced, because women were sharing it publicly, writing comments publicly, sending it to men publicly. Women were outspoken in their applause, but I noticed an interesting phenomenon, one that I called out in the talk itself: where were the men? Men weren't out publicly sharing or commenting (and if they were, it was usually to put me down). The positive, life-altering responses from men were all happening in private. They were in my direct messages, my private messages, and in emails: teenagers telling me it was the first time they felt like there was a place for who they were; a sixty-year-old man saying he could for the first time articulate what it felt like to be disowned by his gender. Men wrote pages of text sharing their deepest, most intimate feelings and fears. Men said they finally felt seen, and in feeling seen, they felt free. But this was only a portion of the men. By the time the message reached the others, it had been misconstrued, taken out of context, and weaponized as political.

I distinctly remember the night the two-minute video TED had posted of the most passionate part of the speech went viral (by that I mean it had upward of fifty million views in a matter of days on the platform). After getting tons of texts and calls from family and friends that instantly gave me anxiety, as I knew that with massive amounts of love comes, at times, an equal or greater amount of hate, I hesitantly logged into my Facebook knowing what I was about to find and saw that I was getting tagged in many of the reposts of the video by random men. Unfortunately, many of the men who were tagging me were doing so to publicly criticize me. It took me right back to being that kid who desperately wanted to be liked by the other guys, and I knew I had two options: to close the app and try to ignore the hate or to genuinely try to understand what men didn't like about the talk. I chose the latter. After all, I can't preach about getting comfortable in the uncomfortable without being willing to hear the feedback from the very audience I was trying to reach. After scrolling down past all the women who were heaping praise, I landed on the first post by a male. He was a white man, living in the Midwest, and had shared my post with a warning to men, essentially using me as an example of what's wrong with “The Left” and how I am attacking men. I decided to write him privately to try to understand what it was about the talk that rubbed him the wrong way. I could tell by his post that there was a good chance he didn't actually watch the full talk but was making an assumption after watching the portion of it that TED posted. Surprised by my message, he

responded politely and admitted to not having seen it but felt like he could gather “what I was saying” from the clip he did see. I asked him kindly to watch the eighteen minutes and consider having a longer conversation with me, as many of his comments alluded to me being a “man-hating” feminist and apologizing for being a man. I explained the “why” behind my talk, that it was about using our strong attributes as tools to dive deeper into ourselves, and about how much my father influenced me. After watching it he wrote me a long message apologizing for his post, then immediately posted a public apology and asked his friends who had joined in on the public bashing to watch the full talk before condemning it. This interaction, and ones similar to it, gave me massive amounts of hope. I found that men, when confronted and lovingly challenged in private, were not only more than willing to listen but, even more inspiring, were open to doing the necessary self-work to become the most honest, virtuous versions of themselves. My deduction: most men, regardless of our actions and beliefs, what side of the political aisle we sit on, want the same thing. We want to become the best version of ourselves possible, to simply become better men. That is what kept me going. And that is why I am writing this book.

Our stories may be individualized, but there is a universal thread that connects us. And every single man I know has had countless experiences of feeling like we don't fit in. My story is a buildup of decades of experience trying to fit into the man box, trying to wear the suit of armor that made me man enough, until I became so weighted down by who the world told me to be that I didn't even know who I was.

The power of my story isn't in the details, although this book will dive deep into the details of my experience. The power is in the invitation. It's in the opportunity to hear something in my story that reminds you of something in your story and invites you to lean into that, question it, and reframe it. The power lies in the invitation to believe that you are not alone in your struggles, emotions, or fears. You are not alone in this box—this constricting set of socially constructed identities that have pressed and pressured us into thinking we have to think, act, and be a certain way to be man enough.

The Risk

I am admittedly a bit scared of finishing this book, having it published, and then launching it into a public space to be openly criticized. There is innate risk in vulnerability by its very

definition: the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. This book is an exposure of parts of me and my feelings that I have struggled with talking about and, as a result, long felt shame around. This isn't an airing of my dirty laundry, or a confession of sins, but hopefully it's an exposure of my humanity—a humanity we all share.

And it will be just that: an exposure. I'm diving in, heart first, and I share it with you in the most authentic and sincere way I can, because I know no other way. The risk of being harmed, or ridiculed, or cut off from my gender (the gender that part of me still, despite this whole process, wants to be accepted by) is real. But in this case, the rewards far outweigh the risks because what's even scarier for me than being called names or being bullied online is spending another thirty-plus years afraid of knowing who I really am, knowing only who the world tells me I'm supposed to be.

The Hope

I want this book to feel like a trusted friend-whether you are a man who, like me, feels like you've been trying for too long to fit in a box that's too small, or you are a woman or nonbinary person who wants insight into how masculinity has affected not only your life but also the lives of the men you know and love. I want this book to serve as an invitation to begin, or continue, on your own exploration. There is no right way. That is the purpose of undefining something. It opens that thing up to interpretation and exploration. It creates space and allows for creativity. And where there is creativity, there is love. I want this book to be a companion on your journey as you navigate the long and tumultuous path from your head down to your heart, arming you with sincere human truths that will bring some relief to the long-held cultural belief that you have to be X enough to be man enough.

Most importantly, I want this book to restore in you the belief that you are good, inherently and intrinsically good, and that who you are, as you are, is enough.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRIVILEGED ENOUGH

The Reality of My Racism and White, Male Privilege

You have to get over the fear of facing the worst in yourself. You should instead fear unexamined racism. Fear the thought that right now, you could be contributing to the oppression of others and you don't know it. But do not fear those who bring that oppression to light. Do not fear the opportunity to do better.
—IJEOMA OLUO

If the title of this chapter or the above quote has already turned you off, I want to say two quick things: I understand, as at one point it would have turned me off too, and also I'm still going to write about it. Look, I get it. I know how politicized and polarizing the word "privilege" has become. But if you find yourself feeling triggered by my use of the word in this chapter, then I hope you will consider using the tools in the past few chapters to push past that feeling and ask yourself why. This isn't about partisan politics (although an argument can be made that everything is inherently political); this is about humanity and my coming to terms with my own worldviews and the behaviors that have hurt people I love and contributed to a world where inequality and injustice run rampant.

In a book largely based on vulnerability and transparency, I would be remiss not to make it known that this chapter was written last, yet it is going in the middle of the book. I had just finished writing more than eighty thousand words, touching on my whiteness here and there, mostly reiterating that my story—this book—was of course written through my lens as a white male. But I never really dove into the systemic racism, and definitely not my personal racism, that's very much at play in my story and in my socialization.

Then on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black American man, was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis. While Mr. Floyd was far from the first Black person to be murdered by police, there was a difference in the collective response of white people to his murder both here in the United States and abroad. It's been said that 2020 was about finally being able to see things clearly, and for many of us white folks, seeing Mr. Floyd murdered by a police

officer while others stood by and did nothing was enough to see clearly that perhaps there has been and continues to be a larger problem, and that we are a part of it. I was forced to really look at why I hadn't responded with the same outrage to previous murders, why I wasn't using my voice, and the megaphone given to my voice, for anti-racism in the same way I had used it for anti-sexism. What was it in me that chose to ignore this problem in the same way that many men ignore their socialized masculinity? Why as a Baha'i who believes in the eradication of all-isms, who holds tightly to the words of Baha'u'llah, "Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch," did I not address this in myself, in our world, earlier? Why was I so willing to "get comfortable in the uncomfortable" in regard to my masculinity, but so unwilling to in regard to racism and white privilege?

It is my job, my responsibility, my duty, not only to figure out the answers to these questions, but also to use the resources readily available to me to educate myself and use the unearned power I have been given as a white man to help change the system so it is more equitable for everyone.

Intersectionality Is Integrity

For the first time in more than thirty-five years, I am recognizing that my socialization as a man cannot be separated from my socialization as a white person-and to be able to separate them for as long as I have is a privilege that I have continuously benefited from. In fact, it's part of why I have the platform I have, why I am able to produce and direct movies, act in Hollywood, and write this book. In other words, the system doesn't benefit me just because I am a man; the system also benefits me because I am a white man (not to mention, an able-bodied heterosexual cis white man from a middle-class family). As Nico Juárez, a Mexican American man with Tzotzil ancestry, said when he shared part of his story in Liz Plank's book, *For the Love of Men*, "Race fundamentally changes masculinity. We need to think about masculinity as a deeply racial issue."

It's only been in the past few years that I have learned that the idea that I exist in intersecting areas of privilege, and should then be using those privileges to advocate on behalf of those on the other end of the spectrum, is part of what's called intersectionality, a term that has been used in the fight for equality and equity by activists and organizers for more than three decades.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law at UCLA and Columbia Law School, coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 when she published a paper that focused on legal cases that dealt with issues of both racial and sexual discrimination. Crenshaw describes intersectionality as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”

In other words, I cannot write a book, live a life of integrity, and openly discuss wrestling with my masculinity without simultaneously wrestling with the racial bias, prejudices, and discrimination that coexist in my socialization within this culture. I cannot learn about how sexism and gender inequality have benefited me at the cost of women, trans, and nonbinary people without also educating myself on how racism and racial inequality has benefited me at the cost of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.

I have a lot to learn. I have a lot to unlearn. This chapter is merely a glimpse into the work that is just beginning in me, and like the rest of this book, it will never be complete, as my learnings will never be complete. And because it’s just a glimpse, I am going to focus mostly on the impact my whiteness and racism have on the Black community, as that is what I'm learning about most right now, while also knowing that the impact goes beyond that into Indigenous communities and the communities of all people of color. Each community has a specific intersection with racism and whiteness, and truth be told, I haven't done enough of the private, personal work in regard to Indigenous communities and other communities of color yet to speak from an educated place of integrity. Even in writing about what I have learned in this chapter, I fear that there’s a good chance I will look back in a year, five years, or ten years at this chapter (and really this book) and see that I have said something offensive and ignorant. At the same time I would rather face that fear than, as author and speaker Ijeoma Oluo says, fear my own unexamined racism and the thought that right now I could be contributing to the oppression of others, of people I love, of my own family, and not even know it.

I Don’t See Color

Kay and I became friends through our shared faith. She is a Black woman who exemplifies ’Abdu’l-Baha’s words when he says, “Thou art like unto the pupil of the eye, which is dark in

color, yet is the fount of light and the revealer of the contingent world." Unfortunately, like many Black women experience, Kay's profound impact on my journey with privilege, racism, and racial justice came at a cost to her-a cost she never should have had to pay.

Soon after Emily and I were married, a small group of six of our friends flew from Los Angeles to Nashville, Tennessee, for a wedding. Kay was in that group, and not only was she the only Black woman in the group, she also was the only Black person at the wedding. The wedding was beautiful and fun, and the newly married couple reveled in the joy of being surrounded by their loved ones. After the celebration, our group of six headed out together to go explore the nightlife in Nashville. As we got into the car, Kay began to cry. Something at the wedding had gone completely unnoticed by the rest of us and had deeply hurt her. And the fact that none of us had the awareness to notice she was uncomfortable and hurt made it even worse. When we first arrived at the wedding, each guest was handed a program and a small bag with instructions to toss the contents of the bag in the air toward the married couple as they walked up the aisle. At some weddings this happens with bubbles or rice; others lead the couple out of the reception with sparklers. At this wedding, however, each bag was filled with fresh cotton that we were to pick apart and toss, like confetti, in celebration of their love.

That's right, Kay was being asked to throw in celebration what her ancestors were forced to pick in slavery.

There are some of you who may read that and have your jaw drop at how painful, triggering, and emotional that must have been for Kay. Perhaps you instantly knew, before you even read it, that the bag was filled with cotton. You will empathize with her, and if you are Black, it will undoubtedly remind you of similar stories in your own life and the lives of your friends and family. There are also some of you who may read that and wonder what the hell the big deal was. Of course, the bride and groom didn't choose cotton for its implications of slavery! You will not only be confused by Kay's reaction, but you will be frustrated by it and feel that it is irrational. I get both reactions, because our initial reaction to our dear friend was the latter, and unfortunately it took us way too damn long to get to the former.

Later that night when Kay shared her raw feelings and her experience at the wedding, and the pain around the cotton, instead of listening, empathizing, and honoring her, as a group we downplayed the whole situation, and in doing so, we downplayed her feelings and really her humanity. We bypassed her pain and came to the defense of the couple, imploring her to know that they were good people and it had nothing to do with race. She felt abandoned and told us that she did not feel seen by us. With the intention of being a "peacemaker" and bringing "unity," I responded to Kay's pain by telling her that when I look at her, I don't see a Black

woman, I just see my friend. I don't see color; I see her heart. In other words, I made her exact point.

As a white person, I was taught to say that we don't see color, that we don't see our differences, that we treat everyone equally. While this concept of color blindness initially sounds very nice and idealistic to white people, it not only ignores the socialization and foundation on which the United States was built, it also ignores the very rich, beautiful cultures and humanity of people of color. In fact, the statement "I don't see color" from a white person, regardless of how well-intentioned it is, oftentimes comes across to a person of color just as it did to Kay, as "I choose not to see YOU." Look, it's no secret we all see color, regardless of what color we are. So when a white person tells a Black person they don't see color, what they are actually trying to say is "I'm not racist." But when I said that to Kay, what I was actually telling her was that even though I know she is Black, I have chosen to ignore it and whitewash her into a friendship that meets my preferred boundaries… not hers.

What is even crazier to me is that the "I don't see color" narrative also goes against the very teachings in my own faith, and yet somehow, via the way I was socialized as a white person living in America, I changed the narrative and completely misunderstood the teachings. In talking about color and diversity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us to "behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs, and trees. Each flower has a different charm, a peculiar beauty, its own delicious perfume and beautiful color. The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage-and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain." And he goes on to say, "If you meet those of different race and color from yourself… think of them as different colored roses growing on the beautiful garden of humanity and rejoice to be among them."

How did I miss it? As a group we were oblivious to Kay's pain, and when she held it out in front of us and shared it with us, we closed our eyes—not to mention our minds and our hearts—to her. After we returned home from the trip, Kay emailed the group and in justified anger exclaimed, "That was some fucked up shit." She explained how she expected better of us and how deeply hurt she was by the entire situation. She went on to say, "That night I realized that my dear friends, who aspire to unity in a diverse global society, had no idea what my pain looks like. I was shaking and I was on the same couch as you and you did not see me. You didn't even know to look."

Her email was honest, and it was educational (which she shouldn't have to do—to carry the weight and spend the energy on educating us on why her discomfort, pain, and anger are valid).

She finished the email with, “My life as a Black woman has taught me not to react. I'd run the risk of being dismissed as dramatic, volatile or unintelligent… or worse, ostracized and completely alone. Airing my deepest emotions in the moment is a privilege I have never had. In a situation where I feel isolated and stepped on, I will bury my reaction and survive.”

I wish I could say that her email flipped a switch for us. Looking back on that email now, it’s almost unbelievable to me that I didn’t get it, that I didn't rush to apologize and then start unpacking all the reasons why I missed it and why I wasn’t there for her. Someone I loved bared her soul and showed me her pain right in front of me, and I was too willfully ignorant to see it and too proud and fragile to hold it. I’m profoundly embarrassed by what happened next. Instead of calling her immediately, my wife and I, in our confusion and privilege, flipped the narrative, centered on our own emotions, and in many ways turned our privilege into victimhood, feeling like we were the ones who were irrationally attacked and that she was blowing things out of proportion.

Over the next six years, little by little I would begin learning from—and actually listening to—my Black friends when they shared their experiences that were similar to Kay’s. And as I began my journey of self-discovery and dug into my masculinity, little by little I would notice the intersection of these racial justice conversations with the journey I was on. Every so often, I would think about the situation with Kay and I would feel deep remorse about how I handled it, how I mishandled her feelings and her humanity. I would feel that knot in my gut, that weight on my heart, that would tell me I need to apologize to her. But I would inevitably brush it aside, telling myself that we were all friends, and since everyone had moved on, bringing it up again would just open old wounds.

Then George Floyd was killed. It should not have taken his death and the countless other deaths that had come before and would continue to come after. It should not have taken stay-at-home orders during a global pandemic. It should not have taken all that it did for me to pick up the phone and call Kay. It is problematic that it took so much on a societal level, and it is problematic that it cost Kay so much on a personal level for my wife and me to call and apologize, for us to see how wrong we were and how deeply loving and profoundly kind Kay’s email had truly been. But, regrettably and embarrassingly, it did.

I have to admit, Emily and I were extremely nervous when we reached out to her and asked to FaceTime. I don't think I had felt that nervous since I took the stage at TED. I'll spare you the details of the conversation, but all in all, what we wanted to convey to her was how deeply sorry we were not only for what happened, but also for how we let her down, as friends and as fellow humans. We let her know that it was thanks to her and her vulnerability and willingness

in her pain to educate her white friends that we both had finally chosen to educate ourselves and to begin to unlearn and relearn all we thought we knew. I let her know how problematic my behavior was when I told her "I don't see color" and more than anything how sorry we were it took us as long as it did to wake up. I then promised her that I would do everything I could to educate myself and my family and have those uncomfortable conversations with fellow white people, as the burden shouldn't be on her and other Black folks to educate white people.

Kay responded to our apology in a way that she did not need to, in a way that frankly we did not deserve. She offered us grace from the same deep well of love that she had always lived her life with. She accepted our apology and reconciled with us. She revealed to us what 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke of-the fount of light within her and the possibility of what our world could look like when we choose to truly see each other. When we see each other, skin color and all, the contingent world, one of justice and equity, will not come at such a high price to Black people, to the phenomenal Black woman that Kay is.

Well-Intentioned White Man

In addition to telling Kay that I don't see color, here are other examples of some of the things I have thought, said, posted, and tweeted that I have only recently come to learn are indicative of the racism that exists in me:

> "My first friend was a Black girl."
>
> "He was a great athlete, as are many young Black kids."
>
> "It wasn't about race, man. No need to make a scene."
>
> "Some of my best friends are Black."
>
> "Black Lives Matter, and so do 'blue lives,' and so do 'all lives'—we are one human family."

Unfortunately, the list is much longer, and I'm sure that I will add to it as I continue to learn, unlearn, and relearn what it means to be a man, and specifically what it means to be a white man in this time and in this culture.

Like most white kids who grow up in America, I was taught that racism was the overt, horrific actions of people who believed that Black people shouldn't drink from the same water fountains as white people and needed to sit in the back of the bus, or that Black men deserved

to be lynched for being suspected of laying eyes on or speaking to white women. Racism was Black people being enslaved, and after slavery ended, it was Black people not being allowed to vote. Racists are the members of the KKK and the malicious, ignorant, and usually old people who live in the southern United States and continue to use the n-word. In other words, I was taught that after the Civil Rights era, racism was no longer systemic and racists were on the outskirts of society, and if they weren't, then they were old and would likely be dead soon, and then we could all just get along. So basically, I grew up believing, a white, Italian-Jewish guy born almost two decades after the end of the Civil Rights Movement, raised by fairly progressive "woke" parents who believed in unity and the oneness of humankind, couldn't be farther from a racist.

This framework around racism is known as the good/bad binary, and it is what anti-racism educator Robin DiAngelo describes as "perhaps the most effective adaption of racism in recent history". This framework allows good, well-intentioned, nice guys like me not to be racist because I'm not committing these extreme, hateful acts of prejudice and racism. It operates in a way that's similar to the gender binary and the rules and messages around masculinity and femininity. With masculinity there are traits that are acceptable for men to have and ones that are unacceptable for men, and those traits determine where you fall on the "man enough" scale. Within the context of our flawed understanding of racism, there is one side of the binary that's considered racist and the other side isn't. So since I am not out here committing these overt, heinous racist acts, then I don't fall on the racist side of the binary.

DiAngelo explains that while initially this adaption of the good/bad binary seemed like a good thing, what it does in practice is exempt well-intentioned white people from conversations about racism and how we are socialized and conditioned in a society that is deeply divided by race. And here's what I've discovered: when I exempt myself from having racism within me, when I place myself on the "good" side of this binary, then I also exempt myself from the responsibility to change it. Some of those statements that I listed above are subconsciously said to make it clear that I am not a racist. "My first friend was a Black girl." "Some of my best friends are Black." When I stop to critically think about why I make statements like these, it becomes apparent that I am trying to make it clear that I don't fall on the bad side of the binary and I'm defending myself preemptively. Here's the reality, though: not only is the binary false, but also the feedback that DiAngelo received from people of color is that when they hear a white person claim these things, it doesn't make the white person seem woke; in fact, it reveals how unaware the white person is.

Along those same lines, when I make statements like “He was a great athlete, as are many young Black kids,” I am committing a microaggression and perpetuating stereotypes that disregard the individuality of each person while expressing the false universality of an entire group of people. The same could be said when people make statements about Asian people being smarter, loving homework, etc. Microaggressions and stereotypes aren't always overtly “negative,” and yet their impact adds up. Simply by generalizing and talking about race in that way lumps an entire group of people together based on a false identity; it creates and perpetuates the same problems that we are trying to address in masculinity. Ijeoma Oluo describes microaggressions as bee stings, where “one random bee sting might not be a big deal, a few random bee stings every day of your life will have a definite impact on the quality of your life, and your overall relationship with bees.” It’s death by a thousand cuts. When I have made a statement like that, even if it’s done with the intention to celebrate a kid’s athletic ability, it perpetuates a stereotype that all Black people are athletic and therefore disregards the unique talents and gifts of not only the Black people who are not athletic, but even the athletes themselves. It robs people of their individualism. In some ways I think I have done it to make myself feel better for not being as good an athlete as those who were better than I was. In other words, I was propping myself up to incorrectly believe I'm at a disadvantage because I’m white so that getting beaten in a race by a Black kid is more of an expected outcome in a race of genetics versus an outcome in a race of athletics. Going down that rabbit hole, it also creates a false sense of accomplishment if I then beat a Black person in a race and makes me the underdog as a white person because I overcame a disadvantage that doesn’t exist genetically.

Now, this isn’t something that I think I, or many of my other white friends, are aware of when we make comments like that, but that’s also part of the problem. Our unawareness is the very thing that is so damn hurtful. I’ve learned that it’s a common experience for a Black person on a college campus to be assumed to be a member of a sports team and to be at the school on an athletic scholarship. Think about that. The implication of that assumption is that the student was admitted because of their athletic ability, not because of their academic ability or their leadership skills or their volunteer résumé or their personhood.

Another example of a racial microaggression happened when I was with one of my best friends, Jamey (who would later accompany me on that infamous trip to Mexico). Jamey was one of my groomsmen, and we were looking for the shirt I was going to wear on my wedding day. I didn’t have much money at the time, but this was the shirt I was going to get married in so we wanted it to be nice. We grabbed Starbucks and walked into an upscale shop in Los Angeles, carrying our drinks. As I walked in, I nodded at the employee and walked right past

him with my drink in hand and headed to a nearby rack, while Jamey went to another part of the store and looked at the shirts in that area. Just as I started browsing the overpriced shirts, I noticed an employee go up to Jamey, and rather than saying, “Hello, sir, may I help you?” he said, “You can’t be in here with that drink.” Hearing this I walked over with my coffee, confused, as people in LA carry their coffees wherever they go all the time, and I'd never been told I couldn't have one in a store. Now, Jamey, having been in this situation thousands of times over the course of his life, knew exactly what was happening. But I was oblivious. The employee was white, it was a fancy store, and Jamey was a Black man dressed very casually. Jamey jokingly replied to the employee, “Okay, do you fear I'm gonna spill it?”

The employee then says, “Well, the shirts here are very expensive.” To which Jamey responded, “And you think that I can't afford to purchase them should I tumble and fall and spill my coffee on your very expensive shirts?” Now, I know Jamey well, and he has a magical way of making a point and dropping some serious truth while also disarming you with his humor and tone. It's one of the things I love most about him. So I start smiling, thinking the employee will just go away and let us shop, but he doesn’t, so Jamey continues. “I’m looking to spend money in your shop and you’re concerned with me holding a closed coffee? Why is he [pointing to me] allowed to hold his coffee and no one is asking him to leave? In fact, he is being helped by your co-worker.” I then jumped in and, being the good “peacemaker” (read: problematic white man) that I am, played it down and said to Jamey, “It wasn’t about race man. We should go because they don’t have the shirts I’m looking for anyway.” Jamey then got quiet and walked out of the store. As I caught up to him, he turns to me and asks why I didn’t speak up. I said that I didn’t think it was a big enough deal to make a scene and it was just a policy of the store. Then Jamey lost his shit. Rightfully so.

“Justin, I love you, but you are choosing not to get it. You mean a policy for ME? No one asked you to leave. No one doubted your ability to pay for the items in the store. No one thought you were going to trip and fall and spill coffee all over their shirts. But not with me! This shit happens to me all the time, Justin!”

My response? I got defensive. I went to the well-intentioned white man in me that doesn’t want to be placed on the “bad” side of the racism binary. I started listing the things I did see, the times I had noticed, the ways I stood up for racial equality and tweeted about justice. In other words, I again made the conversation about me and my intentions. I centered myself and my experience, and not his frustration or pain, when in reality the situation called for it to be about Jamey and the impact the action of the employee, and the inaction of me, one of his best friends, had on him.

We then approached another store a few doors down, and Jamey, still heated, walks into this new store and says to the employee (who was a Black man), “Hey man, I got this coffee in my hand. Can I come in the store and browse around?” To which he responded, “If you’re thinking about spending money in here, you can bring whatever the hell you want in with you.” You see, this new guy didn’t see Jamey being Black as a reason to dismiss him. Even then, in my discomfort and ignorance, I just laughed it off, not really getting what had happened. I just wanted everything to be fine and cool and comfortable, and in doing so dismissed my best friend's entire experience while believing race had no part in it.

Jamey has experienced the bee stings almost every day of his life, and so his relationship to bees is different from mine. It was as if he were telling me that he was stung by a bee and hurting, but because I failed to see the bee, I chose to say, “I don’t know, man, are you sure? Maybe you weren’t stung?” Meanwhile, he has a stinger in his damn arm and his skin is beginning to swell. What matters more in that moment, my intention or the impact of the sting? In relationships, impact must always outweigh intention. But too often, especially when I am being called out, whether it be by Jamey for not seeing a racial injustice, or by my wife for interrupting her, my default has historically been to get defensive and reiterate my good intentions. I also wish I could say that was one of the only times a situation like that happened, but unfortunately Jamey had been trying to tell me about his bee stings for years. In hindsight I have realized that it was simply easier for me to choose ignorance than to make the choice to educate myself. I found it easier to defend the intentions of the white man who “didn’t mean anything by it” than to defend my friend.

This is perhaps the most difficult part of getting comfortable in the uncomfortable. This is part of the pause before responding, especially when my initial reaction is to defend myself. Often my defensiveness is a good indicator for me that I need to shut up, listen, and reflect. This is part of taking the risk to peel off the mask I’ve hidden behind, look critically at myself, and acknowledge that maybe I don't know everything, maybe I have been on the wrong side of history before, maybe I have been ignorant of my privilege and of the full spectrum of racism that very much exists in our society. Maybe I have some work to do.

How ridiculous would it be if we as a society said the same kinds of statements about gender? What if I said, “My first friend was a girl so of course I don't objectify women”? Or “I am married to a woman and have a daughter and my mom is a woman and I have a sister who is a woman, so therefore I can’t be sexist”? Or even “I don’t see gender; I treat everyone equally”? This entire journey that I am on to undefine my masculinity would not be a thing, this book would not be a book, none of the issues that come out of the conditioning around

gender in our culture would be issues. And yet here I am, on this journey, writing this book, unlearning and relearning what it means to be a man, what it means to be a good human.

I need to do the same work with race. Because if I exempt myself from the work, then I place the burden of responsibility on the same people that are being oppressed because of their race. In the same way that if I excused myself from the work around masculinity and gender, then I am inadvertently placing the responsibility of the work on women, trans and gender nonconforming people, when they are the ones who are being disadvantaged because of the systems in place. Additionally, if I exempt myself from the work and the responsibility, then I also miss out on the connection, the healing, and the joy that also come with doing the work. I miss out on the full spectrum of the journey, which isn't always easy but has so far always proved to be meaningful and worth it. After all, more than I want to be a well-intentioned white man, I want to be an impactful partner, father, friend… human.

Checking My Privilege

I was not taught to see white privilege, just as I wasn't taught to see male privilege.

Like male privilege, white privilege is an invisible force that gives me advantages that are not given to everyone.

Like male privilege, white privilege is ingrained in us through our socialization within this society and culture.

Like male privilege, white privilege is uncomfortable for me to talk about. In addition, if you are feeling triggered by my saying "male privilege" and "white privilege," then that means one thing: we need to talk about it. So let's take this cold plunge together; the water isn't warm, but I promise you it's good for us.

I can't recall the first time I came up against the concept of my white privilege, but I can absolutely recall the ways I have been deflective and defensive about it. But I found that I have had a misconstrued, misunderstood idea of what white privilege was. When I first started leaning into the idea of male privilege, I felt like I was being told that I didn't work hard, that I didn't actually earn the job or promotion, that my sacrifice and hard work were invisible and I was being told I only got whatever it is I got because I am male. I said things like, "I worked my ass off to get here; nobody gave me anything." And "I earned all that I have." I felt like anytime someone said the word "privilege" or insinuated that I had it, I would become annoyed

or angry. It felt like I was being robbed of my individual story and struggle (hmmm, sound familiar?). I felt the same way when white privilege came up. But my defensiveness was a sign of my ignorance.

There are many forms of privilege that honestly deserve their own book. Every day I learn something and have a newfound appreciation not just for where I sit in society but also the privilege that something as simple as being healthy and able-bodied gives me. I mean, how often do I wake up and feel grateful for my health or my arms or my ability to see or walk? It's generally not until our physical abilities are injured or taken away that we actually appreciate the benefits and privileges our bodies give us. As an able-bodied person I can be sure that shops, homes, parks, and neighborhoods are all accessible to me. I can travel and eat out without having to think about how I will navigate public transportation or the security terminal at the airport. But at the same time, when my able-bodied privilege is brought up, I am not defensive or deflective, and it is not uncomfortable for me to talk about. Why? There's part of me that feels like it's because race and gender have become such politicized topics. Maybe it's because of that good/bad binary and not wanting to recognize my white privilege because then I can no longer ignore racial injustices. Or maybe it's something entirely different that I have yet to learn. But I understand that having able-bodied privilege doesn't mean that I did not and don't have struggles or hardships; it simply means that I don't have those particular struggles or hardships.

I think of privilege like the 110-meter hurdles in track. First of all, in a very literal sense, I am privileged to even be able to be on the track, running that race, because a person in a wheelchair could not participate in hurdles and has way fewer opportunities to participate in any form of track than I do. So, right off the bat, that's able-bodied privilege. Does that mean that I didn't train my ass off, that I didn't drink enough water and eat enough nutrients (completely hypothetical, as high school was the time I could pound Taco Bell for lunch just hours before a track meet)? No, it simply means that I have an opportunity, an advantage not available to everyone.

