

# A LETTER TO THE NEW YORKER



## Unpublished

*New York, 7-14-2017*

Dear New Yorker,

My name is Francesco Mazza and I am Italian. I moved to New York a few years ago and I am active in the film-making industry.

I greatly appreciated Richard Brody's review of "The Big Sick" and I share his views about the movie's "bland likability". I believe, however, that the same applies to most American independent film productions.

Most of these movies work the exact same way. The hero comes from an ethnic or gender minority, has a funny quirk, and is struggling to integrate into society. A white American citizen, a compassionate liberal, steps in and develops emotional ties with the main character. They initially get along, then fight, but eventually make peace and live happily ever after in America.

That pattern, inflected in all possible combinations, is meant to reassure the public and let them believe that America still is the welcoming land of opportunities for everyone. As I see it, that depiction of reality is a bit unrealistic.

Immigrants, in New York as elsewhere, have to deal with very different problems than the ones showed in movies like *The Big Sick*, and their lives are often much more difficult than those portrayed by the Independent moral fairy-tales.

The thousands of restrictions imposed by a jungle of visa types, the limitations and higher tax rates applied on the work market to non-American citizens (enforced well before Trump's presidency), the small biases, the small discriminations make it extremely difficult for anyone who wasn't born in America to have access to the higher end of the social scale.

Finding a job in a kebab shop or as a pizza-maker is not difficult. Things change when the objective is to affirm oneself, pursue one's dreams, try to become a lawyer, a doctor or, in my case, a film director. A maze of rules and loopholes makes any attempt vain.

There is a cultural issue too. Decades of bloody battles have earned the Afro-Americans, and rightly so, the respect and dignity from the public opinion that a free society should guarantee to everyone.

All the other minorities still have a long way to go, though. "Somethingstan" is how many of my liberal friends call the Queens, the district the main character of *The Big Sick* could come from. In my view that is a lousy definition. It shows little knowledge of geography and no respect for the traditions and diversities of a region that was the cradle of humanity.

Things are not much different every time I introduce myself and say I am Italian. Sooner or later, a joke about the mafia inevitably pops up. The Godfather, the Sopranos and many other shows are certainly masterpieces, but they are fictional. What Americans, including New Yorkers, seem to ignore is that the actual mafia is a terrible reality. The mafia killed one of my best friends' father when she was just a child. To joke about the mafia with an Italian is humiliating them, it rubs salt in a wound that has been open for decades, yet that doesn't seem to remotely bother the civic conscience of the dozens of liberals I have been speaking with in the last few years.

The life of an immigrant in the United States is multi-faceted and far from easy. Sometimes pleasant, sometimes painful at best. Yet, in its big screen representations all that is trivialised in the unique dimension of a happy-ending fairy tale. The very same movies that are supposed to “give a voice to those who don't have a voice” prove to be rhetoric exercises at best, based on an idealised reality (a reality where Mr. Trump appears in Wrestlemania and not at the White House) that has nothing to do with the ugly, dirty reality we have to deal with (a reality where Mr. Trump appears in Wrestlemania and at the White House *at the same time*).

So, while the social, cultural and economic problems are not dealt with, liberal America continues to absolve itself through movies like The Big Sick, that are all alike, rather than truly rise questions on the unsolved social issues.

Nothing to worry about if that was just one summer rom-com. As a movie lover who travels every year to Utah to go at the Sundance Festival though, I can testify that it is a general trend no one escapes in feature films today.

And now, waving burning torches, they are going for the big target who goes by the name of Woody Allen. He has eluded them until now, but they are finally getting ready to burn him too.

How is it possible that all of a sudden America has become more puritan than Oliver Cromwell's England, and that no one sees the Orwellian turn it is taking?

The answer is easy: because they know perfectly. The reasons for this witch hunt – or rather sorcerer hunt – are quite petty and may downgrade the urgent and legitimate battle to protect women from discrimination at the workplace by turning it into just a means to a far less noble end.

For many years the web, and the social networks in particular, have been modifying the public debate distorting it completely. By dividing the public opinion into bubbles, the social media forced the media to decide on which bubble to bet on in order to survive. So, while some newspapers openly addressing one bubble only (HuffPost for the left, Breitbart News for the right) thrived, the mainstream media everywhere were forced not only to take up less and less moderate positions and to orient themselves more and more towards the selected bubble, but also to nourish and pamper it constantly.

They stopped addressing the general public, diverse by definition, and chose to talk to one bubble, intrinsically homogeneous and conformist, in a constant radicalization process. Triggering indignation feelings proved to be the best, almost surefire way to keep it happy.

Maybe the wall with Mexico won't be built, thank goodness, but the fact remains that in America any immigrant still faces a tall, invisible wall every day and gets by in the services sector at best.

It would be nice to see their stories told as they really are, and not just as people would like them to be., and to give serious thought to a “culture of inclusion” that America is still far from really putting into practice.

If this is not done thousands of people, unheeded by a navel-gazing liberal avant-garde, might give in to Fear and fall into the trap of those who make of Fear their political brand.

Respectfully,

*Francesco Mazza*

To drown the guilty together with those who should at least have the right to a trial in an ocean of outrage to get a heart emoji in exchange. They are all guilty, which will soon mean that no one is guilty.

Those who dare to raise a doubt are told that, sure, the blacklist may include some innocent people, but they are necessary casualties so that other women will have the courage to come out. It is indiscriminate shooting. Stalin, as a matter of fact.

We can only hope that no philologist will find out that Newton or Galileo too made shocking advances to a woman or a student. Should that happen, given the current climate, the consequence could be a ban on the law of gravity or a prohibition of the Copernican system.

Welcome to the 16th century.