Figuratively, I think of privilege like the hurdles in the sense that we are each running our own race, in our own lane, and yet we each have our own sets of hurdles, or barriers, in our lane on the way to the finish line. Oversimplified, white privilege means that the color of my skin will never be a hurdle for me, just like male privilege means that my gender will never be a barrier for me. It doesn't mean that I won't have hurdles—that there isn't struggle, that I am not working hard—it just means that my skin color will never work against me. And in a society

built on such a deep racial divide, not having a race hurdle not only doesn't work against me, it often works for me, in the same way that being a male in a patriarchal society works for me.

If I am able to see clearly how my able-bodied privilege is at play, then maybe my white privilege isn't as invisible as I thought. Maybe once I start looking at it, looking for it, it becomes undeniably visible, like male privilege.

Here are some examples of white and/or male privilege:

Based on the most recent survey in 2018, for every dollar earned by white men, white women earn only seventy-nine cents, Black women earn sixty-two cents, Hispanic or Latino women earn fifty-four cents, and Indigenous women earn fifty-four cents.

I can easily find Band-Aids in “flesh” tones that more or less match my skin tone. (Shout out to Tru-Colour Bandages for blazing the trail in making bandages and kinesiology tape in a wide range of colors to match the wide range of skin tones! #notsponsored)

I feel safe, and for the most part, don’t have to think about my safety. One of my close friends recalled a time when she asked her husband, a white male, how often he thinks about his safety. Without hesitation he said that he rarely does, and it’s only in extreme situations such as a car accident or maybe if the bank next door to his work is being robbed. He then asked her how often she thinks about it. Her answer? “Every day, multiple times a day. When I'm walking to the car and it's dark out, when a man approaches me in the grocery store, when I go on a run, when I am driving home and notice that the same car has been behind me most of the way, anytime I travel alone and am seated by a male on the plane…” After I heard this, I asked Emily the same question, and without hesitation she began telling me all the things she has to think about every day that literally never cross my mind. Like how, if she is alone and has to walk to her car at night, she keeps her car keys between her fingers like a mini version of Wolverine’s claws.

Similarly, anti-sexism educator Jackson Katz has asked men and women the same question for decades in his trainings: what steps do you take daily to prevent sexual assaults? Katz explains that nearly every woman in the room raises her hand when he asks this question and can immediately list countless steps they take-not jogging at night, carrying pepper spray or Mace, locking car doors as soon as they get in the car, parking in well-lit areas, ensuring that a friend or family member knows their location and itinerary, etc. As for the men, what do we say we do daily to prevent sexual assault? Nothing. Not one hand

goes up. It's hard to believe the world we live in as men, and especially those of us white men, can look and feel so different just because of the body we are born into. That difference is simply privilege.

Activist Danielle Muscato posed the question on Twitter. "What would you [women] do if all men had a 9:00 p.m. curfew?" The responses poured in by the thousands and were frankly heartbreaking to read. Instead of being wildly adventurous with what they would do, most women said they would do things such as grocery shop, go for a run, listen to music with headphones on, walk to the car without their keys between their fingers ready to be used as a potential weapon, or be able to sleep on the first floor with the windows open. In other words, things that should be very normal for people to do without fear, and quite frankly things that most men like myself feel extremely comfortable doing without thought every single day. It's well worth noting that Muscato's question was sparked by a conversation she had with a friend, where she shared how much her life had changed since coming out as a transgender woman, and how things that she never had even considered before were now part of her daily mental and physical load-a load that weighs heavier on the transgender community, and specifically the Black transgender community, than on anyone else. Similarly, in a conversation with trans-male activist Jevon Martin, he told me that while he was born into a Black female body and experienced the intersection of oppression that came from being a Black woman in the world, once he transitioned to a man, he had to confront another side of racism-as a Black man, he was now seen as a threat.

I have to admit that I knew next to nothing about the unimaginable hardships and struggles of the Black trans community. Recently I got a chance to interview trans activist Devin Michael Lowe, the founder of the Black Trans Travel Fund, which pays for private car rides for Black trans women in New York and New Jersey so they can access self-determined safer transportation options. In a survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality, which included more than twenty-eight thousand respondents (all of whom are transgender), nearly half (47 percent) of all Black respondents reported being denied equal treatment, verbally harassed, and/or physically attacked in the previous year because of being transgender. It was thanks to my conversations with trans male activists that I learned about the ways that even those I have privilege over have their own levels of privilege over more marginalized groups, hence the importance of intersectionality in this conversation. People who look like me are largely represented in media, entertainment, leadership positions, Congress, the Oval Office, and education. In fact, my entire education was

centered around people who looked like me. I didn't have one Black or Indigenous teacher over the course of my education from kindergarten through high school, and it wasn't until I typed those lines that I even stopped to think about it. I can easily find children's books that have characters who look like my children and that have a family structure like ours, but I have to go out of my way to find books that feature diverse characters and stories.

I can also (generally) have a positive relationship with the police. In fact, there was a time in the fall of 2014, after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, that I was driving home and saw a Black man being pulled over by police. I decided in that moment to pull over on the opposite side of the street. I didn't know exactly what I was planning on doing other than readying myself to take a video or potentially intervene if things took a turn for the worst, and by the way, who the hell am I to think intervening was even an option for me? That right there is a sure sign of white privilege. See, when that Black man was pulled over, even before he stopped he rolled his window down and he threw his hands out of his window and waved his ID like a peace flag. I had never seen anything like it in person, and seeing it crushed me. Do you know what I think about when I get pulled over? My first thought every time is *I hope I can get out of this*. Meaning I hope I can get myself out of this ticket, even though most times I was guilty and deserved a ticket. In that moment, I realized that while I think about getting out of a traffic stop without a ticket, a Black person is hoping that they can get out of a traffic stop ALIVE. Thankfully, this man did.

That night, my white privilege in regard to my relationship with police became visible. I went home and tweeted about what I saw and how as white people we have a responsibility to the Black Lives Matter movement. I hadn't read any books, nor had I educated myself on white supremacy and the nuanced and complicated history of police, not to mention the complicated history of our country, white saviorism, or white exceptionalism. So when the replies started rolling in about how racist and terrible I was for saying Black Lives Matter, and how blue lives matter and all lives matter, I didn't know what to do. I mean it all made sense, right? The lives of police officers matter, and of course all lives matter, right? I wish I could say that I ignored the replies, or that I had articulated, educated responses, but I can't. Instead, I panicked because people were calling me racist, and I was new to this and instantly felt like I messed up or that I was misunderstood. So I replied that blue lives do matter and of course all lives do matter. But in my ignorance, I didn't understand how those responses were problematic and frankly racist responses to the Black Lives Matter movement.

My phone rang, and it was Jamey. He saw my tweets and said, “I see the good you’re doing, and I see where you went wrong.” He explained to me how my desire to be a peacemaker wasn’t rooted in true peace. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.” My idea of peace, as a white man, has often been focused on having an absence of conflict or tension, even in issues outside of race. Jamey then very lovingly and patiently explained that when there is a fund-raiser or event focused on breast cancer, when sports teams rock pink jerseys for breast cancer awareness, we don’t show up with signs and argue that prostate cancer matters too! And when our neighbor’s house is on fire and the fire department shows up to help, we don't run from our house that is not on fire and exclaim that we need the resources our neighbor is getting. We need the fire hose! We need the firefighters! No, we don’t, because our house is not on fire-theirs is! Regardless of where your political beliefs lie, or what outlet your news originates from, I hope this understanding can bridge the gap between partisan ideologies and fundamental human rights. As I have learned the hard way, when we say that Black lives matter, we are not saying that Black lives matter more than anyone else’s; we are not saying that the lives of police officers don’t matter or that all lives don’t matter. We are simply saying that all lives cannot matter until Black lives finally do.

Whitewashing Hollywood

Early in my acting career I screen-tested for a show called Greek, which went on to do several seasons on ABC Family. Screen-testing is one of the later parts of the audition process where you act in front of a live studio audience of generally bored, overworked executives and an enthusiastic director and producer who collectively determine if you’re the right one for the part. I remember my agent telling me that I was the favorite and that I just needed to go in there and knock my screen test out of the park. It couldn’t have gone any better, and I left feeling confident that this role was mine. My phone rang. It was my agent and manager, and whenever they called me together, it was either really, really good news or really not good news. This time it was definitely the latter. The feedback was that while I was the show creators’ first choice for the role, I didn’t get the part because “honestly, the network felt your eyebrows were too distracting on camera.”

My agent and manager then flat-out asked me if I was willing to trim and pluck my eyebrows because it would help me get these kinds of parts. What exactly were "these kinds of parts"? I couldn't articulate it then, but I am able to now. These were parts that were set up to be played by traditionally white guys. The irony? I am white. But to Hollywood, I wasn't white enough. My features were too ambiguous for the industry's definition of whiteness, and as a result I found myself getting more auditions for characters that were Spanish, Latino, or Middle Eastern.

One of the first roles that I booked was an Iraqi prince on a TV show in the early 2000s called JAG. I remember walking into the audition room where there were probably ten other guys there to audition-every one of them Middle Eastern. Guess who got the part? The white guy. When I asked if I should learn an Iraqi accent, the producers told my manager not to worry about it, that I was "Americanized." When it finally came out on TV several months later, guess what had been done? My voice had been dubbed. They took a Middle Eastern man's voice and put it over mine, so it was my face with his voice.

If I can remember, just a few years later, how it felt to be told that my eyebrows were too distracting and how annoying it was that I didn't fit the traditional blond, blue-eyed stereotype that the network had in mind for this role, I can only imagine what it would feel like for the Middle Eastern actors who were finally getting the chance to audition for the role of prince-a welcome break from the usual terrorist or Islamic extremist roles they are pigeonholed into-only to have a very not Middle Eastern man, a white man, come in and take the role. This is an example of whitewashing that has taken place throughout our country's history, and so of course it takes place in Hollywood too.

Our textbooks have sanitized the truth of our country's history and the mass violence that has been committed against Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color by white colonizers. It's why Columbus Day is still a federally recognized holiday, while Indigenous Peoples' Day is an official holiday in only six states. It's why Juneteenth goes largely unnoticed by anyone outside of the Black community. In fact, it was just recently that I learned that our country's true independence day is June 19, as it represents the emancipation of Black people who had been enslaved. It was just this year, after learning this, that our company finally recognized Juneteenth as a paid holiday for our staff. The consequences of our history, and our repression of its full truth, continue to play out in the present day in everything from how national holidays are and aren't commemorated to how the media portrays white mass murderers in comparison to a Black person who commits a crime of much lesser magnitude (or heck, even to a Black person who hasn't even committed a crime) to how

the beauty industry lightens the skin tone of people of color in their advertisements and how the powers that be in Hollywood have long been casting white men to play characters that are not white.

But as I said, I am just beginning to learn this. I didn't have this knowledge and awareness when I was getting rejected for the traditionally white roles and taking the roles of characters who were not white. In fact, I can remember conversations in auditions or on sets with other actors where we would share our experiences, and a Black actor would share about how he was able to book more roles than his girlfriend because even though he knew she was a better actor, he was light-skinned and she had darker skin. In an attempt to connect, which in hindsight I can see how it would do the exact opposite, I would say something like, "Ah, I feel you, man, this town can't figure out my ethnicity and doesn't know where to put me." Now, while that may have been true, my experience is very different as a white man, and by overidentifying my experience with the experience of people of color, I am disregarding the structures and systems in place that benefit me and disadvantage people of color.

Fast-forward to ten years later, when I came back from my break from acting and one of the first auditions I got was for Rafael Solano on Jane the Virgin. I saw that the character was intended to be Latino, but I didn't give it any thought; after all, I was so used to auditioning for these roles that I often joked that I didn't know I was Latino until I moved to Hollywood. Looking back, it's not nearly as funny as I thought it was, mostly because after spending five years on a show surrounded by Latinx actors, I see the intense barriers that they have all had to overcome to get to where they are, and while, like them, I may have worked my ass off and sacrificed and dedicated years of my life before finally getting a break, I still had an unfair advantage no matter how you slice it. Now, unknown to me at the time, the CW had been looking for Rafael for months and had screen-tested a bunch of guys but hadn't found him, so they ended up opening the role to all ethnicities. That's why, when I showed up for the audition, it was filled with people of all ethnicities, including a few blond, blue-eyed white guys, so again, I didn't think anything of it. The rest is history, as I ended up getting the role, and like I've said, it was the role of a lifetime for me-and potentially one of the reasons you are even reading this book. The role gave me the chance to play an interesting man on a prime-time television show, to find a way to portray authentically the inner life of a confused and beaten-down masculine man who is forced to go on a journey to explore his identity and his masculinity. I didn't think twice, or even once, about if I had taken a role from a Latino actor because there were so many other folks auditioning. Rafael didn't have a backstory, and it eventually was written that he was Italian, but there was a lot of questioning and fair criticism

of his character's racial and ethnic ambiguity, considering the Venezuelan roots of the original show.

With the privilege of hindsight and new (to me) information, I can absolutely see how I took a role from a Latino actor. I can see how the systems that are in place—the same ones that gave me the role of an Iraqi prince, the same ones that allowed me to be in a position to write this book and have this platform—play to my advantage. As I have begun to learn these nuances, I can feel my white privilege rearing its head and telling me "but I've worked hard" and "I've been rejected too" and "I deserve roles too." Again, recognizing my white privilege doesn't negate my efforts and worth, nor does it negate my struggle. Just because I am white it does not mean my life is easy and that everything is just given to me. White privilege is not a free pass by any means. At the same time, I can no longer ignore that, overarchingly, white people are not oppressed in the same way that Black people are, we are not judged, pulled over, enslaved, imprisoned, or killed in the same way. I don't have the additional hurdles that have been placed in the lanes of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color. And, like in the situation of getting the Iraqi prince role, it means that in some situations, not only do I not have the hurdle, but I also have a head start.

This matters in the entertainment industry because representation matters. It is important for everyone to see people who look like them in characters that resonate with them. It is imperative for people of color to see their stories, gifts, abilities—their humanity—represented in the characters of books, films, ads, careers, and families. In Jordan Flaherty's No More Heroes, he takes us back to 1979, when boxing legend Muhammad Ali, one of my personal heroes, invited film critic Roger Ebert to his home to watch Sylvester Stallone's Rocky II. In the film, which I have to admit is also one of my all-time favorites, Stallone's white boxer beats Carl Weathers's Apollo Creed, who was widely thought to be based on Ali. During the commentary, as the credits rolled, Ali went on to say, "For the Black man to come out as superior would be against America's teachings. I have been so great in boxing that they had to create an image like Rocky, a white image on the screen to counteract my image in the ring. America has to have its white images, no matter where it gets them. Jesus, Wonder Woman, Tarzan, and Rocky." That hit me deeply. Of course I loved Rocky. How could I not? He was an Italian American underdog who went on to overcome all odds. He looked like me, and thus it reminded me that I could do it. But I didn't take into account that it wasn't just him that looked like me; the heroes of almost all the underdog stories I loved growing up also looked like me. If I were a young Black boy, what films or TV shows or stories had heroes who looked like me? I mean, as Ali said, even Jesus is white in America. How does that even happen if not

by overt racism? Science and history tell us that Jesus was Middle Eastern and had a dark complexion, yet being Black in America today means praying to a white Jesus. Along similar lines, when diverse characters are represented in entertainment, too often the diversity is tokenized as directors and producers cast a Black person, Indigenous person, or other person of color into a role that supports the main white story line so that there is an appearance of diversity. If they aren't supporting the main white story line, the characters still tend to portray inaccurate stereotypes that are rooted in racism, like Latina women who are often cast as cleaning ladies or Native American men as warriors with tomahawks who live in tepees. And as we already know, often these roles can be given to white people to play, further erasing the cultures they are misrepresenting.

In my second film, Clouds, which is based on a true story about seventeen-year-old musician Zach Sobiech, who had osteosarcoma and who passed away just before his song "Clouds" hit number one on iTunes, I felt it was important, even though it was a true story, to surround the all-white main cast with people of color throughout the film. Over the course of the five years it took me to get the film made, Zach's family and I had become incredibly dear friends, and while there is nothing wrong with telling a story about a white family, we had to be intentional about making sure the supporting cast and extras were not reflective of just their homogenous community but of the world. I wanted Zach's story to touch people of all races, cultures, and religious backgrounds, but for that to happen, an audience needed to see themselves reflected in the story and on the screen. The simple reality is that Zach and his family are white, they live in a small town in Minnesota that is also arguably one of the whitest places in America, and unfortunately, there was simply no person of color in Zach's life who was integral in how his story played out. But I believe that just like one can take creative license in the retelling of a true story, we can and should do the same with casting Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color in roles wherever possible, and if it requires it, even going out of our way to do so. We also created a character inspired by two people in his world and cast Lil Rel Howery, a Black actor and arguably one of the funniest people I have ever met. In creating this supporting role we tried to make sure that instead of simply supporting the main character, this person would actually influence and advise him and be one of the contributing voices to the overall hero's journey arc of the film. But even with that choice, I struggled because it didn't feel good enough. I am taking these learnings into my third film, where I am currently advocating and fighting for a diverse cast, starting with at minimum one of the two main leads.

I am learning that there is a distinct difference between appearing diverse and amplifying diversity. Too often, and I am guilty of this, we want to tokenize (which again objectifies and

dehumanizes) people of color in an attempt to be seen as not a racist, when in reality the real work of anti-racism is amplifying the voices of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color. And while their voices are beginning to be amplified more, they are often being told in stories about race, but their stories are so much fuller than race, and the fullness of their humanity deserves to be normalized, represented, and amplified in media, in our daily lives, in history textbooks, and in Hollywood. There is so much more for me to learn and do as someone who is stepping into a position of power in this industry. I won't always do things perfectly, but I can't allow the fear of mistakes to keep me from growing and learning, as even that, I have learned, is a choice that stems from privilege. The choice to do nothing, while it may feel safer in the moment, is far more harmful to the plight of marginalized communities who are fighting to be seen, heard, and represented.

I Am Responsible for My Response

There is part of me that feels completely overwhelmed at the work that I need to do in myself and that our society needs to do collectively in regard to racial justice. There is part of me that feels ashamed that it has taken me as long as it has to intersect my journey with masculinity and male privilege to white privilege and racism. And then there is part of me that reminds myself that shame is an invitation to lean in, not to run away from or repress. Ijeoma Oluo says, "I know that the issue of racism and racial oppression seems huge—and it is huge. But it is not insurmountable."

I have a lot to learn and a lot to unlearn. I can apply some of the same principles, and use some of the same tools, that I have discovered in my journey to undefine my masculinity to help me on this intersection of the journey as well. I can get comfortable in the uncomfortable, listen more than I speak, pick up some damn books and educate myself, and get brutally honest with myself about what I don't know. And while I'm doing the personal work, I can also be doing the practical, systemic work of supporting businesses and projects of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color, and amplifying their voices in all contexts, from social media to donating to organizations that are doing anti-racism work, and voting for leaders who are actively working toward an equitable society.

We aren't taught about masculinity and the social context of it in the same way that I, as a white person, wasn't taught about whiteness and the social context of it. But while I may not

have been taught it, I can still learn. I can learn so that I can teach our children, so that they grow up knowing what I didn't because growing up without having discussions about white privilege and racism is a privilege in and of itself.

When author and speaker Layla Saad was about seven years old, her mother talked with her about her lack of white privilege. In Saad's book *Me and White Supremacy*, she details what her mother told her. "She said to me, 'Because you are Black, because you are Muslim, and because you are a girl, you are going to have to work three times as hard as everyone else around you to get ahead… She was pointing out to me that in a racist and patriarchal society, I would be treated differently. I would not be rewarded the same for the same effort. And she wanted me to know that though this was not fair or right, it was (and still is), sadly, the way things were."

In the same way that Saad has those things working against her, I have my gender and skin color working for me. Since she has to work three times as hard to get ahead in the system, then as a white male from a middle-class family I have three times the responsibility to do the work to dismantle the system. And if I can use a little reverse psychology, I can reframe this as a challenge to myself and ask, am I going to be man enough to handle the responsibility. Am I going to be accountable enough to do the personal work? Am I going to have enough integrity to continue to recognize how my journey with masculinity intersects with my whiteness? Am I going to be brave enough to risk messing up as I continue to learn? Because that's the bad news: I am going to mess up. But I'd like to argue that it's also the good news too. There is no expectation of perfection, and we need to continue to normalize changing opinions with new information, to normalize not knowing it all and even not knowing enough to form an opinion in the first place.

My whiteness affords me the privilege of never being able to fully understand what it is like to have the experiences that people of color do, in the same way that my maleness affords me the privilege of never knowing what it's like to walk through this world as a woman, trans, or gender nonconforming person. But just because I cannot understand something does not mean that I cannot honor it. Just because I do not understand someone's experience does not mean I cannot honor them. As I do the meaningful work of honoring myself, my own humanity, I am also responsible to do the meaningful work to honor others in their full humanity.

And I am late—really fucking late—to be honoring the full humanity of Black people.

I am here now, committed to learning and relearning what it means to be anti-racist, to be a privileged white man in this society, and to be responsible for making our world a more just and equitable place.

The target text

The following sections present the translation of the two chapters selected for this thesis, *Introduzione* and *Abbastanza privilegiato: La realtà del mio razzismo e del mio privilegio maschile e bianco*.

INTRODUZIONE

Non so se c'è qualcosa di veramente rivoluzionario in questo libro. Di unico, forse? Ma diciamoci la verità. Tutto questo non è altro che una caotica esplorazione a cuore aperto del concetto di mascolinità, scritta da una persona che gode allo stesso tempo di potere e privilegio, che storicamente forse non avrebbe scelto di rendersi così vulnerabile, perché la vulnerabilità, apparentemente, non apporta benefici. Perché cercare di abbattere un sistema da cui, per tutta la vita, ho tratto beneficio? In parte penso sia perché so che è giusto. In parte perché sento l'enorme responsabilità di doverlo fare. In parte perché adesso sono padre e credo che lɜ nostrɜ figliɜ, la nostra più grande fonte di speranza, meritino un futuro migliore. E in parte perché mi sento come bloccato in una dimensione che non mi soddisfa e voglio davvero, davvero, davvero uscirne.

Questo libro parla delle mie personali difficoltà con l'essere "abbastanza" e, in particolare, di una definizione di mascolinità, cioè dell'essere uomini, che dipende dall'essere abbastanza X. Ora, "X" può significare qualsiasi cosa. Per molti uomini, per me, significa essere abbastanza di tutte quelle caratteristiche del maschio alfa: forte, sexy, coraggioso, potente, intelligente, di successo, e anche abbastanza bravo come padre e come marito. Non dico che queste cose siano negative o che non dovremmo aspirare a esserle. Non è di questo che parla il libro. Cioè, essere un padre o un marito "abbastanza bravo" è strafigo, ma la "bravura" è soggettiva, quindi dobbiamo smetterla di provare a dimostrare quanto siamo "bravi" e semplicemente esserlo, vivere, festeggiare e celebrare la nostra bravura senza denigrare gli altri nel frattempo.

Dunque, chiariamo subito alcune cose: sono etero. Sono anche cisgender. E bianco. Anche se più in là condividerò le esperienze di altri uomini, il libro si basa prevalentemente sulla mia esperienza e, per questo, scrivo dalla prospettiva con cui sono cresciuto. Quando dico "uomini" (o qualsiasi declinazione del genere) intendo chiunque si identifichi come uomo e quando dico "noi" includo me stesso in quel gruppo. Questo libro non è un corso completo sugli studi di genere o sul binarismo di genere. Inoltre, e forse cosa più importante, non è assolutamente un attacco agli uomini o alla mascolinità. Sono convinto che gli uomini siano naturalmente, intrinsecamente buoni. Che TU sia buono. E ci sono tantissimi aspetti della definizione tradizionale di mascolinità che condivido e per cui sono grato. Non mi vergogno per niente di dire che amo essere un uomo. E non mi scuso di esserlo. Ma ciò non vuol dire che non mi scuserò per i modi in cui la mia interpretazione della mascolinità ha ferito le persone attorno a me. I tratti positivi che vengono associati all'essere uomo, come l'essere

intraprendenti e responsabili, onesti e affidabili, leali, padri e mariti presenti o semplicemente forti, intelligenti e coraggiosi, sono tutti tratti positivi a cui aspiro nella vita. Ma ritengo anche che siano tratti a cui tutti gli esseri umani debbano aspirare. Non sono tratti esclusivi degli uomini, sono universali. Il punto non è il tratto. È quella voce nella tua testa, nella mia testa, che ci dice che non siamo abbastanza X. Adesso basta. Basta con questo "abbastanza".

Chiamatemi ingenuo ma io credo che, tutto sommato, il genere umano sia buono. Ed è a partire da questa convinzione radicata e fondamentale che inizia e finisce questo viaggio (e questo libro). Non voglio imporre idee faziose o programmi politici. Sono registrato come "indipendente"[1], quindi non aderisco a nessuna ideologia politica e, anche se, ovviamente, voto e seguo le elezioni, non esprimo pubblicamente le mie preferenze. Nella vita faccio il possibile per essere empatico e compassionevole nei confronti delle persone con cui non sono d'accordo o che non sono d'accordo con me. Quindi se uso un termine che ti infastidisce o che ti fa pensare che io voglia importi un determinato programma politico, ti chiedo di continuare a leggere, perchè ti assicuro che non è questo il mio obiettivo. Il mio desiderio di riservatezza e di distanza da una politica di parte deriva prevalentemente dalla mia fede.

In breve, la mia fede, a cui farò qualche riferimento in questo libro visto il legame con le scelte che ho fatto, è la Fede Bahá'í. Se parlare di religione o leggere un libro scritto da una persona con una religione diversa dalla tua ti mette a disagio, immagina che le mie citazioni o analogie vengano dal nostro "universo", da un*attivista che ti piace o dalla tua stessa religione. Non condivido la mia fede nel tentativo di convertirti. Nel condividere storie così personali scrivo a partire da ciò che conosco, da ciò che guida le mie decisioni, e per me la fede è al centro di tutto ciò che sono e che faccio. La comunità bahá'í crede fondamentalmente nell'unificazione di tutte le religioni e nello sradicamento di ogni genere di pregiudizio. Crediamo nell'unità dell'umanità e nell'idea che ogni anima sulla terra sia stata creata nobile, ognuna con il proprio legame con Dio. Detto ciò, questo non è un libro che parla di religione, anzi moltɜ bahá'í potrebbero trovarne il contenuto provocatorio e scomodo. E in questo caso io dico: bene! Uno dei precetti fondamentali della Fede Bahá'í è la ricerca indipendente della verità. Tuttɜ noi dobbiamo trovare la nostra verità, non seguire ciecamente una fede o insegnare una cosa senza averla approfondita in prima persona. Credo che se la fede ha uno scopo, questo sia l'unificazione dell'intera umanità, e che la nostra missione (se decidiamo di accettarla) come esseri umani è semplicemente quella di aiutare e creare unità ovunque possibile. Una delle cose che preferisco della mia religione è probabilmente la pratica dell'amore incondizionato e dell'assenza di giudizio, oltre che la lotta per la parità di genere e per la giustizia razziale. Nella vita di tutti i giorni come bahá'í mi si chiede di essere un "difensore

per la vittima dell'oppressione"[2] in qualsiasi modo possibile e di non forzare mai le mie convinzioni su un altro individuo, perché l'amore e la misericordia divina sono immensamente superiori al mio limitato e ingannevole cervello. Quindi, anche se non seguo una fede, un'ideologia o uno stile di vita, il mio dovere come essere umano è quello di amare ed essere prontə a difendere chiunque venga oppressə o trattatə ingiustamente. Tutto questo per dire che, relativamente al sistema politico americano e alla mia volontà di assicurarmi che questo libro non venga considerato *woke*[3] solo per amor di causa, il mio obiettivo è condividere ciò in cui credo a partire dalla mia personale esperienza come uomo. Credo che più di tutto adesso dobbiamo trovare il modo per smettere di "estraniare" amicɜ, familiari e vicinɜ di casa solo perché la pensiamo diversamente e conduciamo stili di vita diversi. Dobbiamo, invece, trovare quel terreno comune e umano di empatia, rispetto e amore. A partire da queste premesse credo che, per ciò che riguarda questo libro e il concetto di mascolinità, dobbiamo separare l'intricato discorso sulla mascolinità dai programmi politici per realizzare uno sfaccettato lavoro individuale e guarire delle parti di noi al fine di riuscire a creare uno spazio dedicato al confronto. Le vittime della mascolinità, quando diventa malsana come lo è per molti di noi uomini, non sono solo le nostre amiche, mogli, fidanzate e compagne, ma anche noi stessi. Sono io, sei tu, sono gli uomini con cui interagiamo giornalmente a soffrire, e forse non lo ammetteranno mai. Sono le centinaia di migliaia di instancabili lavoratori, uomini buoni, gentili e amorevoli che ogni anno si tolgono la vita perché il dolore è diventato troppo insopportabile e credono che questa sia l'unica via d'uscita. Sono i milioni di uomini che soffrono di depressione e non possono, non sono in grado o non andranno dallə psicologə. Sono i tuoi fratelli, compagni di squadra, colleghi, padri e, per alcuni di noi, figli. È a partire dal desiderio di aiutare a fermare e prevenire tanto dolore e sofferenza superflui che provo a scrivere questo libro.

Perché io?

Guarda, sono stato fortunato. Sono cresciuto da privilegiato appartenente alla classe media e in una casa con due genitorɜ che si amano profondamente, che amano lɜ propriɜ figliɜ, la propria comunità e il mondo. Ora, non sono statɜ perfettɜ; anche loro convivevano con un complesso bagaglio di ferite profonde, storie e traumi, senza una guida che indicasse loro come guarire queste cose dentro di sé. Ma c'era l'amore. Sempre l'amore. Cavolo, sono veramente

fortunato ad essere stato, ed essere ancora, così tanto amato. Eppure, quando ripenso alla mia infanzia, accanto a questa abbondanza di amore risiede la convinzione che manchi qualcosa, che mancasse qualcosa in me, che non ci stessi azzeccando.

Ma non necessariamente a causa di qualcosa che lз miз genitorз facevano o dicevano. Non ho mai sentito di fallire ai loro occhi. E nemmeno a causa della nostra fede, perché in quanto Bahá'í crediamo nella nobiltà di ciascunə. Ho scoperto dopo che stavo fallendo nell'azzeccare degli invisibili, elevatissimi e irraggiungibili standard di mascolinità, quegli standard che fanno di te un uomo. Non era abbastanza che fossi nato uomo e mi identificassi in un uomo, o che camminassi e parlassi come un uomo, il mondo continuava a dirmi che non stavo azzeccando qualcosa e per questo non ero un uomo. Era come se l'asticella fosse posizionata troppo in alto e io non riuscissi a raggiungerla, o, meglio, come se la scatola fosse troppo piccola e non riuscisse a contenermi del tutto.

Da che ho memoria sono stato un ragazzo emotivo e sensibile nascosto dentro un tornado di energia, testosterone e creatività, che non riesce a stare fermo e ha bisogno di muoversi in continuazione. Con lo sport riuscivo a meditare e medicarmi allo stesso tempo. Da adolescente ero bravissimo negli sport di competizione, ma allo stesso tempo sentivo di non essere come i miei compagni di squadra. Venivo bullizzato, preso di mira e trattato da campione mentre io stesso bullizzavo e prendevo di mira qualcun'altro. Il minuto prima i miei compagni mi prendevano in giro o mi chiamavano "Baldurello"[4] (bella questa, vero?) e quello dopo mi si buttavano addosso esultanti perché avevo segnato il goal vincente o perché come ultimo frazionista nella staffetta 4x100m avevo stabilito il nuovo record della scuola. Il giorno prima gli studenti più grandi mi prendevano e mi legavano alla porta del campo da calcio, quello dopo ero io a legare alla porta qualche ragazzo più piccolo. Da ragazzino mi sentivo combattuto e confuso, prevalentemente perché, come molti ragazzi adolescenti, dentro di me sentivo crescere sempre di più l'urgenza e la pressione di essere accettato, di essere considerato uno di loro. Quindi ho insegnato a me stesso a farmela passare, a fingere indifferenza, a stare al gioco e, di fatto, a nascondere le emozioni e rifiutare i sentimenti nel tentativo di entrare in una scatola costruita molto prima che io e i miei amici nascessimo. Ho iniziato a indossare l'armatura che poi avrei dimenticato di avere, un'armatura di cui pensavo di aver bisogno per essere un uomo funzionale in questo mondo.

Nei dieci anni successivi questa relazione complessa e ambigua con la mia mascolinità si è manifestata attraverso relazioni fallimentari, scelte pessime, dolore immenso, conflitti interni e una valanga di tempo sprecato, ma soprattutto attraverso la vergogna. Proprio a partire da questa situazione di vergogna crescente ho iniziato il lungo e tumultuoso viaggio per capire

come arrivare dalla testa al cuore, dall'interno della scatola all'interno di me stesso. Il viaggio che ti porta ad essere abbastanza uomo. Abbastanza umano. Semplicemente abbastanza, e che cazzo. Però forse il problema non è il mio non essere (stato) "abbastanza", ma che questo "abbastanza" è un mito, un miraggio che sfugge sempre alla nostra comprensione, sempre irraggiungibile, sempre diretto verso l'orizzonte. Questo concetto di "abbastanza" produce quella sensazione di "se solo…" che ha fatto cadere tanti di noi in trappola. Se solo fossi più forte, più veloce, più intelligente, più ricco. Se solo avessi i bicipiti un centimetro più grandi, il cazzo un centimetro più grande, quaranta punti in più sul test del QI. Se solo avessi più soldi, più amici, più cose. Se solo facessi questo, o avessi questo, o fossi questo, allora sarebbe abbastanza. Allora sarei abbastanza. Eppure non lo è mai. E non lo sarà mai.

Un invito

Se sei qui per imparare qualcosa sulla storia della mascolinità e su come siamo arrivatɜ a questo punto, su come aggiustare la tua vita o comportarti per fare colpo su qualcunə, allora hai scelto il libro sbagliato. Questo non è un trattato accademico o un manuale motivazionale di auto-aiuto. Non c'è bisogno che ti dica di farti il letto per iniziare la giornata con una vittoria, anche se amo questo tipo di libri e ho sempre pensato che il mio primo libro sarebbe stato proprio così. Ma invece di scrivere un libro motivazionale ne sto scrivendo uno invitazionale. Condivido la mia storia nella speranza di invogliarti ad approcciarti alla tua. Mi faccio domande su me stesso nella speranza che, insieme, il "noi" collettivo possa farsi le stesse domande. Tipo: "Perché l'ho detto?", "Perché ho reagito così quando mi ha detto quella cosa?", "Perché cacchio sono così incavolato?", "Capiranno mai che dico solo un pugno di cazzate?", "Perché sono infelice se ho una vita fantastica?", "Perché ho insistito anche se mi aveva già detto di no?", e altre mille cose che mi sono chiesto nel corso dei miei trentasei anni sulla terra. Ad oggi, farmi domande è lo strumento che uso di più per scavare a fondo, per imparare, scoprire e farmi strada tra i blocchi presenti lungo il percorso dalla testa al cuore.

Se qualche anno fa mi avessi detto che avrei scritto un libro del genere, incentrato sulla mascolinità, mi sarei messo a ridere. Non di te, del futuro me. Del resto ho iniziato questo viaggio pubblico e privato nell'esplorazione della mascolinità solo da pochi anni. La verità è che niente di tutto questo era stato pianificato e ancora mi sconvolge pensare che viviamo in un mondo in cui ci si può casualmente imbattere nel proprio scopo semplicemente modificando

la bio di Instagram. Questa è la versione breve della storia di come sono arrivato qui. Dopo la nascita di mia figlia, Maiya, mi ritrovo con un sacco di pensieri, idee e domande, ma senza un luogo in cui condividerle. Così, come tanti, inizio a usare i social come una specie di diario pubblico. Invece di postare solo belle foto e condividere reel coi momenti salienti della mia vita, scrivo lunghe didascalie e faccio il poetico con discorsi sulla vita e sull'amore. Parlo di mia moglie e di quanto la ammiri, affrontando in modo realistico il tema del matrimonio e delle sfide che ne derivano, e condividendo le speranze e i sogni che ho per mia figlia.

Non ci vuole molto prima che varie testate giornalistiche (dedicate alle donne) prendano i miei post e prontamente mi etichettino come uomo femminista che lotta per la parità di genere. Anzi. Succede tutto così in fretta che al tempo non capisco nemmeno di esserlo, né che stavo cercando di fare proprio quella cosa lì. All'inizio ero semplicemente io che aprivo il mio cuore. Poi capisco che noi uomini occupiamo gran parte dello spazio nel mondo, ma all'area della condivisione di emozioni e sentimenti avrebbe giovato una maggiore partecipazione maschile. Poco dopo decido di puntare tutto su questo e creare la miniserie *Man Enough*[5], in cui riunisco un po' di amici con cui chiacchierare davanti a una telecamera di temi che non avevo mai visto affrontare da uomini, dando vita a conversazioni che vorrei tanto aver visto quando ero più giovane. Proprio quando inizio a farmi domande un po' più pubblicamente ricevo la chiamata della vita: l'invito a tenere un TED Talk. E non un TED Talk qualsiasi, ma un discorso sulla mascolinità al TED Women. Già solo l'invito è non solo un bagno d'umiltà, ma anche un'opportunità spaventosa che volevo rifiutare. Mia moglie era incinta, il bambino sarebbe dovuto nascere appena una settimana prima del giorno programmato per il mio intervento ed ero impegnato a tempo pieno con le riprese di *Jane the Virgin*. Il mio primo istinto? Dire di no. Cos'ho io da offrire? Dovrei fare un passo indietro e lasciare lo spazio a una donna, no? È una conferenza sul potere delle donne, dopotutto, e io non sono una donna. Volevo rifiutare perché ero all'inizio del mio percorso, non a metà e non alla fine, e non ero pronto a condividere le mie opinioni perché non sapevo nemmeno quali fossero! All'epoca un sacco di gente mi metteva su un piedistallo, come se avessi un ingrediente segreto che potesse aiutare gli uomini a migliorarsi, e, di conseguenza, aiutare anche le donne, ma quel piedistallo mi metteva estremamente a disagio, perché, onestamente, stavo solo facendo il minimo indispensabile, eppure quel minimo in qualche modo mi separava dagli altri uomini. Ero confusissimo. Come potevo aiutare altri uomini se mi veniva già difficile aiutare me stesso? E, soprattutto, sapevo che più si alzava il piedistallo, più dura sarebbe stata la caduta. Odio i piedistalli.

Ma la pura verità è che volevo rifiutare perché pensavo di non essere abbastanza bravo.

Caspita se era una sensazione familiare. Avevo passato buona parte della mia vita a familiarizzare con questa sensazione di inadeguatezza. La conoscevo bene: sapevo come mi faceva sentire, cosa mi voleva dire, che era sempre accompagnata dalla vergogna. E avevo iniziato a imparare quello che aveva da insegnarmi. Per me la paura, l'inadeguatezza e la vergogna sono le sfide più grandi, sono un invito a non mollare, a guardare le cose più da vicino e ad allenarmi a stare a mio agio nel disagio.

Cosa voleva dire "non mollare"? In questa situazione dire di sì a un TED Talk quando la vergogna e la paura volevano che dicessi di no. E quel "sì" significava dire a me stesso che andava bene non avere tutte le risposte, che andava bene non aver letto tutte le ricerche in merito e che andava bene essere ancora nel bel mezzo del processo di apprendimento.

Essere me stesso era abbastanza. E lo era anche parlare di quello che sapevo in quella fase del mio viaggio senza offrire soluzioni, solo la mia storia.

Eppure tante volte ho pensato di tirarmi indietro e l'ho quasi fatto, perché sentivo che i rischi erano maggiori delle ricompense. Temevo di ferire il movimento femminile dicendo qualcosa di sbagliato o offensivo, in più sapevo che il mio lavoro era rivolto agli uomini e non alle donne. Sapevo anche che pochi uomini avrebbero trovato il mio intervento, a meno che non gli fosse stato mostrato dalle donne nelle loro vite. Solo quando ho finalmente riconsiderato l'intervento come una sfida personale – ero abbastanza uomo per assumermi il rischio? – mi sono ripromesso di non tirarmi indietro. Non è assurdo? Usare un termine storicamente impiegato per denigrarci e tenerci chiusi in una scatola costruita dalla società, un'espressione che stimola una competizione malsana, delle relazioni malsane con altri uomini e con noi stessi. Usare quella stessa espressione per spingere me stesso a presentarmi a un evento in cui l'ho demolita e le ho dato un nuovo significato, al fine di sfidare gli uomini a essere migliori di quanto non fossi io in quell'esatto momento. Ma va bene, perché mi ha insegnato ciò di cui sapevo di aver bisogno. Mi ha insegnato che la mia socializzazione, il mio bagaglio, gli insegnamenti e le lezioni che ho appreso dal mondo e che sono radicate dentro di me da quando ho memoria non dipendevano da me, e che queste possono anche essere usate a fin di bene se siamo disposti ad accettare gli inviti. Il veleno, se rilavorato, può anche diventare medicina.

Mi accorgo solo ora di star parlando un sacco di un intervento che probabilmente non hai mai visto. Visto che ha ispirato gran parte di questo libro, ecco una breve sintesi del mio intervento al TED Women 2018:

- come uomo ho capito che gran parte della mia mascolinità era performativa e che per anni avevo recitato, fingendo di essere un uomo che non sono;
- credo nell'idea "radicale" che donne e uomini siano uguali;

- come uomini non dobbiamo avere paura di quello che la società ritiene “femminile”, ovvero “debole”;
- molto di quello che ho imparato sulla mascolinità performativa l’ho imparato da mio padre, che, come poi ho capito, l’ha imparato da suo padre. Oppure l’ho imparato dai miei compagni maschi, che l’hanno imparato dai loro padri. Tramandiamo dei copioni di generazione in generazione. Dobbiamo rompere lo schema;
- come uomini dobbiamo usare la forza, il coraggio e gli altri tratti tradizionalmente maschili per analizzare quello che abbiamo nel cuore. Fondamentalmente tutte quelle altre parti di noi che non metteremmo sul CV o sui profili social. Cose come la sensibilità, la vulnerabilità e il saper ascoltare;
- chiudiamo la bocca e decidiamoci finalmente ad ascoltare le donne che fanno parte della nostra vita;
- ah e mio padre, con cui ce l’ho avuta per anni a causa della sua predisposizione alla sensibilità, è anche il motivo per cui, prima come ragazzo e ora come uomo, ho imparato come usare il cuore al posto dei pugni. Quindi anche se non è perfetto, cosa di cui parlerò nei capitoli successivi, cavolo se è speciale! E non potrei essere più grato di averlo come papà.

Il potere di una storia

Beh, ce l’ho fatta. Il riscontro è stato immediato e *prevalentemente* molto incoraggiante e positivo. Da parte delle donne. Dagli uomini? Non molto. Ma il tutto è stato più articolato di così, perché le donne condividevano il discorso pubblicamente, lo commentavano pubblicamente e lo inviavano agli uomini pubblicamente. Le donne mi elogiavano in modo esplicito, ma notavo un fenomeno interessante di cui ho parlato durante l’intervento stesso: dov’erano gli uomini? Gli uomini non condividevano o commentavano pubblicamente (e se lo facevano di solito era per denigrarmi). Da parte degli uomini le risposte positive, quelle che ti cambiano la vita, arrivavano tutte in privato. Erano tra i miei DM, tra i messaggi privati e tra le mail: adolescenti che mi dicevano che per la prima volta sentivano che un posto in cui essere se stessi esiste; un uomo di sessant’anni che per la prima volta riusciva a verbalizzare come si era sentito ad essere rinnegato dal proprio genere. Gli uomini scrivevano pagine intere in cui condividevano i sentimenti e le paure più profonde e più intime. Dicevano di sentirsi finalmente

capiti e, per questo, liberi. Ma questa era solo una parte degli uomini. Quando il messaggio ha raggiunto gli altri è stato frainteso, decontestualizzato e strumentalizzato come politico.

Ricordo benissimo la sera in cui i due minuti più intensi dell'intervento sono andati virali dopo un post del TED (e con ciò intendo che il video ha superato le 50 milioni di visualizzazioni sulla piattaforma nel giro di qualche giorno). Dopo una valanga di messaggi e chiamate da familiari e amicɜ che mi fanno venire l'ansia all'istante, perché so che con questa enorme quantità d'amore arriva, a volte, la stessa o anche una più grande quantità d'odio, entro su Facebook con titubanza sapendo cosa avrei trovato e vedo che diversi uomini sconosciuti stanno ricondividendo il video e mi stanno taggando. Sfortunatamente molti di loro lo fanno per criticarmi pubblicamente. Questa cosa mi riporta indietro a quel bambino che voleva disperatamente piacere agli altri ragazzi e so di avere due opzioni: chiudere l'app e provare a ignorare l'odio oppure cercare di capire davvero cosa del mio intervento non piaceva agli uomini. Scelgo la seconda. Del resto, non posso predicare il sentirsi a proprio agio nel disagio senza essere disposto a sentire le opinioni delle persone a cui volevo arrivare. Dopo aver scrollato tra tutti i post di donne che mi elogiano arrivo al primo post di un uomo. È un uomo bianco che vive nel *Midwest* e ha condiviso il mio post con un avvertimento, usandomi praticamente come esempio degli errori "della sinistra" e scrivendo che sto attaccando gli uomini. Decido di contattarlo in privato per cercare di capire cosa dell'intervento gli avesse dato fastidio. Si capiva dal suo post che molto probabilmente non aveva guardato l'intervento completo ma che stava facendo ipotesi in base a quel pezzetto postato dal TED. Sorpreso dal mio messaggio, risponde educatamente e ammette di non aver visto il video completo, ma pensa di aver capito "cosa volevo dire" da quella clip che aveva visto. Gli chiedo gentilmente di guardare i diciotto minuti per intero e considerare l'idea di riparlarne meglio insieme, visto che molti dei suoi commenti davano ad intendere che fossi un femminista "odiatore di uomini" e che mi stessi scusando di essere uomo. Spiego il "perché" del mio intervento, in cui parlavo di usare le nostre qualità migliori come strumenti per scavare a fondo dentro noi stessi e di quanto fossi stato influenzato da mio padre. Dopo averlo guardato, mi scrive un lungo messaggio in cui si scusa per il post, poi posta subito delle scuse pubbliche e chiede agli altri suoi amici che avevano partecipato agli attacchi pubblici di guardare l'intervento per intero prima di condannarlo. Questo e altri scambi simili mi hanno dato tantissimissima speranza. Ho scoperto che gli uomini, se confrontati e gentilmente messi in discussione in privato, non solo erano più che disposti ad ascoltare ma, cosa ancora più motivante, erano aperti a fare quel lavoro necessario per trasformarsi nella versione più onesta e virtuosa di se stessi. La mia deduzione: la maggior parte di noi uomini, al di là di quello che facciamo o in cui crediamo, o

dello schieramento politico, vuole la stessa cosa. Vogliamo trasformarci nella migliore versione possibile di noi stessi, semplicemente essere uomini migliori. Questo è ciò che mi ha spinto ad andare avanti. E questo è il motivo per cui sto scrivendo questo libro.

Le nostre storie saranno pure diverse tra loro, ma esiste un filo comune che ci collega. E ogni uomo che conosco ha provato un milione di volte cosa vuol dire sentirsi un pesce fuor d'acqua. La mia storia raccoglie anni e anni di tentativi di entrare nella scatola del maschile, di cercare di indossare l'armatura che mi rendeva abbastanza uomo, finché mi sono sentito talmente schiacciato da colui che il mondo mi diceva di essere che non sapevo nemmeno chi fossi.

Il potere della mia storia non sta nei dettagli, anche se questo libro scaverà nei dettagli della mia esperienza. Il potere sta nell'invito. Sta nell'opportunità di sentire qualcosa nella mia storia che ti ricordi qualcosa nella tua, e che ti inviti ad avvicinartici, metterlo in discussione e riformularlo. Il potere sta nell'invito a credere che **non sei solo nelle difficoltà, nelle emozioni o nelle paure.** Non sei solo in questa scatola, questo soffocante sistema di identità costruite dalla società che ci ha spinti e costretti a credere che dobbiamo pensare, agire ed essere in un certo modo per essere abbastanza uomini.

Il rischio

Devo ammettere che mi spaventa un po' finire questo libro, pubblicarlo e poi lanciarlo in uno spazio pubblico in cui verrà apertamente criticato. Esiste un rischio innato nella vulnerabilità già nella sua definizione: la qualità o condizione di esposizione alla possibilità di venire attaccatɜ o feritɜ, fisicamente o emotivamente. Questo libro fa uscire allo scoperto parti di me e dei miei sentimenti di cui ho avuto difficoltà a parlare e, di conseguenza, di cui mi sono a lungo vergognato. Non voglio mettere i fatti miei in pubblica piazza o confessarmi, ma spero di far uscire allo scoperto la mia umanità, un'umanità che tuttɜ condividiamo.

E farò solo questo: uscire allo scoperto. Buttarmi a capofitto, guidato dal cuore, e condividere tutto con te nel modo più autentico e sincero possibile, perché non conosco altro modo di farlo. Il rischio di venire ferito, o ridicolizzato, o tagliato fuori dal mio genere (il genere da cui una parte di me, nonostante tutto questo processo, vuole ancora essere accettato) c'è. Ma in questo caso, le ricompense superano di gran lunga i rischi perché ciò che mi fa

persino più paura dell'essere insultato o bullizzato online è passare altri trent'anni o più con la paura di sapere chi sono davvero, conoscendo solo chi dovrei essere secondo il mondo.

La speranza

Che tu sia un uomo che, come me, sente di aver provato troppo a lungo a entrare in una scatola troppo piccola, una donna o una persona non binaria che vuole approfondire il modo in cui la mascolinità ha influenzato non solo la sua vita ma la vita degli uomini che conosce e ama, voglio che tu percepisca questo libro come un amico fidato. Voglio che questo libro serva da invito per iniziare, o continuare, la tua personale esplorazione. Non c'è un modo giusto. È questo lo scopo della decostruzione, che apre all'interpretazione e all'esplorazione, crea spazio e consente la creatività. E dove c'è creatività, c'è amore.

Voglio che questo libro sia un compagno di viaggio mentre ti fai strada nel lungo e tumultuoso percorso dalla testa al cuore, che ti fornisca delle verità sincere e umane che porteranno un po' di sollievo alla radicata convinzione di dover essere abbastanza X per essere abbastanza uomo.

Soprattutto, voglio che questo libro ripristini in te la convinzione che sei buonə, naturalmente e intrinsecamente buonə, e che la persona che sei, così come sei, è abbastanza.

CAPITOLO CINQUE

ABBASTANZA PRIVILEGIATO

La realtà del mio razzismo e del mio
privilegio maschile e bianco

> *Dovete superare il timore di affrontare la parte peggiore di voi stessi. Dovreste, invece, temere il razzismo inconsapevole. Dovreste temere l'idea che forse in questo momento potreste contribuire all'oppressione degli altri senza saperlo. Ma non temete chi fa emergere quell'oppressione. Non temete l'opportunità di fare di meglio.*[6]
>
> *—IJEOMA OLUO*

Se il titolo di questo capitolo o la citazione precedente ti hanno già scocciato, voglio dire due cose veloci: la prima è che lo capisco, perché un tempo avrebbero scocciato anche me, e la seconda è che ne parlerò lo stesso. Guarda, lo capisco. So quanto la parola "privilegio" sia diventata politica e divisiva. Ma se ti senti infastiditə dall'uso che faccio della parola in questo capitolo, allora spero che considererai l'opportunità di usare gli strumenti acquisiti nei capitoli precedenti per allontanare quella sensazione e chiederti il perché. Non si tratta di fare politica di parte (anche se potremmo discutere del fatto che tutto sia per natura politico), si tratta di umanità. Si tratta del mio scendere a patti con le mie stesse idee sul mondo e con i comportamenti che hanno ferito delle persone a cui voglio bene e che hanno contribuito a un mondo in cui la disuguaglianza e l'ingiustizia dilagano.

In un libro basato prevalentemente sulla vulnerabilità e sulla trasparenza, non dire che questo capitolo è stato scritto per ultimo, pur trovandosi a metà del libro, sarebbe una mancanza da parte mia. Avevo appena finito di scrivere più di ottantamila parole, accennando qua e là alla mia bianchezza e ripetendo prevalentemente che la mia storia (questo libro) è stata scritta, ovviamente, dalla mia prospettiva di uomo bianco. Ma non avevo mai approfondito né il razzismo sistemico, né tantomeno il mio personale razzismo, elemento importante nella mia storia e nella mia socializzazione.

Poi il 25 maggio 2020 George Floyd, un uomo americano nero, viene assassinato da alcuni poliziotti a Minneapolis. Nonostante Floyd non fosse di certo la prima persona nera ad essere assassinata dalla polizia, la risposta collettiva delle persone bianche al suo omicidio, negli Stati Uniti e nel mondo, stavolta è diversa. Si è detto che il 2020 è stato l'anno in cui

siamo finalmente riuscitз a vedere le cose in modo chiaro: per molte persone bianche vedere Floyd morire per mano di un poliziotto mentre gli altri stavano lì senza fare niente è stato abbastanza per comprendere chiaramente che esiste un problema più grande, passato e presente, di cui facciamo parte. Sono stato costretto a cercare di capire perché non avevo risposto con la stessa rabbia agli omicidi precedenti, perché non stavo usando la mia voce e il megafono dato alla mia voce per promuovere l'antirazzismo nello stesso modo in cui avevo fatto con l'antisessismo. Quale parte di me sceglieva di ignorare questo problema proprio come molti uomini ignorano i tratti della propria mascolinità, appresi attraverso la socializzazione? Perché come Bahá'í che crede nello sradicamento di tutti gli -ismi e che si aggrappa saldamente alle parole di Bahá'u'lláh: "Siete tutti frutti di un solo albero e foglie di un solo ramo"[7], non l'ho affrontato prima, sia con me stesso che col mondo? Perché ero così disposto a "imparare a stare a mio agio nel disagio" quando si trattava della mia mascolinità ma non quando si trattava di razzismo e privilegio bianco?

È un mio lavoro, una mia responsabilità e un mio dovere non solo trovare le risposte a queste domande, ma anche usare le risorse a cui ho facile accesso e l'immeritato potere che mi è stato dato come uomo bianco rispettivamente per educare me stesso e per aiutare a cambiare il sistema affinché possa diventare più equo per tuttз.

L'intersezionalità è integrità

Per la prima volta in più di trentacinque anni riconosco che la mia socializzazione come uomo non può essere separata da quella come persona bianca, e che essere riuscito a tenere le due cose separate così a lungo presuppone un privilegio di cui ho sempre goduto. Questo privilegio è parte del motivo per cui ho la piattaforma che ho, per cui posso produrre e dirigere film, recitare a Hollywood e scrivere questo libro. In altre parole, il sistema non mi riconosce dei benefici solo perché sono un uomo, il sistema mi riconosce dei benefici anche perché sono un uomo bianco (per non parlare del fatto che sono un uomo bianco, etero-cis e abile che proviene da una famiglia appartenente alla classe media). Come ha detto Nico Juárez, uomo messicano-statunitense di origini Tzotzil, quando ha condiviso parte della sua storia nel libro di Liz Plank, *For the love of men*: "L'etnia cambia radicalmente la mascolinità. Dobbiamo pensare alla mascolinità come ad una questione profondamente etnica"[8].

Solo da qualche anno ho imparato che l'idea che la mia vita sia un concentrato di tanti privilegi diversi e che quindi dovrei usare questi privilegi per difendere chi si trova nella situazione opposta, fa parte della cosiddetta intersezionalità, un termine usato da più di trent'anni da chi si batte per la parità e l'equità, facendo attivismo e organizzando eventi e manifestazioni.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, docente di giurisprudenza alla UCLA[9] e alla Columbia Law School[10], ha coniato il termine "intersezionalità" nel 1989 con la pubblicazione di un saggio incentrato su alcune cause giudiziarie che avevano al centro episodi di discriminazione razziale e sessuale. Crenshaw descrive l'intersezionalità come "la lente attraverso cui si riesce a vedere da dove provengono le diverse forme di potere, dove si scontrano, si intrecciano e si incrociano. Non si tratta semplicemente di un problema legato al colore della pelle di qua, al genere di qua, alla classe o all'orientamento sessuale di là. Molto spesso questo modo di pensare cancella il vissuto di persone soggette a tutte queste cose assieme."[11]

In altre parole, non posso scrivere un libro, vivere una vita all'insegna dell'integrità e parlare apertamente di questa battaglia contro la mia mascolinità senza allo stesso tempo lottare contro i *bias*, i pregiudizi e la discriminazione razziale che coesistono nella mia socializzazione all'interno di questa cultura. Non posso capire come il sessismo e la disparità di genere abbiano giocato a mio favore a discapito delle donne e delle persone trans e non binarie senza informarmi su come il razzismo e la disuguaglianza razziale abbiano giocato a mio favore a discapito di tutte le persone nere, native americane e razzializzate.

Ho tanto da imparare. Ho tanto da disimparare. Questo capitolo è un semplice accenno del lavoro che sta appena iniziando dentro di me, e, come il resto del libro, non sarà mai completo, perché avrò sempre da imparare. E dal momento che è solo un accenno, mi concentrerò prevalentemente sull'impatto che la mia bianchezza e il mio razzismo hanno sulla comunità nera, visto che è su questo che sto imparando di più al momento, pur sapendo che quest'impatto si allarga alle comunità indigene e a tutte le comunità di persone razzializzate. In ogni comunità razzismo e bianchezza si incrociano in modo diverso e, a dire la verità, non ho ancora svolto abbastanza di quel lavoro privato e personale che mi permetta di esprimere un punto di vista esperto e onesto sulle comunità indigene e sulle altre comunità razzializzate. Temo che ci sia persino una buona probabilità che fra uno, cinque o dieci anni, rileggendo il contenuto di questo capitolo (magari dell'intero libro), in cui parlo di cosa ho imparato finora, noterò di aver detto qualcosa di offensivo e ignorante. Però preferisco affrontare questa paura invece che, come dice l'autrice Ijeoma Oluo, avere paura del mio personale razzismo

inconsapevole o di star contribuendo all'oppressione di altre persone, di persone che amo o della mia stessa famiglia, senza nemmeno saperlo.

Non vedo colori

Kay e io abbiamo stretto amicizia grazie alla fede che abbiamo in comune. Lei è una donna nera che incarna le parole di 'Abdu'l-Bahá quando dice: "Sei come la pupilla dell'occhio che, nera di colore, è fonte di luce e rivela il mondo contingente"[12]. Sfortunatamente, come succede per molte donne nere, il profondo impatto che Kay ha avuto sul mio viaggio alla scoperta del privilegio, del razzismo e della giustizia razziale le è costato un prezzo che non avrebbe mai dovuto pagare.

Subito dopo esserci sposatɜ, io, Emily e altrɜ quattro amicɜ prendiamo un volo da Los Angeles a Nashville, in Tennessee, per andare a un matrimonio. Kay è tra questɜ, e non solo è l'unica donna nera del gruppo, ma è anche l'unica persona nera al matrimonio. Il matrimonio è stupendo, noi ci divertiamo e lɜ sposɜ si godono a pieno la gioia dell'essere circondatɜ dalle persone che amano. Dopo i festeggiamenti, noi sei usciamo per esplorare la vita notturna di Nashville. Appena salitɜ in macchina, Kay inizia a piangere. Durante il matrimonio era successo qualcosa che il resto di noi non aveva assolutamente notato ma che l'aveva ferita profondamente. E il fatto che nessunə di noi fosse stato in grado di accorgersi che Kay si era sentita ferita e a disagio peggiorava persino la situazione. Appena arrivatɜ al matrimonio a tuttɜ lɜ invitatɜ erano stati consegnati un programma e un sacchettino, insieme alle istruzioni per il lancio del contenuto dello stesso sulla coppia di sposɜ quando avrebbero percorso la navata. In alcuni matrimoni si lancia il riso o si soffiano bolle di sapone, in altri si accompagnano lɜ sposɜ fuori dalla sala ricevimenti con delle stelline scintillanti. In questo matrimonio, invece, ogni sacchetto conteneva dei fiocchi di cotone da sfilacciare e lanciare come coriandoli per celebrare il loro amore.

Esatto, si chiedeva a Kay di celebrare lanciando in aria quello che lɜ suɜ avɜ erano statɜ costrettɜ a raccogliere sotto schiavitù.

Alcunɜ di voi, leggendo, saranno rimastɜ a bocca aperta nell'immaginare quanto doloroso, sconvolgente ed emotivamente complesso deve essere stato per Kay. Avrete capito subito, anche prima di leggerlo, che dentro il sacchettino c'era del cotone. Starete empatizzando con lei e, se siete persone nere, la sua storia vi ricorderà che voi, lɜ vostrɜ amicɜ o la vostra

famiglia avete vissuto situazioni simili. Al contempo alcunɜ di voi potrebbero aver letto ed essersi chiestɜ quale caspita è il problema. Ovvio che la sposa e lo sposo non hanno scelto il cotone per i suoi rimandi alla schiavitù! Non solo sarete confusɜ dalla reazione di Kay, ma vi sentirete frustratɜ dalla sua irrazionalità. Capisco entrambe le reazioni, perché la nostra reazione iniziale nei confronti della nostra cara amica è stata la seconda, e sfortunatamente ci è voluto fin troppo per arrivare alla prima.

Più tardi quella sera, quando Kay ci parla di come si è sentita al matrimonio e di quanto è stata male per la storia del cotone, invece di ascoltare, empatizzare e rispettarla, tutto il gruppo minimizza non solo i suoi sentimenti ma proprio la sua umanità. Ignoriamo il suo dolore e difendiamo la coppia, pregandola di capire che sono brave persone e che la cosa non c'entra niente con la questione razziale. Lei si sente abbandonata e, dice, non capita. Con l'intenzione di portare "pace" e "unione", rispondo al suo dolore dicendole che quando la guardo non vedo una donna nera, vedo solo la mia amica. Non vedo colori, vedo il suo cuore. In altre parole, dimostro che aveva ragione.

In quanto persona bianca, mi è stato insegnato a dire che non vediamo colori, che non vediamo differenze, che noi trattiamo tuttɜ allo stesso modo. All'inizio questo non vedere colori sembra molto bello e idealistico alle persone bianche, ma in realtà non tiene in considerazione né il tema della socializzazione, né i pilastri portanti su cui si fondano gli Stati Uniti, né tantomeno le ricchissime e bellissime culture delle persone razzializzate e la loro umanità. Anzi, l'affermazione "non vedo colori" detta da una persona bianca, a prescindere dalle sue buone intenzioni, spesso viene percepita da una persona razzializzata proprio come è stata percepita da Kay, come uno "scelgo di non vedere TE". Guarda, non è un segreto che tuttɜ vediamo i colori, a prescindere dal colore della nostra pelle. Quindi quando una persona bianca dice a una persona nera che non vede colori, quello che cerca di dire in realtà è: "Non sono razzista". Ma nel mio caso quello che in realtà stavo dicendo a Kay era che, pur sapendo che è nera, sceglievo di ignorare questo aspetto e farle *whitewashing*[13], creando un'amicizia che rispettasse i miei limiti… non i suoi.

Quello che mi sembra ancora più pazzesco è che la narrativa del "non vedere colori" va anche contro gli insegnamenti della mia stessa fede, eppure in qualche modo, sulla base di come sono stato socializzato in quanto persona bianca che vive in America, ho cambiato la narrativa e frainteso completamente quegli insegnamenti. Parlando di colori e diversità, 'Abdu'l-Bahá ci dice: "Guardate un bel giardino pieno di fiori, alberi e arbusti. Ogni fiore ha un differente fascino, una grazia speciale, un suo profumo delizioso e un suo bel colore. E anche gli alberi, quanto differiscono in grandezza, sviluppo, fogliame e quanto diversi sono i

loro frutti! Ma tutti questi fiori, questi arbusti, questi alberi hanno radici nella stessa terra, il medesimo sole risplende su di loro e le medesime nuvole li irrorano di pioggia". E continua così: "Se incontrate gente di razza e colore diversi dai vostri [...] Considerateli come fossero rose di diverso colore, che crescono nel bellissimo giardino dell'umanità e rallegratevi di essere fra loro"[14].

Come ho fatto a non arrivarci? Come gruppo non ci siamo curatɜ del dolore di Kay e quando ce l'ha palesato e condiviso abbiamo chiuso gli occhi, oltre che la mente e il cuore. Una volta a casa dopo il viaggio, Kay manda una mail di gruppo e, con una rabbia giustificata, scrive: "Bel comportamento di merda". Ci spiega che si aspettava di meglio da noi e quanto sia profondamente ferita dall'intera situazione. Continua dicendo: "Quella sera mi sono resa conto che lɜ miɜ carɜ amicɜ, che aspirano all'unità in una società globale e inclusiva, non avevano idea di come è fatto il mio dolore. Stavo tremando, ero sul divano con voi e non mi avete vista. Non sapevate nemmeno come guardare".

La sua mail è sincera e istruttiva (e non dovrebbe essere lei a investire la sua energia e portare il peso di educarci sul perché il suo disagio, il suo dolore e la sua paura siano validi). Conclude con: "Come donna nera, la vita mi ha insegnato a non reagire. Correrei il rischio di essere liquidata come quella drammatica, irascibile o poco intelligente… o peggio, di essere ostracizzata e restare completamente sola. Palesare le mie emozioni più profonde è un privilegio che non ho mai avuto. In una situazione di isolamento e prevaricazione di solito evito di reagire e sopravvivo."

Vorrei poter dire che la sua mail accese qualcosa in noi. Rileggendola adesso mi sembra quasi incredibile non averla capita, non essere corso a scusarmi per poi iniziare ad analizzare i motivi per cui non ci ero arrivato prima e non c'ero stato per lei. Una persona che amavo si era messa a nudo, mostrandomi il suo dolore, e io ero volutamente troppo ignorante per vederlo, oltre che troppo orgoglioso e fragile per sostenerlo. Quello che è successo dopo mi imbarazza profondamente. Invece di chiamarla immediatamente, io e mia moglie, confusɜ e privilegiatɜ, ribaltiamo la narrazione, ci concentriamo sulle nostre emozioni e trasformiamo in mille modi il nostro privilegio in vittimismo. Secondo noi stava facendo un casino per niente e ci sentivamo attaccatɜ in modo irrazionale.

Nei sei anni successivi, poco a poco ho iniziato a imparare dallɜ miɜ amicɜ nerɜ – e ad ascoltare davvero – quando condividevano esperienze simili a quella di Kay. Una volta intrapreso il viaggio dentro me stesso e la mia mascolinità, poco a poco iniziavo a capire come i discorsi sulla giustizia razziale si incrociassero con il mio viaggio. Ogni tanto pensavo alla situazione con Kay e sentivo un profondo rimorso rispetto a come l'avevo gestita e a come

avevo maltrattato i suoi sentimenti e la sua umanità. Sentivo quel magone, quel peso sul cuore, che mi suggeriva di scusarmi. Ma puntualmente lo mettevo da parte, dicendo a me stesso che eravamo tuttɜ amicɜ e che, dal momento che tuttɜ erano andatɜ avanti, riprendere l'argomento avrebbe solo riaperto vecchie ferite.

Poi George Floyd viene ucciso. Non dovevano volerci né la sua morte, né le innumerevoli altre morti, precedenti e successive. Non doveva volerci la quarantena obbligatoria durante una pandemia globale. Non doveva volerci tutto questo per prendere il telefono e chiamare Kay. È problematico che ci sia voluto così tanto a livello sociale ed è problematico che a Kay sia costato così tanto a livello personale prima che io e mia moglie la chiamassimo per scusarci, prima che capissimo quanto ci sbagliavamo e quanto fosse piena di amore e gentilezza la mail di Kay in realtà. Ma, purtroppo e con tanto imbarazzo, è stato così.

Devo ammettere che Emily e io eravamo agitatissimɜ quando l'abbiamo contattata per chiederle di fare una videochiamata su FaceTime. Penso di non essermi sentito così agitato dai tempi del TED. Ti risparmio i dettagli della conversazione ma, in sintesi, volevamo farle capire quanto ci dispiacesse, non solo per quello che era successo ma anche per averla delusa, come amicɜ e come esseri umani. Le spieghiamo che era grazie a lei, alla sua vulnerabilità e alla sua voglia di educare lɜ suɜ amicɜ bianchɜ, seppur nel suo dolore, che entrambɜ avevamo finalmente deciso di informarci, iniziando a disimparare e reimparare tutto ciò che credevamo di sapere. Le spiego quanto era stato problematico il mio comportamento quando le avevo detto "non vedo colori" e più di tutto quanto ci dispiace di averci messo così tanto per svegliarci. Poi le prometto che avrei fatto qualsiasi cosa per educare me stesso e la mia famiglia e avere quelle conversazioni scomode con altre persone bianche, perché il peso di educare le persone bianche non dovrebbe ricadere su di lei o sulle altre persone nere.

Kay reagisce alle nostre scuse come non era tenuta a fare, come onestamente non ci meritavamo, con una grazia proveniente dalla profonda sorgente d'amore con cui ha sempre vissuto la sua vita. Accetta le nostre scuse e ci riappacifichiamo. Ci mostra ciò di cui parlava 'Abdu'l-Bahá: la fonte di luce dentro di sé e le possibili fattezze del mondo se scegliamo di vedere realmente l'altrə. Quando vedremo l'altrə, colore della pelle e tutto il resto, questo mondo possibile, fatto di giustizia ed equità, non esisterà a spese delle persone nere, della fenomenale donna nera che è Kay.

L’uomo bianco benintenzionato

Oltre ad aver detto a Kay che non vedo colori, ci sono altre cose che ho pensato, detto, postato e twittato che solo di recente ho imparato essere indicatori del mio razzismo interiorizzato, ad esempio:

“La mia prima amica è stata una ragazza nera”.

“Era un ottimo atleta, come tanti ragazzini neri”.

“Non c’entra il colore della pelle, dai. Non c’è bisogno di farne un dramma”.

“Alcunɜ dellɜ miɜ migliorɜ amicɜ sono nerɜ”.

“*Black Lives Matter*[15]. Ma anche la vita dellɜ poliziottɜ conta, così come quella di tuttɜ. Facciamo parte di un’unica famiglia di esseri umani.”

Sfortunatamente la lista è molto più lunga, e sono sicuro che avrò da aggiungere man mano che continuerò ad imparare, disimparare e reimparare cosa vuol dire essere un uomo, e in particolare cosa vuol dire essere un uomo bianco in questo periodo e all’interno di questa cultura.

Come alla maggior parte dellɜ bambinɜ bianchɜ cresciutɜ in America, mi è stato insegnato che il razzismo si configura con le azioni orribili ed esplicite di chi credeva che le persone nere non dovessero bere dalle stesse fontane delle persone bianche, che dovessero sedersi sulle ultime file negli autobus o che gli uomini neri meritassero il linciaggio se sospettati di aver guardato una donna bianca. Il razzismo erano la schiavitù e, dopo la fine della stessa, la negazione del diritto di voto. Razzistɜ sono i membri del KKK e le persone cattive, ignoranti e di solito anziane che vivono nella parte meridionale degli Stati Uniti e che continuano a usare la parola con la “n”. In altre parole, mi è stato insegnato che dopo il periodo dei movimenti per i diritti civili il razzismo aveva smesso di essere sistemico, lɜ razzistɜ erano relegatɜ ai margini della società e, se non lo erano, erano vecchiɜ e sarebbero mortɜ presto, dopo di che saremmo potutɜ andare tuttɜ d’amore e d’accordo. In pratica io, un ragazzo bianco italo-ebreo nato circa vent’anni dopo la fine del movimento per i diritti civili in una famiglia composta da genitorɜ abbastanza progressistɜ e *woke* che credono nell’unità e nell’armonia del genere umano, sono cresciuto credendo di poter essere tutto tranne che razzista.

Questa struttura di pensiero rispetto al razzismo è nota come logica binaria buono/cattivo, ed è quello che l’educatrice antirazzista Robin DiAngelo descrive come “l’adattamento forse più efficace del razzismo nella storia recente”[16]. Essa consente ai ragazzi bravi, gentili e benintenzionati come me di non essere razzisti, perché non colpevoli di quegli estremi e orrendi

atti di razzismo e pregiudizio di cui sopra. Funziona in modo simile al binarismo di genere, con le sue regole e i messaggi sulla mascolinità e sulla femminilità. La mascolinità stabilisce tratti accettabili e tratti inaccettabili da possedere per un uomo, i quali servono a misurare quanto sei "abbastanza uomo". Entrando nel merito della nostra comprensione viziata del razzismo, si crede che un polo della logica binaria sia razzista e l'altro no. Quindi: io che non commetto le atroci ed esplicite azioni razziste di cui sopra non mi colloco nel polo razzista.

DiAngelo spiega che se all'inizio questo adattamento della logica binaria buono/cattivo sembrava una cosa positiva, quello che fa nella pratica è esimere le persone bianche ben intenzionate dalle conversazioni sul razzismo, sulla socializzazione e sul condizionamento che subiamo all'interno di una società profondamente divisa dalle questioni razziali. E questo è quello che ho scoperto: quando mi dichiaro totalmente antirazzista, quando mi posiziono dalla parte dellɜ "buonɜ", mi sto anche esimendo dalla responsabilità di cambiarla. Alcune delle affermazioni riportate sopra vengono inconsciamente fatte per chiarire il mio antirazzismo. "La mia prima amica è stata una ragazza nera". "Alcunɜ dellɜ miɜ migliorɜ amicɜ sono nerɜ". Quando smetto di pensare in modo critico al perché io faccia affermazioni del genere, diventa evidente che sto cercando di chiarire che non faccio parte dellɜ cattivɜ e che mi sto difendendo in modo preventivo. Però questa è la realtà: non solo la logica binaria è falsa, ma il feedback che DiAngelo ha ricevuto dalle persone razzializzate dimostra che quando una persona bianca dice questo genere di cose non sembra *woke*; anzi, rivela il grado della propria inconsapevolezza.

Sulla falsariga delle affermazioni precedenti, quando dico, ad esempio: "Era un ottimo atleta, come tanti ragazzini neri", sto commettendo una microaggressione, sto perpetuando stereotipi che non tengono conto dell'individualità di ogni persona e, allo stesso tempo, sto dichiarando la falsa universalità di un intero gruppo di persone. La stessa cosa avviene quando qualcunə afferma che le persone asiatiche siano più intelligenti, amino fare i compiti, ecc. Le microaggressioni e gli stereotipi non sono sempre esplicitamente "negativi", eppure il loro impatto si somma a tutto il resto. Già solo generalizzare e parlare di "razza" raggruppando le persone sulla base di una falsa identità crea e perpetua gli stessi problemi che stiamo cercando di affrontare con la mascolinità. Ijeoma Oluo descrive le microaggressioni come punture d'ape: " [...] una casuale puntura d'ape potrebbe non essere niente di grave, un paio di punture casuali ogni giorno incideranno decisamente sulla qualità della vostra vita e sul vostro rapporto con le api in generale".[17] È come morire di una morte lenta e dolorosa. Quando faccio un'affermazione del genere, seppur con l'intenzione di celebrare l'abilità atletica di un bambino, perpetuo uno stereotipo secondo cui tutte le persone nere sono atletiche, non tenendo

dunque in considerazione i talenti e i doni unici né delle persone nere che non sono atletiche, né dellɜ atletɜ stessɜ. Privo le persone della loro individualità. In un certo qual modo credo di averlo fatto per sentirmi meglio davanti al fatto di non essere un atleta bravo come chi era migliore di me. In altre parole, per farmi forza mi autoconvincevo, sbagliando, di essere in svantaggio perché sono bianco, così da poter giustificare l'essere battuto da un bambino nero come il naturale risultato di una gara genetica più che di una gara atletica. In più, se poi sono io a vincere una gara contro una persona nera, seguire questa logica assurda crea un falso senso di vittoria e mi fa passare per l'*underdog*[18] perché, in quanto persona bianca, ho superato uno svantaggio che geneticamente non esiste.

Ora, credo che né io, né moltɜ dellɜ miɜ amicɜ bianchɜ siamo consapevoli di tutto questo quando facciamo commenti del genere, il che è parte del problema. La nostra maledetta inconsapevolezza è proprio la cosa che ferisce di più. Ho scoperto che un'esperienza comune per unə studentə nerə è che la gente pensi che faccia parte di una squadra e che possa frequentare l'università grazie ad una borsa di studio sportiva. Pensaci. Questa supposizione implica che lə studentə è statə ammessə per le sue abilità atletiche[19], non per quelle accademiche, per la sua *leadership,* per le esperienze nel volontariato o per la sua individualità.

Un altro esempio di microaggressione ha visto coinvolto uno dei miei migliori amici e testimoni di nozze, Jamey (che mi avrebbe poi accompagnato in quel famigerato viaggio in Messico). Io e Jamey stavamo cercando la camicia che avrei indossato il giorno del matrimonio. Non avevo tanti soldi all'epoca, ma questa era la camicia con cui mi sarei sposato, quindi volevamo che fosse una bella camicia. Quel giorno prendiamo una cosa da Starbucks ed entriamo in un negozio costoso di Los Angeles con le bevande in mano. Entrando, saluto il commesso con un cenno del capo e gli passo davanti col bicchiere in mano diretto verso una mensola vicina, mentre Jamey va a guardare le camicie da un'altra parte del negozio. Non appena inizio a guardare queste camicie costose, noto che un commesso si avvicina a Jamey e invece di dire: "Buongiorno signore, posso aiutarla?", dice: "Non puoi entrare con quel bicchiere". Lo sento e, confuso, mi dirigo verso di loro col mio caffè, visto che a Los Angeles si va sempre ovunque col caffè in mano e mai nessuno mi aveva detto che non si può portare dentro i negozi. Ora, Jamey, che si è trovato in questa situazione mille volte nella vita, sapeva esattamente cosa stava succedendo. Ma io ero ignaro. Il commesso era bianco, eravamo in un negozio altolocato e Jamey era un uomo nero vestito in modo molto *casual*. Scherzando, Jamey risponde: "Ok, hai paura che te lo versi sulle camicie?"

E il commesso: "Beh, le camicie sono molto costose". Al che Jamey ribatte: "E tu pensi che io non potrei permettermi di acquistare le tue costosissime camicie se inciampassi e ci

versassi il caffè sopra?" Ora, conosco bene Jamey e ha questo modo magico di farti un discorso dove ti sgancia delle grandi verità e nel frattempo disarmarti con l'umorismo e col tono. È una delle cose che amo di più di lui. Quindi inizio a sorridere, pensando che l'impiegato se ne sarebbe andato e ci avrebbe lasciato fare shopping, ma non lo fa, quindi Jamey continua: "Guardo in giro perché voglio spendere soldi nel vostro negozio e tu ti preoccupi per un caffè col tappo? Perché lui [indicandomi] può tenere il caffè e nessuno gli chiede di andarsene? Anzi il tuo collega lo aiuta pure". A questo punto mi intrometto e, da bravo "pacificatore" (che si legge: problematico uomo bianco) quale sono, minimizzo e dico a Jamey "Non c'entra il colore della pelle, dai. Andiamocene, tanto in ogni caso non hanno le camicie che stavo cercando". Al che Jamey si ammutolisce ed esce dal negozio. Appena lo raggiungo si gira e mi chiede perché non ho preso le sue parti. Gli dico che non pensavo che fosse una situazione così grave da fare una sceneggiata e che era solo una regola del negozio. Quindi Jamey si incazza di brutto. Giustamente.

"Justin, ti voglio bene ma stai scegliendo di non capire. Intendi una regola per ME? Nessunə ha chiesto a te di uscire. Nessunə nel negozio ha dubitato della tua possibilità di pagare la merce. Nessunə ha pensato che saresti inciampato e avresti riempito le camicie di caffè. Ma con me è successo! Questa merda mi succede in continuazione, Justin!"

La mia risposta? Mettermi sulla difensiva. Rivolgermi al mio benintenzionato uomo bianco interno che non vuole essere messo dalla parte "dellɜ cattivɜ" nella logica binaria del razzismo. Inizio a elencare tutte le cose che avevo visto, le volte in cui mi ero accorto, i vari modi in cui avevo lottato per l'uguaglianza e twittato di giustizia. In altre parole, rigiro nuovamente la discussione su di me e sulle mie intenzioni. Metto al centro me stesso e la mia esperienza invece che la frustrazione e il dolore di Jamey, quando in realtà la situazione richiedeva che ci si concentrasse su di lui, sull'impatto delle azioni del commesso e su quello delle mancate azioni di uno dei suoi migliori amici, io.

Ci dirigiamo quindi verso un altro negozio qualche porta più avanti e Jamey, ancora arrabbiato, entra e chiede al dipendente (un uomo nero): "Ehi, scusa. Ho il caffè. Posso entrare e dare un'occhiata?" Al che il commesso risponde "Se entri per spendere soldi, puoi entrare con quello che ti pare". Capisci, quest'altro uomo non vedeva la nerezza di Jamey come un motivo per respingerlo. E anche a quel punto, nel mio disagio e nella mia ignoranza, semplicemente ci rido su senza capire veramente cosa fosse successo. Volevo solo che fosse una bella giornata e che filasse tutto liscio, ma nel fare questo ho completamente ignorato l'esperienza del mio amico, credendo che il colore della pelle non c'entrasse.

Jamey è stato punto quasi ogni giorno della sua vita e quindi il suo rapporto con le api è diverso dal mio. Era come se mi stesse dicendo che un'ape l'aveva punto e che gli faceva male, ma siccome io non vedo l'ape scelgo di dire "Non lo so, fratello, sei sicuro? Magari non ti ha punto?" Nel frattempo lui ha un cavolo di pungiglione nel braccio e la puntura sta iniziando a gonfiarsi. Cos'è più importante in quel momento, le mie intenzioni o gli effetti della puntura? Nelle relazioni, gli effetti devono sempre avere più importanza delle intenzioni. Ma troppo spesso, specialmente quando vengo ripreso, che sia da Jamey per non aver notato questo tipo di ingiustizie o da mia moglie per averla interrotta, il mio classico difetto è stato quello di mettermi sulla difensiva e ribadire le mie buone intenzioni. Vorrei poter dire pure che è stata una delle poche volte in cui si è verificata una situazione del genere, ma sfortunatamente Jamey aveva cercato di parlarmi di queste punture d'ape per anni. Col senno di poi ho capito che per me scegliere di essere ignorante era semplicemente più facile che informarmi. Trovavo più semplice difendere le intenzioni dell'uomo bianco che "non intendeva quello" che difendere il mio amico.

Forse questa è la parte più difficile del riuscire a sentirmi a mio agio nel disagio. Imparare a prendermi una pausa prima di rispondere, specialmente quando la mia reazione iniziale sarebbe mettermi sulla difensiva. Spesso il mio atteggiamento difensivo mi fa capire che devo stare zitto, ascoltare e riflettere. Questo fa parte dell'assumersi il rischio di sfilare la maschera dietro cui mi sono nascosto, guardare verso me stesso in maniera critica e ammettere che forse non so tutto, forse mi sono trovato dalla parte sbagliata della storia in passato, forse ero all'oscuro del mio privilegio e di tutti i modi in cui il razzismo permea la nostra società. Forse ho un po' di lavoro da fare.

Quanto sarebbe ridicolo se come società dicessimo le stesse cose in relazione al genere? E se dicessi: "La mia prima amica era una ragazza quindi è normale che non oggettifico le donne"? Oppure: "Sono sposato con una donna, ho una figlia, mia mamma è una donna e ho una sorella che è donna, quindi non posso essere sessista"? O anche: "Non vedo generi, tratto tuttɜ allo stesso modo"? Questo intero viaggio verso la decostruzione della mia mascolinità non esisterebbe, questo libro nemmeno, e neppure i problemi che derivano dai condizionamenti sul genere all'interno della nostra cultura. Eppure eccomi qua, nel pieno di questo viaggio, che scrivo questo libro, che disimparo e reimparo cosa vuol dire essere un uomo, cosa vuol dire essere un bravo essere umano.

Devo fare lo stesso lavoro quando si tratta di razzializzazione, perché non farlo vuol dire caricare il peso della responsabilità proprio sulle spalle delle persone che per questo vengono oppresse. Allo stesso modo, se mi sottraggo al lavoro sulla mascolinità, involontariamente

passo la responsabilità del lavoro alle donne, alle persone trans e *gender non-conforming*[20], quando sono loro ad essere in quella posizione di svantaggio creata dal sistema in cui viviamo. In più, se mi sottraggo al lavoro e alla responsabilità, rinuncio anche alla connessione, alla possibilità di guarire delle parti di me e alla gioia che ne derivano. Rinuncio a godermi appieno il viaggio, che non è sempre facile ma è pieno di significato, e che finora ne è sempre valso la pena. Dopotutto, più che essere un uomo bianco benintenzionato, voglio fare la differenza come partner, padre, amico ed… essere umano.

Esaminare il mio privilegio

Non mi è stato insegnato a vedere il privilegio bianco, così come non mi è stato insegnato a vedere il privilegio maschile.

Come il privilegio maschile, il privilegio bianco è una forza invisibile che mi regala vantaggi che non tuttɜ hanno.

Come il privilegio maschile, il privilegio bianco ci viene instillato attraverso la socializzazione all'interno della società e della cultura.

Come per il privilegio maschile, parlare di privilegio bianco mi mette a disagio. Se ti infastidisce che io dica "privilegio maschile" e "privilegio bianco", ciò vuol dire una cosa sola: dobbiamo parlarne. Quindi facciamoci questo bagno ghiacciato insieme, l'acqua non sarà calda ma ti prometto che ci farà bene.

Non ricordo la prima volta che mi sono imbattuto nel concetto di privilegio bianco, ma mi ricordo benissimo come tendevo a mettermi sulla difensiva e sviare il discorso. Però ho scoperto di essermi fatto un'idea sbagliata di quello che era il privilegio bianco. Quando ho iniziato ad approcciarmi all'idea di privilegio maschile, mi sentivo come se mi si dicesse che non lavoravo duramente, che non mi meritavo davvero il posto o la promozione, che il sacrificio e il duro lavoro erano invisibili e che avevo quello che avevo perché sono maschio. Dicevo cose come: "Mi sono fatto il culo per arrivare dove sono, nessuno mi ha regalato niente" e "Tutto quello che ho me lo sono guadagnato". Ogni volta che qualcunə pronunciava la parola "privilegio" o insinuava che io l'avessi provavo fastidio e rabbia. Mi sentivo come se mi stessero derubando della mia storia e dei miei sacrifici (mmm, ti ricorda qualcosa?). Mi sentivo nello stesso modo quando si parlava di privilegio bianco. Ma il mio mettermi sulla difensiva era sintomo della mia ignoranza.

Esistono molte forme di privilegio che onestamente meritano un libro a sé. Ogni giorno imparo qualcosa e sono grato non solo per la posizione che occupo all'interno della società ma anche per il privilegio di godere di una cosa così semplice come l'avere un corpo sano e abile. Cioè, quante volte mi sveglio e mi sento grato di essere in salute, avere un paio di braccia, vedere bene o poter camminare? Di solito non apprezziamo i benefici e i privilegi che ci dà il nostro corpo finché le nostre capacità fisiche non sono compromesse o vengono meno. In quanto persona abile sono sicuro che negozi, case, parchi e quartieri sono tutti accessibili per me. Posso viaggiare e mangiare fuori senza pensare a come destreggiarmi tra i trasporti pubblici o ai controlli di sicurezza all'aeroporto. Ma allo stesso tempo parlare del mio privilegio di corpo abile non mi fa venire voglia di sviare il discorso e mettermi sulla difensiva, né mi mette a disagio. Perché? Una parte di me crede che sia perché quello del colore della pelle e del genere sono diventati argomenti molto politicizzati. Forse è a causa di quella logica binaria buono/cattivo e del non voler riconoscere il mio privilegio bianco perché allora non potrei più ignorare le ingiustizie razziali. O forse è qualcosa di completamente diverso che devo ancora imparare. Ma capisco che godere di privilegi derivanti da un corpo abile non significa non aver mai avuto difficoltà o non aver fatto sacrifici, significa semplicemente non dover far fronte a *quelle* specifiche difficoltà o sacrifici.

Penso al privilegio come ai 110 metri ostacoli. Prima di tutto, in senso strettamente letterale, sono privilegiato persino a poter essere sulla pista e gareggiare, perché una persona in sedia a rotelle non potrebbe nemmeno partecipare alla corsa a ostacoli e ha molte meno opportunità di gareggiare in qualsiasi tipo di corsa rispetto a me. Quindi già dal principio ci troviamo davanti al privilegio abile. Questo vuol dire che non mi sono fatto il culo per allenarmi, che non ho bevuto abbastanza acqua e introdotto abbastanza sostanze nutritive (assolutamente ipotetico, visto che da adolescente mi ingozzavo di cibo messicano a pranzo giusto qualche ora prima di allenarmi)? No, significa semplicemente che ho un'opportunità, un vantaggio che non tuttɜ hanno.

In modo figurato collego il privilegio agli ostacoli nel senso che ognunə gareggia nella propria corsia, eppure ciascunə ha i propri ostacoli, o barriere, lungo il percorso per arrivare al traguardo. Semplificando al massimo, privilegio bianco significa che il colore della pelle per me non sarà mai un ostacolo, così come privilegio maschile significa che per me il genere non sarà mai una barriera. Non vuol dire che non ho ostacoli davanti, cioè che non faccio sacrifici e che non sto lavorando duro, significa solo che il colore della mia pelle non giocherà mai a mio svantaggio. E in una società costruita su un divario razziale così profondo, non avere un

ostacolo sulla pista non solo non è uno svantaggio, ma spesso è un vantaggio, così come lo è essere un uomo in una società patriarcale.

Se riesco a vedere chiaramente come funziona il mio privilegio abile, allora forse il mio privilegio bianco non è così invisibile come pensavo. Forse una volta osservato e ricercato diventa innegabilmente visibile, come il privilegio maschile.

Ecco alcuni esempi di privilegio bianco e/o maschile:

In base a un sondaggio del 2018, per ogni dollaro guadagnato da un uomo bianco negli Stati Uniti, una donna bianca guadagna solo 79 centesimi e una donna ispano-americana, latina o indigena ne guadagna 54.

Trovo facilmente cerotti color "carne" con un colore più o meno simile al mio incarnato. (Un ringraziamento speciale a Tru-Colour Bandages, brand pioniere nella creazione di bende e nastri kinesiologici in una vasta gamma di colori che si adattano a tantissimi tipi di pelle! *#notsponsored*[21])

Mi sento al sicuro e nella maggior parte delle occasioni non devo preoccuparmi della mia sicurezza. Una delle mie amiche più strette mi ha raccontato di una volta in cui ha chiesto al marito, un uomo bianco, quanto spesso pensasse alla propria sicurezza. Senza esitare lui ha risposto che succede raramente e solo in situazioni estreme come un incidente d'auto o un furto alla banca vicina al posto di lavoro. Poi lui ha chiesto la stessa cosa a lei. La sua risposta? Tutti i giorni, più volte al giorno. Quando mi incammino verso la macchina ed è buio, quando mi si avvicina un uomo al supermercato, quando vado a correre, quando in macchina verso casa noto che la stessa macchina mi è stata dietro per la maggior parte del tragitto, ogni volta che viaggio sola e sono seduta accanto a un uomo…" Dopo aver sentito questa cosa faccio a Emily la stessa domanda e, senza esitare, inizia a elencare tutte le cose a cui deve pensare ogni giorno e che letteralmente a me non passano nemmeno per la testa. Come al fatto che se è sola e deve arrivare alla macchina di sera, tiene le chiavi della macchina tra le dita come fossero una mini versione degli artigli di Wolverine.

In modo analogo, durante i suoi corsi l'educatore antisessista Jackson Katz ha chiesto a uomini e donne la stessa cosa per anni: "Cosa fai quotidianamente per evitare la violenza sessuale?" Katz spiega che quando porge questa domanda quasi tutte le donne presenti alzano la mano e riescono ad elencare quasi subito le innumerevoli azioni che

intraprendono: non andare a correre di sera, portare con sé uno spray al peperoncino, chiudere le portiere immediatamente dopo essere entrate in macchina, parcheggiare in zone ben illuminate, assicurarsi di aver condiviso posizione o itinerario con un*amicə o familiare, etc. In quanto a noi uomini, cosa diciamo di fare quotidianamente per prevenire la violenza sessuale? Niente. Nemmeno una mano alzata. È difficile credere che per noi uomini, e specialmente noi uomini bianchi, il mondo in cui viviamo possa essere così diverso solo a causa del corpo in cui siamo nati. Quella differenza non è altro che privilegio.

L'attivista Danielle Muscato ha posto la seguente domanda su Twitter: "[Donne,] Cosa fareste se tutti gli uomini avessero il coprifuoco alle 9 di sera?" Le risposte sono arrivate a migliaia e sinceramente leggerle spezzava il cuore. Invece di immaginare scenari selvaggi e avventurosi, la maggior parte delle donne scriveva che sarebbe andata a fare la spesa, a correre, che avrebbe ascoltato la musica con le cuffie, camminato fino alla macchina senza le chiavi tra le dita, pronte a essere usate come potenziale arma, o che sarebbe riuscita a dormire al primo piano con le finestre aperte. In altre parole, cose che dovrebbero essere fatte normalmente senza avere paura e che, onestamente, la maggior parte degli uomini come me si sente a proprio agio a fare tutti i giorni senza nemmeno pensarci. Vale la pena notare che la domanda di Muscato era scaturita da una conversazione avuta con un'amica, in cui la donna raccontava quanto fosse cambiata la sua vita da quando aveva fatto coming out come donna transgender, e come cose che non aveva mai nemmeno considerato prima adesso facevano parte del suo carico fisico e mentale quotidiano, un carico che pesa di più sulla comunità trans che su chiunque altrə. In modo analogo, durante una conversazione con Jevon Martin, l'attivista trans mi racconta di essere nato in un corpo femminile nero e di aver sperimentato tutte le varie forme di oppressione che derivano dall'essere una donna nera nel mondo, ma che dopo la transizione ha dovuto affrontare un'altra faccia del razzismo: come uomo nero, adesso veniva visto come una minaccia.

Devo ammettere che non sapevo quasi nulla delle inimmaginabili difficoltà della comunità trans nera. Di recente ho avuto l'opportunità di intervistare l'attivista trans Devin Michael Lowe, fondatore del Black Trans Travel Fund[22], un collettivo che si occupa di pagare tragitti privati in auto per donne trans nere a New York e in New Jersey, così che possano avere accesso autonomo a opzioni di viaggio più sicure. In un'indagine condotta dal National Center for Transgender Equality[23], a cui hanno partecipato più di

28000 persone (esclusivamente transgender), quasi la metà (47%) dellɜ partecipanti nerɜ dichiarava di essersi vista negare un trattamento paritario e di aver ricevuto molestie verbali e/o aggressioni fisiche nell'anno precedente a causa della propria transessualità. È stato grazie alle conversazioni che ho avuto con lɜ attivistɜ trans che ho imparato in che modo le persone rispetto a cui ho un privilegio godono anch'esse di privilegi rispetto a gruppi più marginalizzati. Da qui deriva l'importanza dell'intersezionalità in questa nostra conversazione.

Le persone che mi somigliano sono ampiamente rappresentate nei media, nell'industria dello spettacolo, nelle posizioni direttive, tra le più alte cariche politiche e nell'ambito dell'istruzione. In effetti, il mio intero percorso educativo si è concentrato attorno a persone che mi somigliavano. Non ho avuto insegnanti nerɜ o indigenɜ dall'asilo fino alla scuola superiore, e non ci avevo nemmeno mai pensato finché non ho scritto queste righe. Trovo facilmente libri per bambinɜ con personaggi che somigliano allɜ miɜ figliɜ e hanno una famiglia come la nostra, ma faccio tantissima fatica a trovare libri con altri tipi di personaggi e storie.

Ho un rapporto (solitamente) positivo con la polizia. Una volta, nell'autunno del 2014, dopo l'omicidio di Michael Brown a Ferguson, in Missouri, mentre guidavo verso casa vedo la polizia fermare una macchina con un uomo nero a bordo. In quel momento decido di fermarmi dall'altro lato della strada. Non sapevo esattamente cosa volevo fare, oltre ad essere pronto a riprendere la scena o, potenzialmente, intervenire se le cose si fossero messe male, e a proposito, chi cavolo sono io anche solo per pensare di intervenire? Questo è un chiaro segno di privilegio bianco. Dunque quando quell'uomo viene fermato, ancor prima di spegnere la macchina, abbassa il finestrino e mette le mani fuori sventolando la carta d'identità come se stesse sventolando bandiera bianca. Non avevo mai visto una cosa del genere di persona e vederlo mi ha distrutto. Sai a cosa penso io quando vengo fermato? Il mio primo pensiero ogni volta è: "Spero che non mi facciano niente". Nel senso che spero che non mi facciano la multa, anche se la maggior parte delle volte avevo sbagliato e me la meritavo. In quel momento, mi sono reso conto che mentre io penso a cavarmela al posto di blocco senza una multa, una persona nera spera di cavarsela ad un posto di blocco USCENDONE VIVA. Per fortuna così è stato per quest'uomo.

> Quella sera il mio privilegio bianco in relazione al mio rapporto con la polizia è diventato evidente. Sono andato a casa e ho twittato di quello che avevo visto e di come, in quanto persone bianche, abbiamo il dovere di contribuire al movimento Black Lives Matter. Non avevo letto libri né mi ero informato sul suprematismo bianco e sulla sfaccettata e complicata storia della polizia, per non parlare poi della complicata storia degli Stati Uniti, del cosiddetto "complesso del salvatore bianco"[24], e dell'eccezionalismo bianco. Quindi quando la gente ha iniziato a rispondermi che ero un orribile razzista perché avevo scritto "Black Lives Matter", che le vite dellɜ poliziottɜ e tutte le vite contano, non sapevo che fare. Cioè il discorso filava, no? Le vite dellɜ poliziottɜ contano e ovviamente tutte le vite contano, no? Vorrei poter dire di aver ignorato le risposte o di aver risposto in modo articolato e informato, ma non posso. Al contrario, sono andato nel panico perché la gente continuava a chiamarmi razzista. Per me questa era una cosa nuova che mi ha subito fatto sentire come se avessi fatto un casino o fossi stato frainteso. Quindi ho risposto che le vite dellɜ poliziottɜ contano e che ovviamente tutte le vite contano. Ma nella mia ignoranza non capivo perché queste risposte al movimento Black Lives Matter fossero problematiche e francamente razziste.

Mi squilla il telefono; è Jamey. Ha visto i miei tweet e mi dice: "Vedo il bene che stai facendo e vedo dove hai sbagliato". Mi spiega come il mio desiderio di fare da pacificatore non si basasse su una pace vera. Martin Luther King Jr. diceva: "La vera pace non è semplicemente l'assenza di tensione: è la presenza della giustizia." La mia idea di pace, come uomo bianco, è stata spesso incentrata sull'assenza di conflitto o tensione, anche in merito ad altre questioni oltre a quella razziale. A questo punto Jamey mi spiega, con tanto amore e pazienza, che quando si organizza una raccolta fondi o un evento dedicato al cancro al seno e lɜ sportivɜ indossano maglioni rosa per sensibilizzare sul tema, non ci presentiamo con dei cartelli dicendo che anche il cancro alla prostata conta! E che quando la casa dellɜ vicinɜ va a fuoco e intervengono lɜ pompierɜ, non corriamo fuori da casa nostra, che nel frattempo non sta andando a fuoco, per reclamare le stesse risorse destinate allɜ vicinɜ in quel momento. Abbiamo bisogno delle manichette! Abbiamo bisogno dellɜ pompierɜ! No, non è vero, perché casa nostra non sta andando a fuoco, la loro sì! Indipendentemente dalla tua posizione politica o dal giornale che leggi, spero che questa realizzazione riesca a colmare il divario tra ideologie faziose e diritti umani fondamentali. Come ho imparato sulla mia pelle, quando diciamo che la vita delle persone nere conta, non stiamo dicendo che la vita delle persone nere conta più di tuttɜ lɜ altrɜ, non stiamo dicendo che le vite dellɜ poliziottɜ non contano o che nessuna vita conta. Stiamo

dicendo semplicemente che è impossibile che tutte le vite contino finché finalmente non conteranno le vite delle persone nere.

Il *whitewashing* a Hollywood

Nel primo periodo della mia carriera da attore ho fatto un provino per una serie intitolata *Greek*, di cui poi sono state prodotte diverse stagioni per ABC Family[25]. Ai provini, che sono una delle ultime fasi nel processo di selezione, si recita dal vivo davanti a una platea formata da direttorɜ di produzione generalmente stressatɜ, registɜ e produttorɜ entusiastɜ che insieme decidono se sei quello giusto per la parte. Ricordo lə miə agente dirmi che ero il favorito e che dovevo solo entrare e spaccare al provino. Non potevo andare meglio, per cui esco sicuro che il ruolo fosse già mio. Mi squilla il telefono. Che lə miə agente e lə miə manager mi chiamassero insieme significava sempre ricevere o una notizia ottima o una notizia pessima. Stavolta si trattava decisamente della seconda. Mi dicono che, sebbene per lɜ autorɜ della serie fossi la prima scelta per il ruolo, non avevo avuto la parte perché "sarò onestə, l'emittente pensa che in video le tue sopracciglia siano fonte di distrazione".

Poi mi chiedono senza mezzi termini se avrei voluto sistemarle, perché questo mi avrebbe aiutato a ottenere quel tipo di parti. Quali erano di preciso "quel tipo di parti"? Non sapevo spiegarlo allora, ma so farlo adesso. Erano parti destinate a ragazzi tradizionalmente bianchi. L'ironia? Io sono bianco. Ma per Hollywood non lo ero abbastanza. I miei tratti erano troppo ambigui per la loro definizione di bianchezza e, di conseguenza, mi sono trovato a fare sempre più audizioni per personaggi spagnoli, latini o mediorientali.

Uno dei primi ruoli per cui sono stato chiamato è stato quello di principe iracheno in una serie dei primi anni 2000 intitolata *JAG*. Mi ricordo del mio ingresso in una sala audizioni dove c'erano circa altri dieci ragazzi in attesa del proprio turno, tutti mediorientali. Indovina chi ha avuto la parte? Il ragazzo bianco. Quando chiedo se dovessi imparare a fare l'accento iracheno, lɜ produttorɜ dicono allə miə manager di non preoccuparmi, che sarei stato "americanizzato". Quando diversi mesi dopo la serie viene trasmessa in TV, indovina che avevano fatto? Mi avevano doppiato. Avevano preso la voce di un uomo mediorientale e l'avevano sovrapposta alla mia, quindi era la mia faccia con la sua voce.

Se io ricordo ancora, giusto qualche anno dopo, come mi sono sentito quando mi hanno detto che le mie sopracciglia erano fonte di distrazione e quanto mi infastidisse non rientrare

nel tradizionale stereotipo del biondo con gli occhi azzurri che l'emittente aveva in mente per il ruolo, posso solo immaginare come si sentissero gli attori mediorientali che finalmente avevano la possibilità di fare un'audizione per un ruolo da principe – una gradita pausa dai soliti ruoli da terrorista o estremista islamico in cui vengono incasellati – per poi vedere arrivare un uomo non proprio mediorientale, un uomo bianco, e prendersi la parte. Questo è un esempio del *whitewashing* frequente nella storia degli Stati Uniti, e quindi ovviamente anche di Hollywood.

I libri di testo hanno edulcorato la verità della storia americana e delle violenze di massa compiute dai colonizzatori bianchi nei confronti di persone nere, indigene e, in generale, razzializzate. Questo è il motivo per cui il Columbus Day[26] è ancora una festa riconosciuta a livello federale in tutti gli Stati Uniti, mentre l'Indigenous Peoples' Day[27] è riconosciuta come festa ufficiale solo in sei stati. Questo è il motivo per cui ogni 19 giugno il Juneteenth[28] passa ampiamente inosservato al di fuori della comunità nera. In effetti ho scoperto solo di recente che il vero giorno dell'indipendenza americana è proprio il 19 giugno, giorno che celebra l'emancipazione delle persone nere dalla schiavitù. Solo da quest'anno, dopo aver scoperto questa cosa, la nostra azienda ha finalmente riconosciuto il Juneteenth come giornata di ferie retribuita. Le conseguenze della storia americana, che ha spesso occultato la verità, continuano ad avere effetto ancora oggi: nella scelta di celebrare o meno una festa nazionale; nel divario tra come i media dipingono un genocida bianco e come lo fanno con una persona nera che commette un crimine di rilevanza nettamente inferiore (o anche una persona nera che non ha commesso crimini); nella pratica dell'industria cosmetica di schiarire il tono della pelle delle persone razzializzate nelle pubblicità; nella lunga storia di assegnazione di personaggi non bianchi a uomini bianchi a Hollywood.

Ma come ho detto, tutto questo l'ho scoperto da poco. Non avevo queste informazioni e questa consapevolezza quando venivo rifiutato per ruoli tradizionalmente bianchi e mi venivano assegnati personaggi non bianchi. Mi ricordo di conversazioni avute durante le audizioni o sui vari set con altri attori, in cui condividevamo le nostre esperienze, e di un attore nero che mi racconta di come riuscisse a ottenere più ruoli della sua ragazza perché, sebbene lei fosse più brava di lui a recitare, lui aveva la pelle più chiara. Nel tentativo di fare amicizia, e col senno di poi capisco perché la cosa sortisse l'effetto opposto, ho detto una cosa tipo: "Ah, ti capisco. In questo posto non capiscono la mia etnia e non sanno dove collocarmi". Ora, anche se questa cosa è vera, la mia esperienza come uomo bianco è *molto* diversa ed esagerare nell'identificare la mia esperienza con quella di persone razzializzate significa non tenere conto di strutture e sistemi che esistono a beneficio mio, ma a svantaggio loro.

Andando velocemente avanti di dieci anni, tornato da una pausa dalla recitazione, una delle prime audizioni che faccio è quella per Rafael Solano in *Jane the Virgin*. Vedo che il personaggio sarebbe dovuto essere latino, ma non ci faccio troppo caso; del resto, ero così abituato a fare audizioni per questi ruoli che spesso, scherzando, dicevo di non aver mai saputo di essere latino finchè non mi sono trasferito a Hollywood. Pensandoci adesso, non fa così ridere come credevo, principalmente perché, dopo aver passato cinque anni in una serie insieme ad attorɜ latinɜ, so quanto sono alte le barriere che tuttɜ loro hanno dovuto superare per arrivare dove sono. E sebbene io, come loro, mi sia fatto il culo sacrificando e dedicando anni della mia vita prima di sbarcare il lunario, mettiamola come vogliamo ma avevo comunque un vantaggio ingiusto. Ora, al tempo non lo sapevo, ma la CW[29] aveva cercato un Rafael per mesi e visto diversi ragazzi, ma non l'aveva trovato, quindi alla fine aveva aperto il ruolo a tutte le etnie. Ecco perché all'audizione era pieno di persone di tutte le etnie, tra cui qualche ragazzo bianco, biondo con gli occhi azzurri, quindi, ripeto, non avevo proprio pensato alla questione. Il resto è storia, perché alla fine ho avuto la parte e, come ho detto, è stata la parte della vita, oltre che probabilmente uno dei motivi per cui stai leggendo questo libro. La parte mi ha dato l'opportunità di interpretare un uomo interessante in una serie televisiva in prima serata, di trovare un modo di descrivere autenticamente la vita interiore di un uomo virile, confuso e demoralizzato, che è costretto a intraprendere un viaggio all'esplorazione della propria identità e della propria mascolinità. Non ho pensato due volte, ma nemmeno una, alla possibilità di aver rubato la parte a un attore latino perché c'erano tantissimi altri ragazzi all'audizione. Il personaggio di Rafael non aveva una storia e alla fine è stato scritto che era italiano, ma la gente si è fatta tante domande e ha giustamente criticato l'ambiguità etnica del personaggio, considerate le radici venezuelane della serie originale.

Con il privilegio del senno di poi e di queste nuove (per me) informazioni, capisco perfettamente di aver rubato il ruolo a un attore latino. Capisco come i sistemi esistenti – gli stessi che mi hanno dato la parte di un principe iracheno e che mi hanno consentito di essere nella posizione di scrivere questo libro e avere questa piattaforma – giocano a mio vantaggio. Man mano che ho iniziato a capire queste sfumature, ho sentito il mio privilegio bianco venire a galla e dire " ma ho lavorato sodo", " anch'io sono stato rifiutato" e " anch'io mi merito delle parti". Ripeto, riconoscere il mio privilegio bianco non nega i miei sforzi e il mio valore, né i miei sacrifici. Solo perché sono bianco non significa che la mia vita sia semplice e che le cose mi vengano regalate. Il privilegio bianco non è assolutamente un lasciapassare. Allo stesso tempo, non posso più ignorare il fatto che, nel complesso, le persone bianche non sono oppresse allo stesso modo delle persone nere, non veniamo giudicatɜ, fermatɜ dalla polizia, schiavizzatɜ,

imprigionatɜ o uccisɜ allo stesso modo. Sulla mia pista non ci sono gli ostacoli aggiuntivi che sono stati messi sulle piste delle persone nere, indigene e razzializzate. E, come nel caso della parte del principe iracheno, privilegio bianco significa che in alcune situazioni non solo non ho l'ostacolo ma ho anche un vantaggio.

Nell'industria dello spettacolo tutto questo conta perché la rappresentazione conta. È importante per tuttɜ identificarsi in personaggi interpretati da persone che ci somigliano. È fondamentale per le persone razzializzate vedere le proprie storie, talenti e abilità, insomma la propria umanità, rappresentata nei personaggi di libri, film, pubblicità, carriere e famiglie. Nel libro *No More Heroes*, l'autore Jordan Flaherty ci porta indietro al 1979, quando la leggenda della boxe Muhammad Ali, uno dei miei eroi, invita il critico cinematogratico Roger Ebert a casa sua per guardare *Rocky II* con Sylvester Stallone. Nel film, che ammetto essere uno dei miei preferiti di tutti i tempi, il boxer bianco interpretato da Stallone batte l'Apollo Creed di Carl Weather, che si pensava fosse basato su Ali. Arrivati ai titoli di coda, inizia uno scambio e Ali commenta: "Un uomo nero che risulta superiore sarebbe contro gli insegnamenti americani. Sono stato così bravo nella boxe che hanno dovuto creare un'immagine come quella di Rocky, un'immagine bianca sullo schermo, per controbilanciare la mia immagine sul ring. L'America deve avere le sue immagini bianche, indipendentemente da dove le prende. Gesù, Wonder Woman, Tarzan e Rocky." Quella frase mi ha colpito profondamente. Ovviamente amavo Rocky. Come potevo non amarlo? Era l'*underdog* italoamericano che vince contro ogni previsione. Mi somigliava e quindi mi ricordava che potevo farcela. Ma non avevo considerato che non era solo lui a somigliarmi, ma quasi tutti gli eroi *underdog* delle storie che ho amato crescendo. Se fossi stato un giovane ragazzo nero, in quali film, serie tv o storie avrei trovato eroi che mi somigliassero? Cioè, come ha detto Ali, persino Gesù è bianco in America. Come può succedere questa cosa se non per evidente razzismo? La scienza e la storia ci dicono che Gesù era mediorientale e di carnagione scura, eppure essere nerə in America oggi significa pregare un Gesù bianco. In modo analogo, quando nel mondo dello spettacolo vengono rappresentati personaggi di diverse etnie, troppo spesso la diversità viene sfruttata in modo superficiale perché registɜ e produttorɜ scritturano persone nere, indigene o razzializzate per ruoli di supporto alla linea narrativa del personaggio principale bianco, in modo che ci sia una parvenza di diversità. Se non sono di supporto alla linea narrativa principale, i personaggi tendono comunque a raffigurare stereotipi scorretti che affondano le radici nel razzismo, come nel caso delle donne latine o degli uomini nativi americani, che spesso vengono scritturatɜ rispettivamente come signore delle pulizie e come guerrieri muniti di ascia che vivono dentro

le tende. E come già sappiamo, spesso questi ruoli vengono dati a persone bianche, cancellando ulteriormente le culture che stanno mal rappresentando.

Nel mio secondo film, *Clouds*, basato sulla storia vera di Zach Sobiech, un musicista diciassettenne malato di osteosarcoma che è venuto a mancare appena prima che la sua canzone, *Clouds*, arrivasse al primo posto su iTunes, ho ritenuto importante, sebbene si trattasse di una storia vera, accostare persone razzializzate al cast principale, composto totalmente da persone bianche, per tutta la durata del film. Durante i cinque anni che ci sono voluti per finire il film, io e la famiglia di Zach siamo diventatɜ carissimɜ amicɜ, e, se da un lato non c'è niente di male nel raccontare la storia di una famiglia bianca, dall'altro dovevamo consapevolmente garantire la presenza di attorɜ non protagonistɜ e comparse che riflettessero non solo la loro comunità, etnicamente omogenea, ma il mondo intero. Volevo che la storia di Zach arrivasse a persone di ogni colore, cultura e background religioso, ma affinché questo avvenisse lɜ spettatorɜ dovevano riflettersi nella storia e sullo schermo. La realtà è semplicemente che Zach e la sua famiglia sono bianchɜ, vivono in un piccolo paese in Minnesota che molto probabilmente è anche uno dei posti più bianchi in America, e, sfortunatamente, non c'erano persone razzializzate nella vita di Zach che fossero fondamentali nel decorso della sua storia. Ma credo che, così come possiamo ricorrere alla licenza artistica nella rivisitazione di una storia vera, possiamo e dovremmo fare lo stesso assegnando ruoli a persone nere, indigene e razzializzate ovunque possibile, e se necessario, farci in quattro per riuscirci. Abbiamo anche creato un personaggio ispirato a due persone nella vita di Zach e dato la parte a Lil Rel Howery, un attore nero e probabilmente una delle persone più divertenti che io abbia mai incontrato. Nella creazione di questo ruolo secondario abbiamo provato ad accertarci che, invece di supportare semplicemente il personaggio principale, questa persona influenzasse, consigliasse e contribuisse al percorso complessivo del protagonista nel film. Ma persino dopo aver preso questa scelta continuavo a non sentirmi abbastanza bravo. Quello che ho imparato l'ho portato con me nel mio terzo film, battendomi per un cast eterogeneo già a partire da almeno uno dei due ruoli da protagonista.

Sto imparando che c'è una bella differenza tra la parvenza di diversità e il dare spazio alla diversità. Troppo spesso, e io ne sono colpevole, sfruttiamo in modo superficiale le persone razzializzate (il che, ripeto, le oggettifica e disumanizza) nel tentativo di passare per non razzistɜ, quando in realtà il vero lavoro di antirazzismo consiste proprio nell'amplificare le voci di persone nere, indigene e razzializzate. E se da un lato si sta via via iniziando ad amplificarne sempre di più le voci, lo si fa spesso con storie di razzializzazione. Però le loro storie sono molto più di questo, e la ricchezza della loro umanità merita di essere normalizzata,

rappresentata e amplificata nei media, nelle nostre vite quotidiane, nei libri di storia e a Hollywood. Ho molto altro da imparare e da fare in quanto persona che sta acquisendo una posizione di potere in questo settore. Non sarò sempre perfetto, ma non posso permettere alla paura di sbagliare di frenarmi dal crescere e dall'imparare, perché ho capito che anche questa è una scelta che deriva dal privilegio. Se da un lato scegliere di non fare nulla può sembrare la cosa più sicura sul momento, in realtà è molto più dannosa per la difficile condizione delle comunità marginalizzate che lottano per essere viste, ascoltate e rappresentate.

Sono responsabile della mia risposta

Per quanto riguarda la giustizia razziale, una parte di me si sente totalmente sopraffatta dal lavoro che io a livello personale e la società a livello collettivo dobbiamo ancora fare. Una parte di me si vergogna di averci messo così tanto per incrociare il mio viaggio nella mascolinità e nel privilegio maschile al privilegio bianco e al razzismo. E poi c'è una parte di me che mi ricorda che la vergogna è un invito a non mollare, non a scappare o a reprimere. Ijeoma Oluo dice: "So che il problema del razzismo e dell'oppressione razziale sembra enorme. E lo è. Ma non è insormontabile."[30]

Ho tanto da imparare e tanto da disimparare. Posso applicare alcuni dei principi e usare alcuni degli strumenti acquisiti durante il viaggio nella decostruzione della mia mascolinità per aiutarmi ad esplorare anche questa parte. Posso riuscire a sentirmi a mio agio nel disagio, ascoltare più di quanto parlo, prendere dei cavolo di libri e informarmi, ed essere brutalmente onesto con me stesso rispetto a quello che non so. E mentre faccio il lavoro personale, posso anche fare il lavoro pratico e sistemico supportando aziende e progetti di persone nere, indigene e razzializzate, amplificando le loro voci in tutti i contesti, dai social alle donazioni a organizzazioni che si occupano di antirazzismo, e votando per chi lavora attivamente per creare una società equa.

Nessunə ci insegna nulla sulla mascolinità e sul suo contesto sociale, così come a me, in quanto persona bianca, nessunə ha insegnato nulla sulla bianchezza e sul suo contesto sociale. Ma anche se nessunə mi ha mai insegnato, posso ancora imparare. Posso imparare così da poter insegnare allз miз figliз, affinché loro possano crescere sapendo quello che io non sapevo, perché crescere senza parlare di privilegio bianco e razzismo è un privilegio di per sé.

Quando l'autrice Layla Saad ha circa sette anni, la madre le spiega che esiste un privilegio che lei non possiede: il privilegio bianco. Nel suo libro, *Me and White Supremacy*, Saad riporta in dettaglio quello che le dice la madre. "Mi disse: 'Perché sei nera, perché sei musulmana e perché sei una ragazza, dovrai lavorare tre volte di più di chiunque attorno a te per fare strada…' Mi stava facendo notare che in una società razzista e patriarcale sarei stata trattata in maniera differente. Non sarei stata ricompensata allo stesso modo a parità di sforzo. E voleva che sapessi che anche se questo non era giusto, era (ed è ancora), tristemente, lo stato delle cose."

Così come queste cose agiscono a sfavore di Saad, il genere e il colore della pelle agiscono a mio favore. Dato che all'interno del sistema lei deve lavorare tre volte più duramente per fare strada, allora come uomo bianco cresciuto in una famiglia appartenente alla classe media io ho tre volte la responsabilità di impegnarmi per distruggere il sistema. E, se posso usare un po' di psicologia inversa, posso reinterpretare il tutto come una sfida contro me stesso e chiedermi se sarò abbastanza uomo da gestire la responsabilità. Sarò abbastanza responsabile da impegnarmi a lavorare a livello personale? Avrò abbastanza integrità da continuare a riconoscere il modo in cui il mio viaggio nella mascolinità si interseca con la mia bianchezza? Sarò abbastanza coraggioso da rischiare di fare casini mentre continuo a imparare? Perché questa è la brutta notizia: farò casini. Ma ritengo che sia anche la buona notizia. Nessunə si aspetta la perfezione. Inoltre, dobbiamo continuare a normalizzare il cambiare opinione quando si imparano cose nuove, il non sapere tutto e, soprattutto, il non sapere abbastanza per farsi un'opinione.

La mia bianchezza mi offre il privilegio di non riuscire a comprendere pienamente com'è vivere da persona razzializzata, così come il mio essere uomo mi offre il privilegio di non sapere com'è vivere in questo mondo come donna, persona trans o persona *gender non-conforming*. Ma solo perché non riesco a capire qualcosa non significa che non possa onorarla. Solo perché non capisco l'esperienza di qualcunə non significa che non possa onorarlə. Mentre mi impegno a onorare me stesso e la mia umanità, ho anche la responsabilità di impegnarmi a onorare lɜ altrɜ in tutta la loro umanità.

E sono in ritardo (in ritardissimo, cazzo) per onorare le persone nere in tutta la loro umanità.

Sono qui adesso, impegnato a imparare e reimparare cosa significa essere antirazzista, essere un uomo bianco privilegiato nella società e avere la responsabilità di rendere il nostro mondo un posto più giusto ed equo.

NOTE

[1] Un passo fondamentale per accedere alle votazioni negli Stati Uniti è quello della registrazione. I cittadini aventi diritto devono registrarsi prima delle elezioni seguendo tempistiche e modalità definite dai singoli stati. Durante la registrazione è possibile affiliarsi a un partito specifico oppure optare per lo status di indipendente, scelta che non comporta legami specifici con una particolare fazione.

[2] La citazione viene dalla sezione CXXX del testo Bahá'í *Spigolature dagli Scritti di Bahá'u'lláh*, una selezione di brani dagli scritti di Bahá'u'lláh reperibili in versione italiana nella biblioteca digitale bahá'í al link https://www.bahai.it/biblioteca/bahaullah.

[3] L'aggettivo *woke* in inglese si forma a partire dal participio passato del verbo *wake*, ovvero "svegliarsi". Indica una persona consapevole e attenta alle problematiche sociali che causano disuguaglianze, come il razzismo. Tuttavia, così come è accaduto con l'espressione "politicamente corretto", che nel tempo ha assunto una nuova connotazione negativa, anche il termine *woke* viene ormai spesso utilizzato in maniera dispregiativa dalle frange più conservatrici per ridicolizzare e attaccare chiunque abbia una posizione progressista e inclusiva.

[4] L'espressione usata dall'autore nel testo in inglese è *Balboner*, un gioco di parole che unisce il cognome *Baldoni* e il sostantivo *boner*, utilizzato principalmente negli Stati Uniti per indicare in modo volgare l'erezione.

[5] L'autore si riferisce al podcast *Man Enough*, di cui è co-conduttore insieme a Jamey Heath e, fino al 23 dicembre 2024, Liz Plank. Attualmente giunto alla sua terza stagione, il podcast va in onda dal 21 giugno 2021 su tutte le principali piattaforme digitali. L'episodio più recente risale al 28 ottobre 2024.

Il 23 dicembre 2024, a seguito della diffusione del testo integrale della denuncia di 80 pagine presentata dall'attrice Blake Lively contro Justin Baldoni, l'attivista femminista Liz Plank ha annunciato l'abbandono del progetto con un post pubblicato sul suo profilo Instagram.

[6] L'autore cita un passaggio tratto da *E così vuoi parlare di razza?* (titolo originale *So you want to talk about race?*) della scrittrice americana Ijeoma Oluo, tradotto in italiano da Carlotta Mele e pubblicato da Thlon nel 2023.

[7] La citazione viene dal testo Bahá'í *Epistola al Figlio del Lupo* di Bahá'u'lláh, tradotto dall'edizione inglese da Shoghi Effendi e reperibile in versione italiana nella biblioteca digitale bahá'í al link https://www.bahai.it/biblioteca/bahaullah.

[8] Mia traduzione. Non esiste una traduzione italiana del libro.

[9] L'acronimo UCLA sta per University of California, Los Angeles, una delle università più prestigiose degli Stati Uniti e del mondo. Fondata nel 1919, ha sede a Los Angeles. Nel 2024, con oltre 48.000 studentɜ, ha registrato il maggior numero di iscrittɜ tra le università della California. Cfr. About UCLA: Fast facts | UCLA

[10] La Columbia Law School è la facoltà di giurisprudenza della Columbia University. Fondata nel 1858, ha sede a New York City ed è una delle facoltà più prestigiose al mondo nel settore.

[11] Mia traduzione di un'intervista a Kimberlé Crenshaw pubblicata sul sito web della Columbia Law School. La versione originale è disponibile al seguente link: Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later | Columbia Law School.

[12] La citazione viene dal testo Bahá'í *Antologia dagli scritti di 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, tradotto da un comitato del Centro mondiale bahá'í e da Marzieh Gail. Reperibile in versione italiana nella biblioteca digitale bahá'í al link Scritti e discorsi di 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

[13] In inglese *whitewash* è un sostantivo che significa "calce bianca", ma può anche essere utilizzato come verbo, con il significato di "imbiancare". Nel contesto del cinema e dei media, il termine indica la pratica di scritturare attori bianchi per interpretare personaggi di altre etnie. Più in generale, "fare *whitewashing*" significa cercare di adattare le esperienze delle persone razzializzate a quelle delle persone bianche, attraverso processi di generalizzazione, approssimazione o negazione, sminuendone, di fatto, la cultura o il vissuto.

[14] Le citazioni vengono dal testo Bahá'í *La saggezza di 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, reperibile in versione italiana nella biblioteca digitale bahá'í al link Scritti e discorsi di 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Il termine "razza" viene riportato perché facente parte di una citazione. Si tratta, tuttavia, di un'espressione desueta e spesso incline ad essere usata a scopo denigratorio. Pertanto, se ne sconsiglia l'utilizzo. Quando necessario sottolineare le differenze tra diversi gruppi di persone sulla base di elementi socioculturali, è opportuno utilizzare terminologia più neutra (es. "etnia").

[15] Letteralmente "le vite nere contano". Come indicato nell'Enciclopedia Treccani, Black Lives Matter (BLM) è un "[m]ovimento di protesta globale per la liberazione degli afroamericani dalla supremazia dei bianchi, fondato nel 2013 negli Stati Uniti da A. Garza, P. Cullors e O. Tometi a seguito dell'assoluzione dell'assassino di T. Martin. Negli anni successivi il movimento ha organizzato manifestazioni di piazza per denunciare la brutalità contro [le persone nere] perpetrata dalle forze dell'ordine nelle carceri e nel corso di operazioni di polizia,

che si sono progressivamente estese dagli Stati Uniti al Canada – degenerando talora in azioni violente criticate dalle frange più moderate dell'attivismo – e, in concomitanza con l'assassinio dell'afroamericano G. Floyd, ucciso a Minneapolis nel maggio 2020 durante un fermo di polizia, a numerose città europee. Stringendo saldi legami con le radici storiche della protesta nera, dalla lotta antischiavista fino ai movimenti per i diritti civili e contro il razzismo della seconda metà del XX secolo, il BLM ha creato attraverso il Web vasti spazi inclusivi da cui organizzare una lotta globale di liberazione dei neri, proponendo di riformare il sistema di sicurezza attraverso la riduzione dei fondi a disposizione delle forze dell'ordine e la loro riallocazione in favore di programmi di sostegno alle comunità nere". (fonte: Black lives matter - Enciclopedia - Treccani)

[16] La citazione, così come l'espressione "logica binaria buono/cattivo", provengono dal libro *Fragilità bianca: perché è così difficile per i bianchi parlare di razzismo* (titolo originale *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*) di Robin Diangelo, tradotto in italiano da Elena Cantoni e pubblicato da Chiarelettere nel 2020.

[17] Citazione tratta da *E così vuoi parlare di razza?* di Ijeoma Oluo, tradotto in italiano da Carlotta Mele e pubblicato nel 2023 da Edizioni Tlon.

[18] Lo "sfavorito". Il termine *underdog* è entrato nella lingua italiana come prestito dall'inglese. Nel 2022 il Dizionario Treccani lo inserisce tra i neologismi nel campo semantico sportivo. Cfr. Underdog - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani

[19] Il sistema universitario statunitense offre diversi tipi di borse di studio per supportare lɜ studentɜ nel far fronte alle elevatissime tasse universitarie. L'idoneità al supporto economico viene determinata sulla base di quattro parametri principali: rendimento scolastico nei quattro anni precedenti alla richiesta di ammissione, criteri socio-economici, impegno in attività extracurriculari (tra cui attività di volontariato) o eccellenza in ambito sportivo. È inoltre possibile concorrere a una borsa di studio su base individuale per caratteristiche specifiche dellə candidatə, come il possesso di DSA o lo status di studentə di prima generazione.

[20] Letteralmente "che non si conformano al genere". Le persone *gender non-conforming* sono "persone che non aderiscono ad un'espressione di genere binaria, quindi o esclusivamente maschile o esclusivamente femminile. La loro espressione di genere può presentarsi in un mix di elementi o variare a periodi". Fonte: Gender Nonconforming: cosa significa - Gay.it.

[21] Letteralmente "non sponsorizzato". Nel contesto dei social network, questo tipo di hashtag viene usato per segnalare la presenza (o, in questo caso, assenza) di sponsorizzazioni e

collaborazioni con i brand. Trattandosi a tutti gli effetti di pubblicità, in Italia la pratica è regolamentata dal Codice del Consumo e dal Regolamento della Digital Chart dello Iap (Istituto di Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria).

[22] Letteralmente "Fondo per gli spostamenti delle persone trans nere".

[23] Letteralmente "Centro nazionale per l'uguaglianza transgender". Si tratta di un'organizzazione no-profit con sede a Washington, D.C., fondata nel 2003 con l'obiettivo di promuovere i diritti delle persone transgender. Oltre a un costante impegno politico per l'inclusione, le sue principali aree di intervento comprendono la tutela legale contro la discriminazione e la violenza, la correzione dei documenti identificativi e la promozione attiva di un'assistenza sanitaria inclusiva.

[24] L'espressione è una traduzione letterale dell'inglese *white savior complex*. Anche conosciuta come *white saviorism*, si tratta di una forma di finta benevolenza (consapevole o inconsapevole) da parte di persone bianche nei confronti di persone razzializzate. Attraverso azioni umanitarie (spesso ostentate sui social network) espletate con un atteggiamento egocentrico, biancocentrico e paternalistico, il salvatore bianco si relaziona alle comunità razzializzate e marginalizzate considerandole "altro" rispetto allo standard bianco. Le azioni di solidarietà vengono compiute, dunque, non per desiderio di mutuo aiuto e cooperazione, ma per un complesso di superiorità interiorizzato, riproducendo a tutti gli effetti un rapporto di subordinazione.

Il concetto viene spesso considerato un'evoluzione dell'atteggiamento descritto da Rudyard Kipling nella poesia *The White Man's Burden* ["Il fardello dell'uomo bianco"] del 1899, in cui il "fardello" dell'uomo bianco europeo è quello di dover civilizzare i popoli non europei ad ogni costo.

[25] Canale televisivo statunitense, dal 2015 conosciuto come *Freeform*, che si concentra su contenuti destinati ad adolescenti e giovani adultɜ.

[26] Letteralmente "Giorno di Colombo". Festa nazionale statunitense che si celebra il 12 ottobre per commemorare il giorno dell'arrivo del navigatore Cristoforo Colombo nel continente (avvenuto, appunto, il 12 ottobre 1492).

[27] Letteralmente "Giorno dei popoli indigeni". Ricorrenza che si celebra il secondo lunedì di ottobre per onorare e riconoscere la storia e la cultura dei popoli indigeni, mettendo in luce l'oppressione che da secoli viene esercitata dai colonizzatori bianchi.

[28] Il nome *Juneteenth* deriva dall'unione di *June* ("giugno") e *nineteenth* ("diciannovesimo"). Si tratta, infatti, di una festa nazionale celebrata negli Stati Uniti il 19 giugno. La ricorrenza commemora il 19 giugno 1865, giorno in cui, con la fine della Guerra Civile, venne annunciata l'abolizione della schiavitù in Texas, l'ultimo stato confederato ad applicare la proclamazione di emancipazione di Abraham Lincoln del 1863.

[29] Emittente televisiva statunitense attiva dal 20 settembre 2006.

[30] Citazione tratta da *E così vuoi parlare di razza?* di Ijeoma Oluo, tradotto in italiano da Carlotta Mele e pubblicato nel 2023 da Edizioni Tlon.

CHAPTER III:
TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

Functionality and Loyalty in Translation

Pragmatic translation problems

Cultural translation problems

Linguistic translation problems

Text-specific translation problems

A form of linguistic ethics: the use of the schwa in Italian written texts

A reversed ethical declaration of responsibility and intent

TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

Functionality and loyalty in translation

The first chapter of this thesis highlighted the significance of translation as a cultural product with profound revolutionary potential and clarified the rationale behind the choice to translate Baldoni's *Man Enough*, namely the necessity to contribute to male-led, male-oriented initiatives aimed at dismantling gender stereotypes and addressing both a literary and institutional gap. The driving force behind this translation proposal is, therefore, the projected impact it may have within the target culture.

Linguist and translation scholar Hans J. Vermeer succinctly summarized this principle, stating that "[a]n action aims to achieve a goal and thus to alter the current state of affairs" (Reiß & Vermeer 2014: 85). The idea that the objective of a translation plays a crucial role in the translation process led Vermeer to formulate a theory that revolutionized the field of translation studies. Based on the premise that "the *skopos* of an action takes precedence over the mode of action, i.e., the purpose determines whether, how, and what is done" (Reiß & Vermeer 2014: 89), *skopos theory* asserts that translators should move beyond the original text, which must instead "be transferred functionally, taking the expectations of the target audience into account" (Reiß & Vermeer 2014: 92). Consequently, the translation strategies employed will be determined by the intended function of the translation in the target culture.

Building on this functional approach, translation scholar Christiane Nord—who also translated Reiß & Vermeer's seminal work, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie* (1984)—developed the concept of "functionality + loyalty":

> Since in a translational situation neither the author of the original nor the reader of the target text nor the initiator are in a position to 'check' whether the translation actually conforms to their expectations (because each of them knows only one side of the culture barrier), the responsibility rests with the translator alone. He/she is the 'expert' as far as the two cultures and the procedures of translation are concerned. This responsibility towards the author, the initiator and the target recipient is what I call loyalty. Loyalty is a moral principle indispensable in the relationships between human beings who are partners in a communicative action.
>
> Functionality + loyalty means, then, that the translator should aim at producing a functional target text which conforms to the requirements of the translation scopos fixed by the initiator, respecting, at the same time, if necessary, the legitimate interests of both the author of the original and the readers of the translation. (Nord 1992: 39)

Nord proposes a translation-oriented approach that represents an intermediate position between a rigid source-orientedness and a target-orientedness that entirely disregards the original text. This model offers a pragmatic framework for translators, one that takes into consideration both the source text in its situational context and the translation's *skopos*. Translators must then formulate strategies that simultaneously fulfill the *skopos* while maintaining loyalty to the original text.

Nord outlines distinct phases of the translation process to guide translators in this formulation:

1) Compatibility test: translators conduct a preliminary analysis of the source text to assess the feasibility of the translation task within the constraints of the translation *skopos*, as either communicated by the commissioner or determined by the translators themselves. This phase ensures that the translation process does not violate the principle of loyalty toward both the author and the target recipients. If the compatibility test is positive—i.e., the translator deems that the source text allows for the production of a target text capable of achieving the desired function in the target culture—a more detailed analysis follows.
2) Source-text analysis: translators proceed to a more detailed examination of the source text, taking into account both the intratextual and the extratextual factors of communication[1]. This analysis serves to identify which elements should be incorporated into the target text, and whether they should be preserved or adapted. In other words, it enables translators to establish their translation strategies.
3) Target-text projection: translators analyze the *skopos* of the target text using the same analytical model applied to the source-text. Through this process, they can derive a projection of the target text that serves as a framework for its production. The outcomes of the source-text analysis can then be contrasted with those of the translation *skopos* analysis. By comparing both sets of results, translators can determine the extent to which the source-text material needs to be adapted for the target context and identify

[1] To derive the extratextual and intratextual factors, Nord formulates a series of guiding questions: "Extratextual factors are analysed by enquiring about the author or sender of the text (who?), the sender's intention (what for?), the addressee or recipient the text is directed at (to whom?), the medium or channel the text is communicated by, the place (where?) and time (when?) of text production or reception, and the motive (why?) for communication. The sum total of information obtained about these seven extratextual factors may provide an answer to the last question, which concerns the function the text can achieve (with what function?) (see also Nord 1991c). Intratextual factors are analysed by enquiring about the subject matter the text deals with, the information or content presented in the text (what?), the knowledge presuppositions made by the author (what not?), the composition of the text (in what order?), the non-linguistic or paralinguistic elements accompanying the text, the lexical and syntactic characteristics found in the text (in which words?, in what kind of sentences?), and the suprasegmental features of intonation and prosody (in which tone?)." (Nord 1992: 43)

the specific adaptation strategies required to produce a target text that meets the needs of the source text while fulfilling its *skopos* in the target culture.

As it pertains to this thesis, both the analysis of the source and target culture contexts—specifically regarding gender roles—and the definition of the *skopos* for this translation proposal were conducted in the first chapter, emphasizing that the needs of the target culture align with those of the source culture, owing to the close relationship between the two.

The particular attention given to the translation's final objective—and its alignment with the original work's objective in the source culture—is consistent with Nord's practical, translation-oriented approach, which guided the translation process.

Simultaneously, the techniques employed are target-oriented. The primary reason for this choice is that the text must be internalized by the target readers, and the issues raised must be perceived as deeply connected to their own culture and reality. Consequently, linguistic choices cannot be foreignizing, as this would risk portraying the problematic aspects of the current societal structure as belonging to a distant, unrelated culture. However, exceptions to this general strategy are also present.

The following sections will analyze examples of translation issues presented in the text, following Nord's macro-categorization of translation problems into four types: pragmatic translation problems, cultural translation problems, linguistic translation problems and text-specific translation problems.

Although presented last, the final two sections will address some of the most significant issues in this thesis. *A form of linguistic ethics: the use of the schwa in Italian written texts* will explore what is perhaps the main challenge when working with a gendered language like Italian, one that Italian linguists, writers and activists are actively addressing by proposing linguistic strategies to "neutralize" gendered suffixes. In this thesis, the linguistic device employed to overcome this issue is the *schwa* symbol (ə). *A reversed ethical declaration of responsibility and intent* will focus on an extratextual issue, specifically the accusations of sexual assault against the author, which led to a series of problematic implications regarding the potential translation of the text.

Pragmatic translation problems

Nord defines pragmatic translation problems as "those arising from the particular transfer situation with its specific contrast of source language vs. target language recipients, source language vs. target language medium, source language vs. target language function etc.",

suggesting that they should be "identified using the extratextual factors of the text-analytical model." (Nord 1992: 46)

This category includes expressions of temporal and local deixis, which serve to locate the narration temporally and spatially. While translators may have some flexibility in handling these elements in fiction, in non-fiction it is particularly important to adhere to Nord's 'functionality+loyalty' approach. Otherwise, there is a risk of conveying inaccurate or ambiguous information to the target readers and violating the pact of loyalty with the original author.

In this translation, for example, the possessive adjective "our" was frequently rendered as *americana/o* when modifying nouns such as "country" or history". Thus, "our country's political system" became *sistema politico americano*, and "our history" became *la storia americana*. However, in certain instances, "our country" was translated as *Stati Uniti*, as seen in "complicated history of our country", which became *complicata storia degli Stati Uniti*. Additionally, adverbs of place such as "here" were neutralized. For example, "both here in the United States and abroad" became *[x] negli Stati Uniti e nel mondo*. In some cases, additions were necessary to ensure clarity, as in "for every dollar earned by white men [x]", which was translated as *per ogni dollaro guadagnato da un uomo bianco negli Stati Uniti*.

Since the book was published four years ago, temporal deixis also required adjustment. For example, "Based on the most recent survey in 2018" was rendered as *In base a un sondaggio del 2018*, as more recent surveys (specifically on gender pay gaps) have been published since then, and the specific survey referenced by the author is not identified. Similarly, "I am taking these learnings into my third film" became *Quello che ho imparato l'ho portato con me nel mio terzo film*, where "film" refers to *It Ends With Us*, the third movie the author produced and directed. At the time of writing, the film was still in production but was released in September 2024.

The main challenge within the category of pragmatic translation problems was perhaps the rendering of quotations. The original text contains numerous quotations from essays, books, and religious Bahá'í writings, but these are almost never cited appropriately. This poses an additional challenge for the translator. Normally, when encountering a properly cited quotation, translators can investigate whether an official translation exists in the target language. If so, they may opt to use the existing translation or provide a new one. However, in this case, an additional step was required to first determine the actual source of the quotation.

One such case involves a direct quote from Kimberlé Crenshaw in *Chapter V*. On page 143, Baldoni references Crenshaw's 1989 essay, stating that she coined the term "intersectionality" and then proceeding to quote her definition of the term.

> Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law at UCLA and Columbia Law School, coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 when she published a paper that focused on legal cases that dealt with issues of both racial and sexual discrimination. Crenshaw describes intersectionality as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things."

Contrary to what might be expected given the way the quote is introduced, the quoted statement does not actually come from the cited paper. The language used by Crenshaw reflects the structures of oral speech, suggesting that it might have been taken from a conference. Several videos of Crenshaw's lectures, interviews, and talks were reviewed without success before ChatGPT was consulted in Italian to locate the source. The response was: *Questa frase, o versioni simili, appare in interviste e discorsi pubblici di Crenshaw, ed è ampiamente citata per descrivere in modo accessibile la sua teoria. Non appartiene a un singolo testo accademico specifico, ma piuttosto a una delle sue spiegazioni discorsive del concetto*. Upon further inquiry regarding which interview was being referenced, the AI replied: *Quando ho menzionato l'intervista, mi riferivo a diverse apparizioni pubbliche e discorsi di Kimberlé Crenshaw in cui ha parlato del concetto di intersezionalità. Anche se la frase specifica non proviene da una singola intervista, Crenshaw ha utilizzato espressioni simili in contesti diversi, come conferenze e interviste.* Several weeks later, the machine was consulted again, this time in English, and the quote was successfully located in an interview titled *Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later*, published by Columbia Law School[2]. A Google search using the format '"[quote]" site:en' also led to the same result.

Another challenge involved several quotes from Bahá'í figures, for which the original sources were not properly cited. Fortunately, the Italian Bahá'í community has created an online library that offers free access to official Italian translations of the original texts[3]. To ensure accurate

[2] Cf. Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later | Columbia Law School (last accessed: February 8, 2025)
[3] Cf. Biblioteca (last accessed: February 8, 2025)

attribution, a thorough text-by-text search of the entire Italian Bahá'í library was conducted for each English quotation.

Lastly, on page 151, a quote attributed to Robin DiAngelo lacked a specified source, raising a similar issue and prompting consultation with ChatGPT, which suggested *White Fragility* (2018) as the likely origin.

Since an official Italian translation existed—produced by Elena Cantoni and published by Chiarelettere—the AI was consulted to determine how that segment had been translated. Following an initial prompt, further verification was conducted. When asked, *Hai preso la frase direttamente dal libro tradotto in italiano?*, the AI revealed that its previous response was a composite of information retrieved from the web rather than an exact excerpt, as the full text was not accessible. To ensure an accurate and reliable citation of the official translation, the book was ultimately purchased and the passage quoted directly.

Ultimately, all quotations in the translation were sourced from official Italian translations where available, ensuring that target readers have a comparable experience to that of source readers. However, this process proved to be one of the most time-consuming, as determining the origins of certain quotations required considerable effort.

A second key takeaway is that AI—specifically ChatGPT—is undoubtedly a valuable ally for translators. However, it does not have access to copyrighted books, paywalled articles, or other restricted materials, as these are not publicly available. For this reason, the accuracy of the information it provides must always be verified, especially when direct quotations are involved, as it tends to generate results based on self-produced summaries.

Cultural translation problems

In Nord's approach, cultural translation problems are "a result of the differences in culture specific (verbal) habits, expectations, norms and conventions concerning verbal and other behaviour, such as text-type conventions, general norms of style, norms of measuring, formal conventions of marking certain elements in a text, etc." (Nord 1992: 46)

Cultural translation problems are the most challenging because they entail the translation of words laden with meanings, connotations and historical context that are readily understood by source-language readers but may vary in familiarity among target-language readers. The extent to which these terms are recognizable depends on several factors, such as their degree of establishment in the target language, their connection to shared cultural processes between the cultures involved in the translational relationship, and the reader's familiarity with the source culture. While a unified approach to translation and a general orientation for translation

strategies can be established, a single, uniform solution for all cultural translation issues in a specific text is impractical. Although coherence remains essential, translators must maintain a certain degree of flexibility to effectively address the complexities of culturally loaded expressions.

As pertains to this translation, cultural translation problems can be categorized into four subgroups: names of English institutions, brands, associations and festivities, as well as terms related to gender identity and other culturally specific concepts that are retained in English; terms related to American culture and society that have been domesticated; colloquial vocative expressions and vulgar language; race-related vocabulary.

A crucial consideration when translating from English to Italian is the profound influence of the former on the latter. Whether originating from the tech industry, gaming, social media, or dubbing, certain terms and expressions often sound more natural in Italian when left untranslated. Conversely, translating them into Italian may create an unnatural or alienating effect. With this in mind, forcing Italian translations purely for the sake of target-orientedness may paradoxically result in an estranging effect rather than a domesticating one.

Therefore, the 'target-oriented' strategies adopted for the first subgroup of cultural translation issues entail retaining the English terms in the text and adding brief explanatory notes. This approach preserves the reference to the source culture, aligning with Nord's principle of 'loyalty', while also ensuring accessibility for the target reader and facilitating the effective delivery of the message, thus fulfilling Nord's principle of 'functionality'.

For instance, prominent institutions such as "UCLA" and "Columbia Law School" were retained in English; their meaning is easily accessible to Italian readers, not only due to the presence of explanatory notes but also because they are preceded by the phrase *docente di giurisprudenza*, which immediately signals to the reader that these refer to universities.

The same applies to holiday names such as "Columbus Day", "Indigenous Peoples' Day" and "Juneteenth" , which are readily identifiable as holidays even before reading the notes, as they appear in a passage discussing festivities: *il Columbus Day è ancora una festa riconosciuta a livello federale in tutti gli Stati Uniti, mentre l'Indigenous Peoples' Day è riconosciuta come festa ufficiale solo in sei stati*.

A similar approach was adopted with the concept of "whitewashing", which has been incorporated into Italian as a loanword in its noun form, to the extent that the verb "to whitewash" has its correspondent in *fare whitewashing*. Therefore, "I have chosen to ignore it and whitewash her into a friendship that meets my preferred boundaries" became *sceglievo di ignorare questo aspetto e farle whitewashing, creando un'amicizia che rispettasse i miei limiti*.

A parallel phenomenon can be observed with the adjective "gender nonconforming", which has been assimilated into Italian as a loanword, albeit with variations in dash placement ("gender non conforming" and "gender non-conforming" are used interchangeably). In contrast, the corresponding noun "gender non-conformity" is often rendered as the calque *non conformità di genere*. Thus, "my maleness affords me the privilege of never knowing what it's like to walk through this world as a woman, trans, or gender nonconforming person" became *il mio essere uomo mi offre il privilegio di non sapere com'è vivere in questo mondo come donna, persona trans o persona gender non-conforming*.

The second subgroup includes brand and institution names, as well as culturally specific aspects of American society that have been domesticated or paraphrased.

This is exemplified by the translation of "high school" and "Taco Bell" in the sentence: "completely hypothetical, as high school was the time I could pound Taco Bell for lunch just hours before a track meet", which was rendered as *assolutamente ipotetico, visto che da adolescente mi ingozzavo di cibo messicano a pranzo giusto qualche ora prima di allenarmi*. In this case, the technique of modulation was employed to obtain a more concise alternative to the literal *quando andavo alle superiori*. This choice preserves the primary focus of the original phrase—"high school was the time"—which does not emphasize the fact that the author was in high school per se, but rather conveys a broader sense of "when I was younger" or "at that particular age". Additionally, this strategy ensures greater coherence between *da ascolescente* and *cibo messicano*, as Mexican food is far less common in Italy than in the United States—particularly as a typical high school meal. Therefore, pairing *quando andavo alle superiori* with *cibo messicano* would create a highly unnatural effect. For the same reason, "Taco Bell", a widely recognized fast-food chain in the United States but nonexistent in Italy, was generalized as *cibo messicano*. Ultimately, the specific reference to Taco Bell was not essential to the meaning of the sentence; the emphasis remains on Mexican food in general rather than on the particular chain itself.

This category also includes two significant institutions that have established equivalents in Italian through calquing, i.e. "Congress" (*Congresso*) and "Oval Office" (*Studio Ovale*). However, translating only these two in Italian would compromise the principle of coherence that a translator should uphold when applying a strategy to a specific group of linguistic elements. In other words, opting for *Congresso* and *Studio Ovale* would mean finding an Italian equivalent for "UCLA", "Black Trans Travel Fund", etc.

The solution to this apparent problem lies, once again, in the core message of the sentence: the author's intent was not to list specific political institutions in the United States or to emphasize

the presence of white men in Congress rather than, for instance, the Supreme Court. Instead, "Congress" and "Oval Office" serve as representative examples of spaces where political power is exercised in the United States. With this in mind, the sentence was rendered through generalization as: *Le persone che mi somigliano sono ampiamente rappresentate nei media, nell'industria dello spettacolo, nelle posizioni direttive, tra le più alte cariche politiche e nell'ambito dell'istruzione.*

By contrast, omission was employed in the case of "carrying pepper spray or Mace". Mace is a brand name that has become a proprietary eponym in American English, commonly referring to pepper spray or, more rarely, other self-defense products sold by the company. Given that "pepper spray" is already explicitly mentioned, and considering that the original sentence is somewhat redundant in English as well, the superfluous repetition was eliminated by omitting Mace in the translation.

The third subgroup within the broader category of cultural translation problems encompasses colloquial vocative expressions and vulgar language. Often overlooked, these elements can be particularly difficult to translate due to their strong regional and social ties.

The term "man", for instance, is commonly used in English by men to address other men, regardless of age, in a friendly manner, or as an interjection to convey intensity. No direct Italian equivalent possesses the same degree of flexibility. Terms like *bro* (borrowed from English), *zio* or *fra* are typically used by teenagers or young adults, while other expressions like *compà* or *mbare*, also used by adult men, are not only diatopically defined but also diastratically marked—and, most importantly, are not standard Italian but dialectal. In contrast, "man" is a more neutral term when compared to the alternatives in Italian.

Consider, for example, the sentence "It wasn't about race, man", spoken by an adult man to another adult man. In this case, no Italian equivalent of "man" exists that is appropriate for the age group of the speakers. The solution, therefore, was to preserve the emphatic function of the term in the sentence. The result was: *Non c'entra il colore della pelle, dai.*

Similar challenges arise with vulgar language. Terms such as "damned" and "fucking" are often translated through calques, producing outdated or awkward-sounding equivalents like *dannato* and *fottuto*, or the even more forced adverbs *dannatamente* and *fottutamente*. While these calques are not commonly used by native Italian speakers in everyday contexts, they have gained popularity as markers of irony or as a way to mock poor-quality dubbing. Thus, translating a sentence like "Being a "good enough" father or "good enough" husband can be pretty damned wonderful" as *Essere un padre o un marito "abbastanza bravo" è dannatamente*

fantastico would add an ironic undertone that is not present in the source text. In this case, the translation chosen was: *Cioè, essere un padre o un marito "abbastanza bravo" è strafigo*.
When translating such language, it is crucial to recognize that no fixed rules can be universally applied. Each instance requires adjustment based on the specific context of the utterance.
As far as cultural translation problems—and really this translation proposal—are concerned, the most extensive, labor-intensive, and time-consuming research has focused on the fourth subgroup, that of race-related vocabulary. This is not only because the concept of race is inherently problematic, but also due to the disparity in its usage between English and Italian. While "race" is widely accepted and commonly used in English, with its derivative "racial" appearing in numerous collocations, its traditional Italian equivalent, *razza*, carries strong negative connotations, evoking concepts that have marked some of the darkest periods in European history. As a result, advocates of culturally respectful and inclusive language recommend avoiding its use.
Although both English and Italian distinguish between the outdated and widely discredited pseudo-scientific notion of race as a set of biological characteristics—used in the past to justify discrimination—and its more neutral sociological meaning as a cultural categorization, Italian discourse generally prefers synonyms to mitigate the term's problematic history. Nevertheless, *razza* is still far from disappearing and continues to be used in various contexts. A notable example is the Italian translation to Ijeoma Oluo's *So you want to talk about race?*, translated by Carlotta Mele with the title *E così vuoi parlare di razza?*. In this context, the translation is effective because it allows for a dual interpretation: the first as an invitation to engage in discussions on race ("So you want to talk about it? Okay, since you asked, let's discuss it together"); the second as a critique of those who continue to use the term ("So you are still insisting on using it? Read this book, educate yourself, and reconsider your perspective").
In other instances, the term *razza* is employed by Black activists seeking to desemanticize and resemanticize it within the framework of discussions on discrimination and social inequality. This process of semantic transformation is ongoing, and even once it reaches its conclusion, it will remain important to recognize that, for those outside Black and other marginalized communities, the appropriation of this term will continue to be problematic—at least in the foreseeable future.
Despite the continued use of *razza* in official EU and Italian governmental documents, this thesis seeks to align with contemporary discussions advocating for the careful reconsideration of such terminology, particularly in texts intended for a general audience, who may lack the

contextual knowledge necessary to discern whether the term is being used in its outdated biological or contemporary sociocultural sense.

A valuable resource for navigating the complex discourse surrounding race in Italy is provided by Diversity Lab, a foundation established in 2013 with the mission of promoting a culture of inclusion. The foundation collaborates with companies, media outlets, agencies and institutions to drive ethical innovation and business growth through inclusive practices. It offers DEI programs and advocates for diverse representation in media, both behind and in front of the camera. In 2024, Diversity Lab published a document outlining guidelines for inclusive language in four key semantic areas: LGBT+, disability, ethnicity and gender.[4] This document serves as a primary reference for guiding this translation of race-related terminology into Italian.

According to the guidelines, for example, *razza*[5] should be avoided in favor of the preferred *etnia*[6]. This marks a shift away from a term with biological connotations to one that is more culturally oriented. While it is agreeable that *razza* should not be used, the guidelines are not intended as a guide to translation but rather as recommendations for native speakers to articulate their speech differently. As a result, in this translation, *etnia* is not always the most appropriate choice. First, the same distinction between *razza* and *etnia* exists in English between "race" and "ethnicity"—although, as noted earlier, "race" has been liberated from the negative connotations *razza* carries. Second, both terms are employed in the source text, and since they are not entirely interchangeable, some differentiation should also be made in Italian. It is, therefore, important to discern their usage in the text in order to understand what they refer to in the given context. In the passage

[4] The document is available upon request via the link Le Linee Guida del linguaggio inclusivo di Fondazione Diversity. (Last accessed: February 16, 2025)

[5] Treccani defines *razza* as:

- 1.a. *In biologia, popolazione o insieme di popolazioni di una specie che condividono caratteristiche morfologiche, genetiche, ecologiche o fisiologiche differenti da quelle di altre popolazioni della stessa specie [...]*
- d. *Nell'antropologia fisica del 19° sec. e dei primi decenni del 20°, popolazione o gruppo di popolazioni che presentano particolari caratteri fenotipici comuni (colorito della pelle, tipo dei capelli, forma del viso, del naso, degli occhi, ecc.), indipendentemente da nazionalità, lingua, costumi (per es., r. bianca, gialla, nera; r. australiana, sudanese, nilotica, ecc.). Tale suddivisione della specie umana ha costituito il preteso fondamento scientifico per una concezione delle r. umane come gruppi intrinsecamente differenti e da porre in rapporto gerarchico l'uno rispetto all'altro; in partic., con riferimento ai principî e alla prassi del nazifascismo, e più in generale di ogni forma di razzismo*

Cf. Razza - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 10, 2025)

[6] Treccani defines *etnia* as: *[i]n etnologia e antropologia, aggruppamento umano basato su caratteri culturali e linguistici. Spesso usato, nel linguaggio giornalistico, con il sign. di minoranza nazionale, gruppo etnico minoritario.* Cf. Etnìa - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 10, 2025)

> As Nico Juárez, a Mexican American man with Tzotzil ancestry, said when he shared part of his story in Liz Plank's book, *For the Love of Men*, "Race fundamentally changes masculinity. We need to think about masculinity as a deeply racial issue"

the use of *etnia* and *etnica* might be appropriate for two reasons. First, the speaker's cultural background is highlighted, an aspect of his individuality that extends beyond mere aesthetic features. Second, the discussion focuses on masculinity as a cultural construct. In other words, the passage highlights the intersection of two cultural constructs: masculinity and ethnicity. The Italian version reads:

> Come ha detto Nico Juárez, uomo messicano-statunitense di origini Tzotzil, quando ha condiviso parte della sua storia nel libro di Liz Plank, *For the love of men*: "L'etnia cambia radicalmente la mascolinità. Dobbiamo pensare alla mascolinità come ad una questione profondamente etnica".

Different considerations apply to the passage, "It wasn't about race man. We should go because they don't have the shirts I'm looking for anyway." Here, the author describes a microaggression experienced by his best friend, a Black man, in a store. In this case, there is no reference to the man's cultural background, nor is it relevant to understanding why he is being racially targeted; rather, this is inferred from what we know about him—his skin color. While race encompasses various biological traits, the Black community has not faced segregation and discrimination based on eye color, hair or other physical features—although attributes commonly perceived as markers of Blackness have often been caricatured by white people—but rather on skin color or a combination of skin color and other phenotypical traits. This is particularly evident in the use of slurs, which target and stigmatize this specific biological characteristic. Applying the strategy of particularization, "race" can be translated as *colore della pelle*. The proposed translation is: *"Non c'entra il colore della pelle, dai. Andiamocene, tanto in ogni caso non hanno le camicie che stavo cercando"*.
When referring to race as a concept and its implications rather than an individual's specific racial identity, *razzializzazione* emerges as a third viable translation for "race". In the passage:

> Too often, and I am guilty of this, we want to tokenize (which again objectifies and dehumanizes) people of color in an attempt to be seen as not a racist, when in reality the real work of anti-racism is amplifying the voices of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color. And while their voices are beginning to be amplified more, they are often being told in stories about race [...]

The focus is not on race as a set of physical characteristics but rather on the process and consequences of a cultural paradigm that constructs hierarchies of inferiority based on race. The proposed translation is:

> Troppo spesso, e io ne sono colpevole, sfruttiamo in modo superficiale le persone razzializzate (il che, ripeto, le oggettifica e disumanizza) nel tentativo di passare per non razzistɜ, quando in realtà il vero lavoro di antirazzismo consiste proprio nell'amplificare le voci di persone nere, indigene e razzializzate. E se da un lato si sta via via iniziando ad amplificarne sempre di più le voci, lo si fa spesso con storie di razzializzazione [...]

The co-occurrence with *razzializzate* as a translation for "people of color" further enhances textual cohesion.

Finally, "race" is translated as *razza* in only two instances. The first is a direct quotation from a religious text with an official Italian translation (*Se incontrate gente di razza e colore diversi dai vostri [...] Considerateli come fossero rose di diverso colore, che crescono nel bellissimo giardino dell'umanità e rallegratevi di essere fra loro*), where it is accompanied by an explanatory note on the discouraged use of the term in Italian. The second instance appears in a passage that explicitly challenges the validity of the term (*Già solo generalizzare e parlare di "razza" raggruppando le persone sulla base di una falsa identità crea e perpetua gli stessi problemi che stiamo cercando di affrontare con la mascolinità*).

Another problematic phrase that frequently appears in the text is "people of color". The use of this term, along with its acronym POC and its 'extended' form BIPOC, is currently debated. These expressions are criticized for reinforcing a white vs. non-white binary, grouping diverse ethnic communities under a broad, generalized label and limiting identification.

A similar debate exists in Italian regarding the expression *di colore*, its literal linguistic equivalent, albeit with different nuances. For a long time, *persone di colore* has been commonly regarded as a politically correct way to refer to Black people in Italian. However, it is increasingly being replaced by *nera*, *nero*, *nerə*. More recently, some have begun using *di colore*—controversially—to refer to non-Black individuals, particularly brown people, mirroring the ongoing debate surrounding POC in English.

It could be argued that since the author employs a problematic term, it should be retained in the Italian translation. However, there are several reasons to avoid this. First, in the Italian collective imagination, *persone di colore* is still predominantly associated with Black people. Keeping the term could therefore lead to misinterpretation and confusion, particularly in cases

like “Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color”, which would translate to *persone nere, indigene e altre persone di colore*, where *di colore* might appear redundant after *nere* to some readers. Second, this kind of source-oriented choice would undermine not only the principle of functionality, but also the translation’s *skopos*: if the goal of the translation is to be educational, perpetuating problematic language would contradict its intended purpose. Third, throughout the book, the author repeatedly emphasizes that his learning process is ongoing. He acknowledges that he is “going to mess up” but that “messing up” is “good news”, arguing that changing opinions and “not knowing it all” should be normalized. He stresses his commitment to “honor[ing] others in their full humanity” and “learning and relearning what it means to be anti-racist, to be a privileged white man in this society, and to be responsible for making our world a more just and equitable place” (Baldoni 2021: 174). Based on these premises, failing to align the translation with a more inclusive alternative would violate the principle of loyalty to the author.

The Diversity Lab guidelines recommend *razzializzate* as a more appropriate alternative to *di colore*. When applied in practice, the term represents a fitting translation to “people of color” throughout Chapter V.

Cultural translation problems often prompt translators to decide whether to use explanatory notes or opt for other compensatory strategies within the text. Regarding this translation, the use of explanatory notes was initially excluded to avoid graphic interference in the text, with the assumption that sufficient context could be provided through parenthetical sentences or brief in-text explanations. However, upon reviewing the Spanish translator’s version, as well as the Italian translations of other referenced texts (Oluo, DiAngelo), it was observed that notes were incorporated effectively in these translations, leading to a reassessment of their utility, particularly for (a) avoiding excessive non-authorial intrusions in the text and (b) providing clearer, more in-depth explanations. Although footnotes were initially considered, the final decision was directed toward the use of endnotes, which offered a satisfactory compromise by avoiding disruption to the reading flow while still allowing additional information to be provided to the reader.

This reflection leads to another consideration regarding the collaborative nature of translation—an essential aspect of the practice. Collaboration should not be understood narrowly in an “active” sense, where translation tasks are undertaken by groups, but also in a “passive” or “unconscious” manner, through engagement with the work of other translators. A translator’s work is inevitably shaped by the contributions of others—not only synchronically, by engaging with contemporaneous translators, but also diachronically, through insights gained

from predecessors. In this way, the linguistic heritage created through these collective efforts is passed down to fellow translators, fostering a long-lasting dialogue across time and space.

Linguistic translation problems

Nord defines linguistic translation problems as "the structural differences between two languages in lexis, sentence structure and suprasegmental features" (Nord 1992: 46).

One important consideration in this regard is how English and Italian address the target readers. While English typically speaks to a singular reader using the second-person singular "you", Italian tends to address the audience with the second-person plural *voi*. This book follows that pattern, as the author directly addresses the reader as a singular "you" in the *Introduction*. On page 14, he writes: "I want this book to feel like a trusted friend—whether you are *a* man who, like me, *feels* like you've been trying for too long to fit in a box that's too small, or you are *a woman* or nonbinary *person* who *wants* insight [...]".[7] Here, the use of the indefinite article *a* and third-person singular verbs ("feels", "wants") suggests a one-to-one conversation, fostering an intimate relationship between the author/book and the reader. Beyond the grammatical norms of English, the statement "I want this book to feel like a trusted friend" reinforces the author's intent to address the reader as a single person. This establishes a precedent that justifies the use of *tu* in the Italian translation, ensuring the same one-to-one engagement between the target audience and the text.

Another recurring issue in translation concerns punctuation, as linguistic conventions differ across languages. One example in the text is the use of em dashes, which in English function like commas, colons or parenthesis. In contrast, Italian employs en dashes for this purpose, primarily to enclose parenthetical sentences, while commas or parentheses are generally preferred for shorter parenthetical phrases, depending on the importance of the information. For this reason, the passage "mostly reiterating that my story—this book—was of course written through my lens as a white male" was translated as *ripetendo prevalentemente che la mia storia (questo libro) è stata scritta, ovviamente, dalla mia prospettiva di uomo bianco*.

Punctuation was also used to adjust the rhythm of long sentences with multiple coordinate clauses introduced by "and". While in English such structures mimic the rhythm of spoken language while remaining readable—creating a "word train" that parallels the author's stream of thought—this style often results in heavy, repetitive, and difficult-to-follow sentences in

[7] My emphasis.

Italian. To improve readability, commas frequently replaced the conjunction “and” in this translation, streamlining the structure while maintaining the intended flow.

For instance, the passage “Partly because I am now a father and I believe our children are our main source of hope and they deserve a better future” was rendered in Italian as *In parte perché adesso sono padre e credo che lɜ nostrɜ figliɜ, la nostra più grande fonte di speranza, meritino un futuro migliore.*

A common feature of both English and Italian is the use of the present simple to refer to past events in colloquial narratives. Despite this possibility, the source text predominantly employs the past simple to indicate past events, a verb tense typically translated into Italian using either *passato prossimo* or *passato remoto*. In terms of usage, the perfect tense *passato prossimo* has increasingly replaced *passato remoto* in both formal and informal contexts. Today, *passato remoto* is mostly limited to certain domains of written language, whereas in spoken discourse it is either perceived as archaic or as a regional marker of southern varieties, where it is often used as a literal translation of dialectal structures.

As has already been stressed, despite being a written text, *Man Enough* incorporates colloquial language with various incursions of spoken discourse, including the aforementioned coordinative “and” structures, as well as instances of vulgar language, among others. This immediately precludes the use of *passato remoto*. However, rendering the quick and straightforward past simple with a perfect tense such as *passato prossimo*, proved ineffective, as it resulted in longer and more structurally complex sentences. By contrast, the historical present preserves the narrative tone while maintaining structural conciseness. Moreover, it compensates for the neutralization of colloquial elements elsewhere in the text (such as the restructuring of “and” coordinate clauses) by reinforcing the informal tone.

An illustrative example is the passage:

> When I started asking those questions of myself a little more publicly, that's when I got the big call: the invitation to do a TED Talk. But not just any TED Talk, a speech about masculinity at TED Women. The invitation alone was more than humbling; it was daunting, and one that I wanted to turn down

which was translated as:

> Proprio quando inizio a farmi domande un po’ più pubblicamente ricevo la chiamata della vita: l’invito a tenere un TED Talk. E non un TED Talk qualsiasi, ma un discorso sulla mascolinità al

> TED Women. Già solo l'invito è non solo un bagno d'umiltà, ma anche un'opportunità spaventosa che volevo rifiutare.

rather than:

> Proprio quando ho iniziato a farmi domande un po' più pubblicamente ho ricevuto la chiamata della vita: l'invito a tenere un TED Talk. E non un TED Talk qualsiasi, ma un discorso sulla mascolinità al TED Women. Già solo l'invito è stato non solo un bagno d'umiltà, ma anche un'opportunità spaventosa che volevo rifiutare.

In this translation, the most prominent group of linguistic translation issues is of a lexical nature. These include partial false friends, such as the adjective "diverse" in the expression "a diverse global society", which in English means "including many different types of people or things"[8]. Thus, the adjective "diverse" differs from both *diverso*[9], which can also carry discriminatory connotations, and *diversificato*[10] in Italian: *società diversa* would translate as "different society", and *società diversificata* would suggest a society that has been 'made different'. Other alternatives considered were *società pluralizzata* and *società plurale*. The former is tied to *pluralismo*, a concept with strong political implications that are absent in the English term, making it unsuitable in this context. The latter is a collocation frequently used in social studies in the context of *multiculturalismo,* referring to societies where groups with diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds coexist. However, the collocation is not as commonly used in Italian as "diverse society" is in English, and it pertains mainly to formal, specialized discourse, to the point that Treccani does not recognize this meaning and lists *plurale* exclusively as an adjective used in linguistics and grammar[11].

While *società plurale* might be a possible option, *società globale e plurale*—with its rhyme and alliterations—creates a redundant result that has a distracting effect.

Given that one of the main implications of "diverse" in English is inclusivity, by isolating this specific nuance—the most important in the context—using the strategy of particularization, the phrase was rendered as *società globale e inclusiva*.

[8] Cf. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/diverse (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

[9] "Che non è uguale né simile, che si scosta per natura, aspetto, qualità da altro oggetto, o che è addirittura altra cosa". Cf. Diverso - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

[10] From the verb *diversificare*: "Rendere diverso, costituire la differenza [...] anche, considerare come diverso, discriminare". Cf. Diversificare - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

[11] Cf. Plurale - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

Another example of lexical translation issues is the adjective "partisan", which in English means "strongly supporting a person, principle, or political party, often without considering or judging the matter very carefully".[12] This term appears in the expressions "partisan belief system or agenda" and "partisan politics". While its meaning is immediately clear in English, its translation into Italian is challenging, particularly because "partisan" does not translate the same way in both expressions.

Following an initial bilingual search—which led to no results, as a direct equivalent does not exist—I experimented with the calque *politica partitica*. A Google search returned approximately 13,000 results, and a sample analysis indicated that *partitica,* in this already uncommon collocation, means "related to initiatives undertaken by political parties". Although this term falls within the correct semantic area, it does not fully capture the intended meaning, which refers to external support for a political party or agenda rather than the internal mechanisms of parties themselves.

Other options, such as *politica degli schieramenti* (which yielded approximately 2,600 results) and *schierarsi politicamente* were tested in context, but neither proved stylistically convincing or suitable for both occurrences of the term.

At this point, ChatGPT was consulted, first to define *politica partitica*, which aligned with the findings from the previous Google search[13], and then to suggest a translation for "partisan politics". The AI provided two options: *politica di parte* and *politica faziosa.* According to its definitions, the first "highlights a political approach that is aligned with a specific party or faction, often implying a lack of neutrality", while the second "has a stronger negative connotation, suggesting a biased, divisive, or even extremist stance".

Based on these definitions, *politica di parte* emerged as the closest match to "partisan politics". To ensure consistency, the AI was then queried in Italian, producing the following definition: *La politica di parte si riferisce a un tipo di politica in cui le decisioni, le posizioni e le azioni sono fortemente influenzate da una fedeltà o lealtà a un determinato partito politico o ideologia. In questo contesto, i rappresentanti politici o gli elettori tendono a sostenere un*

[12] Cf. PARTISAN | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

[13] The definition provided by the AI was: "La politica partitica si riferisce all'attività politica che coinvolge i partiti politici. [...] Quindi, la politica partitica è l'insieme delle azioni, delle strategie e delle dinamiche che i partiti adottano per:

- Organizzare e mobilitare i loro sostenitori;
- Influenzare il processo decisionale politico;
- Partecipare alle elezioni;
- Formulare proposte e programmi di governo.

In altre parole, si tratta di una politica che è direttamente collegata alla partecipazione e competizione tra i partiti per il controllo del potere politico all'interno di un sistema democratico o elettorale."
However, the AI could not provide exact sources for this information.

partito a prescindere dai contenuti specifici delle proposte, piuttosto che basarsi su un'analisi oggettiva delle questioni. This definition confirmed the consistency of the AI's previous English response and demonstrated a strong semantic similarity to the original term.

Lastly, a Google search for *"politica di parte" site:it* returned approximately 5.7 million results[14], further supporting its validity.

Regarding the translation of "partisan belief system or agenda" in the sentence "I am not pushing any partisan belief system or agenda here", it was rendered as *Non voglio imporre idee faziose o programmi politici*. The adjective *fazioso*[15] is typically used to describe people, and its pairing with nouns such as *idee*, *politiche* or *posizioni* is relatively uncommon[16]. However, not only does its meaning align with that of "partisan", but it is also particularly pertinent in this context, as the sentence that immediately follows ("As a registered Independent, I don't subscribe to any political ideology, and though I absolutely vote and participate in elections, I don't talk publicly about who I am voting for") clarifies the reference to politicians and American political parties.

Linguistic translation problems are perhaps the most common in translation, and addressing all of them in just a few pages would be impossible. After all, if problems often arise at an intralinguistic level due to the rarity of exact synonymy, how can exact correspondence be expected between different languages?

Text-specific translation problems

Text-specific translation problems are defined as "any problems arising in a particular text specimen which cannot be classified as pragmatic, cultural or linguistic" and "their occurrence in a particular text is a special case" (Nord 1992: 47). These issues include figures of speech, metaphors, creative use of language, etc.

Because of their specificity, their occurrence within this text is limited. Despite this, they can still present challenges when approached with target-oriented strategies, because they allow for some degree of modification and creativity.

For instance, the pun "Balboner" in the sentence, "One minute my teammates were making fun of me or calling me "Balboner" (good one, right?)" plays with the author's surname and the

[14] The data on the Google searches *"politica partitica" site:it*, *"politica di parte" site:it* and *"politica degli schieramenti" site:it* were updated on February 9, 2025.

[15] "Con sign. più generico, nell'uso moderno, di persona che subordina tutto alla propria ideologia assumendo consapevolmente atteggiamenti privi di obiettività e quindi settarî: *dirigenti politici f.* Cf. Fazióso - Significato ed etimologia - Vocabolario - Treccani (last accessed: February 9, 2025)

[16] Google searches produced the following results: *"idee faziose" site: it*, 176 results; *"politiche faziose" site: it*, 445 results; *"posizioni faziose" site: it*, 527 results. (Last accessed: February 10, 2025)

vulgar term “boner”. Here, the question “good one, right?” signals a prior joke, making it impossible to simply retain the pun in English and provide an explanatory note. Doing so would risk losing the intended effect of the pun and create confusion, as the readers would be asked to affirm something presented in a different language that they might not have understood. After testing different alternatives (*Balduro*, *Baldritto*), *Baldurello* was ultimately selected. It evokes a playful, teenage tone, aligning with the context and ensuring the translation retains the intended humor and authenticity.

A form of linguistic ethics: the use of the schwa in Italian written texts

As previously observed, translation is an eclectic practice: it is rooted in linguistic transfer but is also inherently cultural, as language and culture are inseparable aspects of human interaction. In translation practice, acknowledging that language is the textual manifestation of culture and that culture is shaped by language leads to a reflection that is both intertextual and extratextual, one that concerns the signifier while also engaging with the ethical dimension of the translator. A translator who understands that the signifier influences the signified will naturally seek to employ signifiers that represent all individuals without exclusion and to use a language that is considerate of diverse sensibilities.

In this regard, one of the most debated topics in recent linguistic research is the development of strategies that enable languages to move beyond the binary opposition ‘masculine vs. feminine’ at a morphological level. This pursuit arises for multiple reasons: to provide non-binary people with linguistic representation, to address an individual whose gender identity is unknown and to offer a solution to what is known in Italian as *genere indefinito*, allowing speakers to address a mixed audience without resorting to *maschile sovraesteso*.

Translators attuned to contemporary cultural and linguistic developments cannot overlook this significant discussion, which reflects a broader movement toward inclusivity—or, as Fabrizio Acanfora terms it, *convivenza delle differenze* (Acanfora Schwa: una questione identitaria - Treccani). This does not mean that translators must necessarily endorse these linguistic innovations. Indeed, they may ultimately decide against incorporating these inclusive language strategies. Nonetheless, an awareness of ongoing developments in this area remains essential to delineate the ethical boundaries of their role.

Unlike Italian, English has relatively few gender markers and lacks grammatical gendered endings. Consequently, proposals for gender-neutral language in English primarily focus on personal pronouns and forms of address. A widely accepted and seamless solution is the so-called “singular they”, which repurposes existing third-person plural forms (they, them, their,

theirs, themself) to refer to an indefinite singular subject. The singular they is used in three main contexts: to refer to a generic individual whose gender is unknown or irrelevant, to refer to a specific non-binary person, or to reference a specific individual whose gender is unknown. This strategy is particularly effective because it leverages an existing element of English grammar and requires minimal morphological adjustment beyond subject-verb agreement.

In this thesis, the "singular they" is used when referring to translators—among others—who are generally addressed in the plural. For instance, the sentence "as either communicated by the commissioner or determined by the translators themselves" (p. 125) avoids gendered pronouns such as "himself/herself" through the simple use of the plural. This approach not only sidesteps structures that reinforce gender binarism but also enhances the readability and fluidity of the text. A gendered alternative, such as "as either communicated by the commissioner or determined by the translator himself/herself," would be both cumbersome and stylistically disruptive.

In Italian—a language with gendered endings for nouns, adjectives and determiners, which therefore requires a more complex system of word agreements—the situation is more intricate. Various proposals have been introduced to address morphological binarism. In her essay *Salve a tuttə, tutt*, tuttu, tuttx e tutt@: l'uso delle strategie di neutralizzazione di genere nella comunità queer online. Ricerca sul corpus CoGeNSI* (2021), Gloria Comandini examines these strategies, classifying them as either "standard" or "sub-standard" (Comandini 2021: 48-49). The standard strategies include:

> a) l'uso di epiceni o nomi di genere comune senza l'articolo, ossia di parole che mantengono la stessa forma sia al maschile che al femminile (4); b) l'uso di pronomi relativi o indefiniti, che nel caso di (5) sostituiscono *il lettore/la lettrice*; c) l'uso di termini collettivi (*la redazione, il pubblico, il personale, la direzione, l'utenza*) (6); d) l'uso di nomi neutri (*la persona, il membro, l'individuo, il singolo, il soggetto*) (7); e) l'uso di strutture impersonali (8) o la riformulazione della frase in modo tale da non nominare esplicitamente il soggetto, usando invece una formula passiva (9); f) l'uso di altri tipi di perifrasi o riformulazioni, come si vede in (10), in cui *l'associazione studentesca* sostituisce *l'associazione degli studenti/delle studentesse* (Giorcelli et al. 2015; MIUR 2018; Alma Mater Studiorum –Università di Bologna 2020). D'Achille (2021b) considera delle strategie utili anche l'omissione dei pronomi personali *lui/lei*, sostituiti dal nome proprio (eventualmente usato in una forma accorciata ambigenere quale *Fede* e *Vale*), e l'eventuale uso anche nello scritto del pronome obliquo sovraesteso *gli*, che già nel parlato colloquiale è spesso usato in luogo di le.
>
> 4. Simone è collega di Martina da oltre dieci anni;
> 5. Chi leggerà il libro di Simone potrà poi notare il particolare uso delle poesie;

6. Il pubblico di Simone potrà poi notare il particolare uso delle poesie;
7. Le persone che leggeranno il libro di Simone potranno poi notare il particolare uso delle poesie;
8. Si dovrà leggere il libro di Simone per notare il particolare uso delle poesie;
9. Il particolare uso delle poesie nel libro di Simone potrà essere notato;
10. L'associazione studentesca di cui fa parte Simone ha organizzato una presentazione del suo libro. (Comandini 2021: 49)

Regarding the "sub-standard" strategies, Comandini identifies various graphic alternatives to gendered endings *-a* and *-o* (feminine and masculine singular), and *-e* and *-i* (feminine and masculine plural). These include the asterisk (e.g., *tutt**), the at sign (e.g., *tutt@*), the "-u" (e.g., *tuttu*), the "-x" (e.g., *tuttx*), the low dash (e.g., *tutt_*) e the schwa (e.g., *tuttə*). Citing sociolinguist, TED speaker and professor Vera Gheno, she also includes the apostrophe (e.g., *tutt'*) and the "-y" (e.g., *tutty*).

The primary criterion for assessing the feasibility of these options is the possibility to pronounce them. While symbols such as the asterisk, at sign, and low dash function solely as written conventions—as they lack a corresponding phonetic realization—the "-y" can be pronounced but closely resembles the plural masculine *-i*. The "-u", by contrast, is both writable and pronounceable, making it more accessible. However, challenges remain. Scientific communicator Cesco Reale argues that "-u" suitable only for singular forms[17]—a claim contradicted by speakers who actively use it in the plural. Additionally, Vera Gheno points out that the "-u" ending appears in many Italian dialects as a masculine marker, making words that adopt this form sound, in her view, as a "supermasculine."[18]

The proposal that has gained the most traction is the use of the schwa (ə), a phonetic symbol representing a mid-central vowel located at the center of the vowel quadrilateral. Unlike other Italian vowels, which require distinct mouth movements, the schwa is pronounced with a relaxed, semi-open mouth position. Although it is not found in standard Italian nor included in the Italian alphabet, it appears in several languages, including English (e.g., "about" /əˈbaʊt/; camera /ˈkæm.rə/), as well as in some Italian dialects, such as Neapolitan (e.g., *femmǝna* /ˈfɛm.mə.nə/; jammə /ˈjam.mə/) and Piedmontese (e.g., frèidə /ˈfrɛj.də/; lət /lət/).

[17] My translation and summary of Reale's statement: *Una proposta pronunciabile è la u: «È andatu via», ma è usabile solo al singolare.* Cf. Linguaggio inclusivo: una panoramica - Treccani (last accessed: February 14, 2025)
[18] My translation and summary of Gheno's statement: *Per quanto mi riguarda, da linguista, la -u come forma. diciamo così, non binaria non mi soddisfa, perché in molti dialetti italiani la -u è una marca di maschile, e quindi quando io sento "buonasera a tuttu" mi sembra di sentire un supermaschile.* Cf. (122) Che cos'è il LINGUAGGIO INCLUSIVO? | Dialogo con VERA GHENO - YouTube (last accessed: February 14, 2025)

The suggestion to adopt the schwa as a means of transcending gender binarism is commonly associated with the already mentioned Vera Gheno, who has studied its use in Italian as a linguistic tool for representing individuals who do not identify within the traditional gender binary. As Gheno explains:

> Il motivo per cui questo simbolo è diventato oggetto di un'accesa discussione, che ha portato fino alla creazione di una petizione su change.org intitolata "Lo schwa (ə)? No, grazie. Pro lingua nostra", è che negli ultimi anni il suo uso ha iniziato a diffondersi in vari contesti per cercare di superare quello che alcune categorie di persone giudicano come un limite espressivo della lingua italiana, ossia il fatto che non sia possibile non esprimere il genere di una persona o di un gruppo di persone. (Gheno, 2022: web, 15/02/2025)

Regarding its origins, Gheno first considered the schwa in this context after being approached by non-binary people at conferences on the use of feminine grammatical forms in Italian for professions and roles[19], who inquired about a suitable linguistic alternative that could represent them as well. However, Gheno later discovered that the symbol had already been in use for some time within certain queer and feminist communities:

> La prima vera e stabile attestazione dello schwa è dunque rappresentata da un articolo pubblicato online nel 2015 a firma di Luca Boschetto, "Proposta per l'introduzione della schwa come desinenza per un italiano neutro rispetto al genere, o italiano inclusivo"; successivamente, nel 2020, il testo di quell'articolo è diventato parte del sito web Italiano Inclusivo, creato e mantenuto a oggi sempre da Boschetto; non un linguista, dunque, ma una persona interessata a fatti di lingua che fa parte della comunità queer. La proposta di Boschetto è di integrare l'italiano con due caratteri diversi: lo "schwa breve", "ə", per il singolare, e lo "schwa lungo", "ɜ", per il plurale [...]. (Gheno, 2022: web, 15/02/2025)

Alongside *Italiano Inclusivo*, the publishing house *Effequ* also adopted the schwa for its *Saggi Pop* collection. With Gheno's assistance, Effequ implemented the schwa in a distinctive way, using ə for both singular and plural forms.

Despite its advantages, the adoption of the schwa also presents certain challenges. Firstly, it may pose difficulties for individuals with dyslexia, neurodivergent readers, or those with

[19] Vera Gheno's linguistic research also focuses on a topic that has encountered widespread public resistance: the use of feminine forms in Italian to address women in professions and roles traditionally associated with masculinity. In her book *Femminili singolari: Il femminismo è nelle parole* (2021), she discusses this resistance and explores how language reflects societal attitudes toward gender. Ultimately, she advocates for a conscious and inclusive approach to language as a step toward feminist practice.

general reading impairments, such as the elderly. Secondly, it is currently not included on standard keyboards and is not recognized by text-to-speech software.

However, the primary resistance to its adoption comes from those who argue that the use of the schwa would not only destroy the Italian language but also impose an ideological agenda—while disregarding the fact that rejecting it on the grounds of viewing non-binarism or gender nonconformity as nonsensical is itself an ideological stance.

What is certain is that, despite criticism and obstructionism, the schwa is being used—and this happens not only in day-to-day private conversations or on social media, but also in literature. In 2021, Michela Murgia and Chiara Tagliaferri's *Morgana: L'uomo ricco sono io* (2021) was the first narrative book to be published using the schwa; in 2022 activist Valeria Fonte published *Ne uccide più la lingua*; in 2020 Lorenzo Fantoni released *Vivere mille vite*; and in translation, Márcia Tiburi's *Il contrario della solitudine. Manifesto per un femminismo in comune* (2020) was translated by Eloisa Del Giudice.

This thesis does not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of the use of schwa in Italian, nor could it, as the phenomenon is too recent and is only embraced by a niche group, meaning it has not yet been standardized. Instead, one of its aims is to contribute to the discussion around inclusive language in Italian within the field of translation studies and to demonstrate that a language mindful of differences is not only possible but can seamlessly uplift all individualities without undermining the grammar, as many critics argue. Indeed, had the debate around the use of alternative desinences not been started with such prejudice, the reader would hardly notice when a writer is actively trying to adopt neutral language.

As far as this translation proposal is concerned, in many parts of the book—almost in its entirety—the author addresses men directly. In these cases, there was no need to use a form other than the masculine. However, in the *Introduction*, the author addresses the readers as a group of men, women, and non-binary people:

> I want this book to feel like a trusted friend-whether you are a man who, like me, feels like you've been trying for too long to fit in a box that's too small, or you are a woman or nonbinary person who wants insight into how masculinity has affected not only your life but also the lives of the men you know and love.

On other occasions in the text, the author acknowledges non-binary identities again, as in the case of "I cannot learn about how sexism and gender inequality have benefited me at the cost of women, trans, and nonbinary people without also educating myself on how racism and racial

inequality has benefited me at the cost of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color."

In the context of this translation, therefore, not only does the use of non-binary morphological strategies reflect the translator's ethical stances, but it is also a choice that respects the author's intention to address their readers inclusively. In other words, it would be wrong to use *maschile sovraesteso* to refer to groups that are not exclusively male, as this would misrepresent the author's view of his readers (and society) as a diverse group, each with an identity deserving of representation. Without a graphic strategy to open the language beyond binarism, Nord's principle of loyalty toward the author could not be fulfilled.

This proves, once again, that translators cannot overlook the importance of linguistic experimentation with non-binary language.

For all the reasons mentioned above, this thesis adopts the schwa as a way to align with both the original author's and the translator's ethical positions, adhering to the guidelines provided by *Italiano Inclusivo* and extending the use of ə and ɜ not only to represent non-binary people but also to indicate a *genere indefinito*, thereby avoiding the *maschile sovraesteso*.

This can be seen in the following example: "Most importantly, I want this book to restore in you the belief that you are good, inherently and intrinsically good, and that who you are, as you are, is enough" is translated as *Soprattutto, voglio che questo libro ripristini in te la convinzione che sei buonə, naturalmente e intrinsecamente buonə, e che la persona che sei, così come sei, è abbastanza.*

Another example is "Figuratively, I think of privilege like the hurdles in the sense that we are each running our own race, in our own lane, and yet we each have our own sets of hurdles, or barriers, in our lane on the way to the finish line", rendered as *In modo figurato collego il privilegio agli ostacoli nel senso che ognunə gareggia nella propria corsia, eppure ciascunə ha i propri ostacoli, o barriere, lungo il percorso per arrivare al traguardo.*

It should be noted that the use of indefinite suffixes effectively solves the issue of not knowing someone's gender identity, providing a respectful and neutral solution that avoids error. In the book, this is exemplified in the sentence "My phone rang. It was my agent and manager, and whenever they called me together, it was either really, really good news or really not good news", where no additional information about the gender identities of the agent and manager is provided. The 'indefinite' schwa offers a solution: *Mi squilla il telefono. Che lə miə agente e lə miə manager mi chiamassero insieme significava sempre ricevere o una notizia ottima o una notizia pessima. Stavolta si trattava decisamente della seconda.*

Overall, despite the ongoing debate and lack of consensus on which symbol should be used to challenge gender binarism—whether two different linguistic strategies should be used to differentiate between non-binary and indefinite solutions[20], or whether the discussion itself is even valid—the only way to allow linguists to study the use and feasibility of such strategies is to implement them in writing.

As previously mentioned, the schwa is not the only available option. Other standard strategies can be employed, which will remain invisible to the reader unless the writer or translator explicitly defines them.

To revisit the examples presented earlier, *Soprattutto, voglio che questo libro ripristini in te la convinzione che sei buonə, naturalmente e intrinsecamente buonə, e che la persona che sei, così come sei, è abbastanza* can easily become *Soprattutto, voglio che questo libro ripristini in te la convinzione di essere una persona buona, naturalmente e intrinsecamente buona, e che, essere così come sei, è abbastanza.*

Similarly, *In modo figurato collego il privilegio agli ostacoli nel senso che ognunə gareggia nella propria corsia, eppure ciascunə ha i propri ostacoli, o barriere, lungo il percorso per arrivare al traguardo* could become *In modo figurato collego il privilegio agli ostacoli nel senso che ogni persona gareggia nella propria corsia, eppure ciascuna ha i propri ostacoli, o barriere, lungo il percorso per arrivare al traguardo.*

Lastly, in *Mi squilla il telefono. Che lə miə agente e lə miə manager mi chiamassero insieme significava sempre ricevere o una notizia ottima o una notizia pessima. Stavolta si trattava decisamente della seconda* the determiners can be omitted, enhancing the informal structure of the sentence. The result is *Mi squilla il telefono. Agente e manager che mi chiamavano insieme significava sempre ricevere o una notizia ottima o una notizia pessima. Stavolta si trattava decisamente della seconda.*

To provide a quantitative overview, the *Introduction* and *Chapter V* of the original text comprise 16,831 words, whereas the Italian translation consists of 16,189 words. Within this translation, only 45 instances of words featured the singular schwa (ə), while 187 occurrences used the plural schwa (ɜ), resulting in a total of 232 words. This equates to a mere 1.43% of the Italian text incorporating gender-neutral morphological modifications.

[20] On this matter, Cesco Reale argues that *molte persone non-binarie mettono in evidenza che oltre al genere indefinito sarebbe necessario anche un "genere non-binario" che includa coloro che non si identificano né con il genere maschile né con quello femminile. [...] In quest'ottica, le vocali centrali (ə, ɜ) potrebbero essere usate per indicare il genere non-binario, mentre le desinenze u e ie potrebbero essere usate per il genere indefinito, ossia come forma inclusiva.* (Giordano, 2021: web, February 15, 2025)

Critics may argue that such a minimal percentage does not justify the effort required to implement these linguistic changes. However, reframing the discussion offers a different perspective: if gender-inclusive modifications constitute such a small fraction of the text, making slight adjustments to accommodate inclusive language should not be considered a burdensome or disruptive task. Rather, it is a minor yet meaningful step toward linguistic representation for all individuals.

Finally, to those who dismiss this debate as inconsequential, it is worth reiterating a fundamental principle that has been extensively analyzed not only in this thesis but also by scholars over the past century: language shapes reality. Resisting the evolution of language toward more inclusive forms does not stem from a genuine desire to preserve linguistic purity—an ideal that does not exist, as language is inherently shaped by its speakers and their social realities. Instead, such resistance reflects an unwillingness to embrace the progression toward a more diverse and equitable society.

A reversed ethical declaration of responsibility and intent

The previous sections explored various types of textual translation problems, each presenting distinct degrees and types of difficulty, along with a broader challenge that is simultaneously intra- and extratextual.

Despite these complexities, the most pressing difficulty in translating the chosen text was extratextual, as it involved ethical concerns that ultimately led to a reconsideration of the overall validity of the translation proposal.

As emphasized in the first chapter of this thesis, Baldoni's *Man Enough* has the potential to foster meaningful change regarding gender stereotypes, sexism and toxic masculinity, encouraging a self-reflection that inevitably challenges existing power structures. In an era marked by the resurgence of authoritarian political figures who promote tradition-inspired, rigid and repressive social structures, translating books that advocate for acceptance, inclusion and a critical reassessment of traditional gender definitions becomes an act of resistance more necessary than ever.

In the United States, the recent political climate exemplifies this regressive shift. The administration of President Donald Trump, alongside influential figures such as Elon Musk, embodies a model of masculinity that thrives on racial, gender, and LGBTQIA+ intolerance, reinforcing exclusivity and personal profit as dominant values. This exclusivity manifests through the reinforcement of gender binarism and the erasure of trans and queer identities. Since his reinstatement, universities have experienced the shutdown or suspension of research

programs—not only those specifically dedicated to racial and ethnic diversity or transgender issues but also any research, regardless of the field, that merely mentioned terms such as "LGBT," "non-binary," or "gender non-conforming."

The administration has also terminated all diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the federal government and ordered agencies to shut down programs and grants that promote 'gender ideology'. As a consequence, dozens of studies—ranging from suicide prevention to women's reproductive health—have been removed from federal websites. This issue expands to governmental webpages; a notable example is the U.S. Department of State's revised webpage for LGBTQI+ travelers, now reduced to "LGB Travelers".

Cultural erasure is always accompanied by linguistic erasure, underscoring the persistent operation of censorship mechanisms. Those who dismiss discussions on inclusive language as trivial are fully aware of the creative and transformative power of words; otherwise, they would not actively seek to eliminate certain terms, as if erasing the signifier could also erase the signified.

In such historical moments, translation emerges as a crucial tool of resistance. It functions not only as a means of introducing new ideas but also as a safeguard against the dissemination of regressive, unscientific discourses that threaten the future of marginalized communities. The United States has historically been at the forefront of feminist and queer studies, producing academic research that has served as a global reference point. However, the current political climate threatens this leadership position. In response, translations into English could facilitate the importation of knowledge from other countries, thereby countering dominant narratives and fostering intellectual and activist resistance.

The Italian cultural landscape reflects similar trends, a development that is unsurprising given the close political alignment between Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and U.S. President Donald Trump. Since taking office, Meloni's administration has overseen the removal of individuals and television programs from the state-owned broadcaster *Rai*, replacing them with figures more aligned with the Italian right or those unlikely to challenge the existing power structure. Simultaneously, ultraconservative pro-life organizations such as *Pro Vita e Famiglia* continue to operate without obstruction, promoting anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns within schools and hospitals.

Parallel to this broader regressive shift, an intriguing phenomenon has emerged: the strategic appropriation of feminism by men for personal and professional gain. Unlike overtly misogynistic figures, self-proclaimed feminist men recognize the financial and social capital feminism can offer, they embed themselves in feminist or female-populated spaces and assume

leadership positions. As writer Carolina Capria observes, this pattern is particularly evident in industries such as fashion and cuisine, where male dominance has redefined professional hierarchies. Capria argues that when men perceive an opportunity for economic benefit and influence in traditionally female-dominated fields, they assert control, ultimately reshaping these spaces to center their own narratives while relegating women's voices to the margins. This dynamic effectively reproduces the long-standing dominant-dominated relationship. In this context, feminism has been commodified, transformed into an exchangeable good and weaponized for economic gain and visibility.

Recent discussions surrounding Justin Baldoni and his activism provide a pertinent example of this dynamic. Following the release of his film *It Ends With Us*—an adaptation of Colleen Hoover's novel about a domestic violence survivor—rumors surfaced regarding tensions between Baldoni and co-star Blake Lively. In December 2024, an 80-page legal complaint[21] filed by Lively against Baldoni became public, citing allegations of retaliation, sexual harassment, failure to investigate, prevent and/or remedy harassment, breach of contract, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligence, false light invasion of privacy, and interference with prospective economic advantage. Baldoni subsequently filed a countersuit in January 2025, accusing Lively of defamation, extortion and economic damage. This legal battle has led many to question whether Baldoni's advocacy for gender equality was weaponized for personal gain, rather than stemming from a genuine commitment to fostering social and personal change.

While the details of their legal dispute are not the focus of this analysis, the controversy underscores broader ethical questions regarding the separation of an artist from their work, the importance of space and representation, the manipulative potential of social media in shaping public opinion[22], the difficulty women face in having their voices heard[23], and, ultimately, the importance of establishing ethical boundaries for a translator.

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[21] The document was first made available by *The New York Times* on December, 21, 2024. It is currently downloadable from Read Blake Lively's Complaint Against Wayfarer Studios - The New York Times. (Last accessed: February 12, 2025)

[22] The smear campaign against Blake Lively, as evidenced in her legal complaint, was a calculated effort to manipulate public opinion, divert scrutiny from Justin Baldoni, and maintain his favorable image. At the core of this strategy were social media platforms, which facilitated the large-scale dissemination of misleading content. Key tactics included the deployment of automated bot accounts to flood comment sections and artificially boost negative or defamatory posts about the actress. These accounts strategically spread misinformation portraying her as manipulative, unprofessional, or vindictive. Additionally, certain narratives framed the film adaptation and promotion as superficial or poorly executed, linking Lively's involvement to its perceived shortcomings. The case underscores the broader issue of how social media can be weaponized to discredit individuals—particularly women—in high-profile disputes, leveraging the rapid spread of misinformation.

[23] The rapid spread of misinformation, which polarized public opinion in Baldoni's favor, was largely facilitated by the strategic exploitation of Lively's preexisting reputation as a difficult person to work with. By capitalizing

The question of whether a work should be evaluated independently of its author has been a subject of longstanding debate. On one hand, a cultural product, once created, enters the public domain, embarking on its own journey. On the other hand, this work remains inextricably linked to its author for two key reasons: first, it is inevitably shaped by the author's belief system and cultural background, becoming a conduit for those influences; second, if the work achieves success, it generates economic profit and enhances the author's visibility—visibility that carries power, as it facilitates the dissemination of one's narrative.

The argument for separating authors from their work has historically benefitted male authors—who operate within a societal structure that affords them power more easily than it does women—allowing them to maintain cultural prominence regardless of their personal conduct. A notable example is that of renowned journalist Indro Montanelli, who openly and unapologetically spoke of his "marriage" (i.e., colonial violence) to a 12-year-old Eritrean girl while serving as a soldier in the Italian colonial army in Ethiopia during the late 1930s[24]. His defenders argue that he was a great journalist and a product of his time, while critics stress the importance of acknowledging and condemning the colonial abuses in which he was complicit. What is certain, however, is that Montanelli faced no consequences for his actions, and his career remained unaffected by the violence he perpetuated, for which he was never held accountable.

This issue is not limited to the previous century. In December 2024, 36-year-old antispeciesist philosopher Leonardo Caffo was invited to *Più libri più liberi*, one of Italy's most prestigious book fairs dedicated to independent publishers, despite facing trial for aggravated mistreatment and serious injury against his former partner.

Caffo's invitation, extended by curator Chiara Valerio—a prominent figure in the Italian literary scene—sparked significant controversy, particularly given that the fair was dedicated to Giulia Cecchettin, tragically killed in November 2023 by her ex-boyfriend, as well as Valerio's close friendship with influential writer and journalist Michela Murgia. Murgia was a key figure in the Italian feminist movement, elevating discussions on femininity and gender

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on public dislike, this campaign effectively shifted the narrative to Baldoni's advantage. This tactic underscores a broader issue: the systemic barriers women face when speaking out against abuse. Despite their visibility and influence—factors that should, in theory, afford them greater protection—women in the music, film, and television industries remain subject to male-dominated power structures designed to discredit and silence them. If such tactics can be successfully employed against high-profile women who have access to resources and public platforms, the implications for women with no tools or support systems are even more alarming. These structures operate by framing women who challenge the status quo as irrational, unlikable, or untrustworthy, weaponizing these perceptions against them when they seek justice or demand basic respect.

[24] Interviews to Montanelli describing how he bought the girl and dismissing the issue as a product of different cultural norms are available on social media platforms. Cf. (122) Indro Montanelli: "Comprai la ragazzina per 500 lire, insieme ad un cavallo ed un fucile" - YouTube (last accessed: February 11, 2025)

roles, and her legacy continues to shape discourse even after her death. Despite widespread criticism, Valerio defended her decision by invoking constitutional principles, asserting that "anyone who has not received a definitive sentence has the constitutional right to speak."[25] Although Caffo voluntarily withdrew from participation, the incident underscores how men will be readily afforded platforms to influence public discourse even when facing charges of crimes such as gender-based violence. This reinforces systemic patterns that prioritize male voices, even within feminist and progressive spaces. Just two days after the conclusion of the fair, on December 10, 2024, Caffo was sentenced to four years in prison.

Caffo's conviction ignited discussions about the intersection of intellectual reputation and personal conduct, a debate of utmost importance. Public figures serve as cultural symbols, and their inclusion or exclusion from intellectual spaces conveys powerful messages about societal values and the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

The concept of separating the author from their work has offered little benefit to society. On the contrary, it has only reinforced the notion that men will always be granted access to positions of influence, regardless of their actions. It is time to reconsider this paradigm and actively choose to elevate voices that are free from such controversy, voices that simply adhere to principles of mutual respect.

The allocation of space is a critical issue in discussions of gender and power, as every space granted to an undeserving or controversial author is a space taken from another author who lacks the same opportunity for visibility. Feminism has long fought for women's rightful place in intellectual and cultural spheres, and, after centuries of exclusion, this space remains precarious. Historically, women were deemed intellectually incapable, culturally inferior, and, more recently, 'less interesting' than their male counterparts. Today, they continue to be systematically underrepresented due to deeply ingrained societal biases—an issue that extends even more acutely to all marginalized groups.

Therefore, when space is created, the decision of who is awarded it must be informed by an awareness of the historical inequalities that have shaped—and continue to shape—our society. This is not merely a matter of representation; it is also an opportunity to introduce counternarratives into the discourse. A space is always an opportunity to tell a story, and to tell a story is to hold the power to shape how we experience and perceive the world.

[25] My translation of Chiara Valerio's intervention on the Italian TV program *Propaganda Live*. Cf. (122) Caso Caffo a "Più libri più liberi", la risposta di Chiara Valerio: "Chi non è condannato ha ... - YouTube (last accessed: February 13, 2025)

This principle was central to the selection of the book for this translation proposal. Initially, the choice to translate a male author's work was fraught with hesitation. Was it truly necessary to amplify yet another male voice? Would it not be more valuable to elevate a marginalized voice instead?

Before December 2024, when the accusation of sexual harassment became public, the answer to these questions laid in the book's potential to generate social change. As previously emphasized, it is long overdue that men move beyond the reactive posture of previous generations toward female emancipation and actively begin to redefine their roles through self-reflection and self-work. This can only be achieved if more male-authored literature and initiatives are undertaken. Given this, if the translated work had the potential to reach a wider audience and foster critical discussions on masculinity, gender roles, blackness, queerness and marginalization, why the hesitation? Whether male, female, straight, or queer-produced, what difference did it make? The desired outcome—the *skopos*—and the potential impact of the book *had to* take precedence over all else. It was time for men to do the work.

December 2024 prompted a reconsideration of this previously held belief, as amplifying yet another male voice is one matter when such a voice positively contributes to the debate, but another when the author's problematic conduct only reinforces the notion that reprehensible personal conduct is not only tolerated but deemed inconsequential for men. Despite initial reluctance to continue with this project, it became evident that it represented an opportunity to reflect on the ethical dimensions of translation, both in relation to the translation itself and the translator's ethical stance.

This thesis highlights the moral complexities inherent in the fact that the translation process is subject to continuous change, serving as concrete evidence of this. Six months have passed since its inception, during which the world has undergone constant transformation, and both this thesis and translation proposal—and the translator—have evolved in tandem with global developments.

In light of the above, the initial plan to propose the book for publication will not be pursued at the moment and unless clear evidence of Baldoni's good conduct is provided. If the first chapter of this thesis argued that translators should offer an ethical declaration of responsibility and intent when undertaking a translation task, then this serves as a reversed ethical declaration of responsibility in relation to both this non-task and the thesis itself.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The trajectory of this thesis and the decision to ultimately withdraw the idea of proposing the translation *of Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity* for publication reflect a possibility that is always inherent in the translation process: the potential for extratextual conditions to shift, compelling the translator to reconsider their entire approach. This shift represents more than just a reconsideration of a single work; it signals a broader reflection on the ethical responsibilities inherent in the act of translation.

Translators cannot separate their linguistic work from the ethical dimensions that shape it. Every decision made, both at an intralinguistic and extralinguistic level, carries significant moral weight. Translation is not a neutral endeavor; it is a deeply political act that actively shapes and reshapes the narratives circulating within society. In this sense, the translator's work extends far beyond linguistic mediation: it plays a crucial role in the ongoing construction and deconstruction of cultural discourses.

In the specific case of *Man Enough*, the ethical dilemma was not merely about the alignment of the book's message with its author's actions. It was also about the power dynamics involved in choosing to elevate certain voices at a time when the boundaries of acceptable discourse are increasingly being controlled by regressive ideologies. The risk of passing the message that unethical behavior and the weaponization of feminist discourse would be greenlit could not be taken.

The power of translation lies in its ability to challenge dominant ideologies and create spaces for marginalized voices to be heard. Translators are not just linguistic bridges but cultural agents capable of reshaping societal narratives. This should prompt translators to reflect deeply on the ethical implications of their work—how it will impact the target culture, the type of change they hope to inspire and the creative and revolutionary power they wield.

This is particularly significant in a historical moment when regressive ideologies threaten to entrench systemic inequalities. Translators, as agents of cultural change, have a responsibility to navigate these challenges thoughtfully and with an awareness of the broader impact their choices can have.

As far as this thesis (and thus this contribution to promoting significant social change) is concerned, *Man Enough* was initially believed to have the potential to act as a catalyst for much-needed conversations on masculinity and gender equality. Yet, the extratextual challenge that arose during the process of translating this work revealed the importance of aligning one's professional endeavors with personal ethics. In this case, it meant sacrificing a potential work

engagement in order to refuse amplifying voices that, despite their potential to inspire, may ultimately perpetuate harm.

This experience also highlighted the necessity for a broader rethinking of translation's ethical framework. Translators must reflect on the kinds of works that should be promoted in today's ultracapitalist societies—texts that invite the deconstruction of harmful norms and encourage the creation of new frameworks based on acceptance, equality and cooperation. In a time when political forces are increasingly skewed toward the preservation of oppressive power structures, it becomes imperative for translators to prioritize texts that challenge regressive narratives and offer alternative visions for the future. Translation, when carried out with a conscientious heart and mind, can indeed shape the world for the better.

The decision to not proceed with the translation proposal is not an abandonment of the belief that translation has the potential to change the world. On the contrary, a 'zero translation' represents a conscious stance, one that refuses to amplify voices that perpetuate harm or uphold toxic power dynamics. In this sense, the refusal to translate becomes an act of resistance, a deliberate refusal to contribute to the circulation of narratives that could reinforce inequity and injustice.

It is not just the words themselves that matter, but the ethical, political, and social contexts in which those words are rendered. The act of selecting a text to translate, and even the act of refusing to translate one, carries profound weight. Translators wield considerable power, and this power must be exercised with awareness of its potential impact on society.

In hope that the seeds,
when transplanted,
flourish.

APPENDIX

The following translation proposal was developed by a group of three students, Giorgia Sclafani, Elisa Zanotel and myself, as part of the Ethics, Professional Deontology and Team Working course held by Professor Linda Rossato within the broader framework of the Translation and Interpreting Master's Degree at Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Proposta editoriale

Titolo dell'opera	Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity
Autore	Justin Baldoni
Detengono i diritti	Harper Collins Publishers
Casa Editrice	Harper Collins
Collana	Cultura e società
Anno di pubblicazione	2021
Numero di Pagine	368
ISBN	9780063055599
Contenuti ed interesse dell'opera	Una delle questioni sociali che generano più dibattito nell'Italia contemporanea è quella della tanto agognata parità di genere. Argomento dibattuto da chiunque ma approcciato in maniera sistematica, analitica ed empirica da poche e pochi, l'opinione pubblica sembrerebbe pregiarsi di un'intenzione alla parità che spesso non trova riscontro nella realtà dei fatti. Basti pensare che, seppur con la prima Premier donna della storia italiana alla guida del paese, non solo i casi di violenza di genere non intendono diminuire, ma i fondi statali destinati alla prevenzione del fenomeno sono stati nettamente sfoltiti. Non manca, poi, nemmeno chi sostiene non solo che la disuguaglianza è cosa del passato, ma che le posizioni di potere si siano addirittura ribaltate. A fare da contrappeso in questo processo di banalizzazione troviamo, invece, la falange femminista di studiose, scrittrici, giornaliste e attiviste, ma anche gruppi di autocoscienza e supporto femminile "dal basso", che scavano, sfidano e decostruiscono l'idea di femminilità e del femminile, laddove, sfortunatamente, pochissimi sono, ad oggi, gli esperimenti di decostruzione del maschile ad opera degli uomini. Negli ultimi anni, anche grazie all'iniziativa di Justin Baldoni, autore dell'opera oggetto di questa proposta, Jamey Heath, presidente dei Wayfarer Studios, e Liz Plank, autrice e giornalista, e del loro podcast, "The Man Enough Podcast", il dibattito attorno al maschile si è messo in marcia nei paesi anglofoni, non senza reticenze ed ostruzionismi. In Italia, un profondo colpo di vanga nel terreno del dibattito è arrivato da Elena e Gino Cecchettin, sorella e padre della giovane Giulia Cecchettin, giovanissima vittima di un femminicidio che ha catalizzato l'attenzione delle italiane e degli italiani di tutte le età. Seppur con le consuete

	strumentalizzazioni da parte dei media mainstream, il tragico evento è anche riuscito a schiacciare il pulsante di accensione di tante coscienze maschili che hanno sentito che, forse, è arrivato il momento di scardinare convinzioni millenarie che ingabbiano tanto le donne quanto gli uomini. Tuttavia, mentre acquisiscono maggiore visibilità le realtà di autosostegno maschile e ne nascono di nuove, la letteratura in merito è ancora scarsa e gli uomini rischiano di trovarsi senza bussole per orientarsi nel labirinto delle discriminazioni di genere e delle motivazioni che, culturalmente, le generano. "Man Enough" si inserisce in questo contesto. È un libro scritto da un uomo in uno stile discorsivo ed informale, semplice ed immediato, apolitico e privo di giudizio. È un'autobiografia che diventa un viaggio di formazione onesto ed aperto, un'esperienza personale che si affaccia alle esperienze di altre persone che si identificano nel genere maschile, una lettura necessaria perché onesta ed emotiva, che cattura l'attenzione del lettore che voglia approcciarsi al complesso processo di decostruzione di sè.
Proposta editoriale	Particolarmente curioso è il titolo del libro, "Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity", che attraverso l'utilizzo di un neologismo formato dal prefisso privativo "un" ed il verbo "define", ci porta immediatamente a riflettere su come questa scelta linguistica si possa concretizzare sul piano reale: che vuol dire per l'autore essere "abbastanza uomo"? E perché la necessità di "decostruire" la propria mascolinità? Questo libro chiarisce immediatamente il proprio *focus*, rivolgendosi al lettore in modo chiaro e diretto, ma senza rinunciare alla delicatezza. Incentrata sull'evoluzione dell'autore, la narrazione accompagna l'*audience* verso una crescita personale che va di pari passo con l'esperienza di Baldoni, il tutto con uno stile informale e alla portata di tutti che allarga lo spettro dei potenziali lettori in modo esponenziale. Ciò viene condizionato dall'obiettivo centrale del testo, ovvero sensibilizzare e aumentare la consapevolezza sul tema della "mascolinità" e dei canoni ad essa legati, scattando una fotografia della società odierna, con l'auspicio che la lettura di questo libro possa scatenare una reazione a catena, spingendo così i lettori ad "aprire gli occhi" per poter finalmente vedere le nuove prospettive sociali che si profilano all'orizzonte. Il *target audience* ideale è, dunque, composto da tutti coloro che, in quanto nati uomini, sono costretti ad assumere atteggiamenti stereotipicamente mascolini. Conseguentemente, ciò li induce a creare una corazza che li faccia apparire forti, virili, impenetrabili, ma che allo stesso tempo non protegge dall'interno ma solo dall'esterno. L'autore vive tutto ciò in prima persona, provandolo sulla propria pelle. Il libro ha, inoltre, lo scopo di fare da eco alle varie esperienze di persone più o meno vicine allo scrittore, tutte con epiloghi diversi. Il testo in questione è stato scritto in lingua inglese, ma è stato tradotto anche in spagnolo. La pubblicazione della sua versione in

	italiano risulterebbe in linea con uno dei temi più dibattuti nel contesto mediatico e culturale del nostro paese: le questioni di genere. La traduzione ha il potere di portare cambiamento, ma la pratica traduttiva deve ancora acquisire consapevolezza della carica rivoluzionaria che le appartiene in modo innato. Questo libro costituisce un ottimo punto di partenza per una riflessione sul maschile che arricchirebbe il panorama letterario e, soprattutto, culturale italiano, nell'ottica di un tanto auspicato cambiamento. In qualità di giovane traduttrice e parte della nuova generazione a cui l'autore si riferisce e a cui affida le proprie speranze e riflessioni, ritengo di essere capace di affrontare questa sfida a tutto tondo. Come dice Liz Plank, rispondendo alla sfida lanciata da Jamey Heath durante una puntata del podcast, in quanto donne siamo in grado di farci portavoci di un problema "maschile" perché i concetti fissi di maschile e femminile si iscrivono nel più ampio quadro di un sistema patriarcale che definisce ed impone rapporti di potere sbilanciati tra uomo e donna. Come afferma Plank: "Quando sei oppressa, sai dire tutto del tuo oppressore". Infine, la traduzione in italiano di questo libro può non solo accrescere la conoscenza dei lettori in termini informativi, ma anche in termini di consapevolezza sull'essere "abbastanza" in quanto esseri umani ed eguali. In questo modo il lavoro di Justin Baldoni non rimarrà incastrato alle sole culture che condividono la lingua inglese, ma abbatterà le barriere invisibili della lingua raggiungendo nuovi target.
Principali problemi di traduzione	- Microlingua specifica utilizzata nell'ambito delle questioni di genere. - Necessità di strategie per trasferire i riferimenti culturali del TP alla cultura target, che hanno a che fare con l'attualità statunitense (struttura e funzionamento della società, della politica e delle scuole). - Mantenere il medesimo registro adottato dall'autore allo scopo di preservare la stessa intenzione comunicativa. - Questioni etiche relative alla presenza di terminologia volgare che veicola pregiudizi legati alla sfera sessuale.
A chi si rivolge il testo tradotto	Lettura adatta a tutte le persone di ogni genere, età e orientamento sessuale.
Annotazioni sullo stile del testo	- Linguaggio informale che tende visibilmente verso uno stile colloquiale, tanto da sembrare un vero e proprio dialogo tra autore e lettore. - Divisione in capitoli, a loro volta formati da paragrafi, ciascuno dei quali rappresenta un differente nucleo tematico. - Frasi di media lunghezza e punteggiatura usata in modo non convenzionale che guida il lettore nella resa prosodica. - Citazioni e riferimenti personaggi o eventi culturospecifici. - Costruzioni paratattiche e, in misura minore, ipotattiche. Queste variano in base all'argomento affrontato.

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