

## MULTICULTURALISM AND THE PROMISE OF HAPPINESS

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In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans ... But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported ... although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it. It was attributed to incompetent appliance repairmen (*New York Times*), or the distances children must be chauffeured in the suburbs (*Time*).<sup>1</sup>

Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* identifies a problem that has no name by evoking what lies behind the image of the happy American housewife. What lies behind this image bursts through, like a boil, exposing an infection underneath her beaming smile. Friedan proceeds by exposing the limits of this public fantasy of happiness. The happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labour under the sign of happiness. The claim that women are happy, and that this happiness is behind the work they do, functions to justify gendered forms of labour not as products of nature, law or duty, but as an expression of a collective wish and desire. How better to justify an unequal distribution of labour, than to say that such labour makes people happy? How better to secure consent to unpaid or poorly paid labour than to describe such consent as the origin of good feeling?

You could say that images of happy housewives have been replaced by rather more desperate ones. I would argue that there is a diversification of affects tied to this figure, which gives her a more complex affective life, but that this does not necessarily dislodge the happiness that is presumed to reside in 'what' she does, even in descriptions of relative unhappiness. After all, explanations of relative unhappiness can also function to restore the power of an image of the good life. As Friedan shows, the unhappiness of the housewife is attributed to what is around her (such as the incompetent repair men), rather than the position she occupies. Unhappiness would here function as a sign of frustration, of being 'held back' or 'held up' from doing what makes her happy.

It is hence far from surprising that a recent study on happiness in the US suggested that feminist women are less happy than 'traditional housewives', as the American journalist Meghan O'Rourke explores in her aptly named article, 'Desperate Feminist Wives'.<sup>2</sup> Unhappiness is used as a way of signalling the need to return to something that has been lost: as if what we have lost in losing this or that is the very capacity to be happy. Happiness becomes in other words a defence of 'this and that'. As Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex*: 'it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them'.<sup>3</sup> Happiness functions as a displacement of a social wish, and a defence against an imagined future of loss.

It is important to note here that the political question of what makes people happy has

acquired some urgency. Commentators have described a 'crisis' in happiness, where the crisis is announced through a narrative of disappointment: the accumulation of wealth has not meant the accumulation of happiness. For example, Layard begins his science of happiness with what he describes as a paradox, 'as Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier'.<sup>4</sup> What makes this crisis 'a crisis' in the first place is of course the regulatory effect of a social belief: that more wealth 'should' have made people happier. In his book, Layard uses an evolutionary model to suggest that 'what makes us feel good (sex, food, love, friendship and so on) is also generally good for our survival'.<sup>5</sup> Survival here involves not just reproduction of the species, but also social reproduction: through marriage, core values are transmitted, as values that provide the foundations for a good life as well as the biological materials for new life. The new science of happiness might uncouple happiness from the accumulation of wealth, but it still locates happiness in certain places, especially marriage, widely regarded as the primary 'happiness indicator'. As Michael Argyle observed in his influential book *Psychology of Happiness*, 'the greatest benefits come from marriage'.<sup>6</sup>

What is striking is that the crisis in happiness has not put social ideals into question, and if anything has reinvigorated their hold over both psychic and political life. The demand for happiness is increasingly articulated as a demand to return to social ideals, as if what explains the crisis of happiness is not the failure of these ideals, but our failure to follow them. What organises the 'crisis of happiness' is the belief that happiness should be an effect of following social ideals, almost as if happiness is the reward for a certain loyalty.

Unsurprisingly, then, when we consider how the new science of happiness might relate to recent debates about the future of multiculturalism we find the use of a nostalgic narrative: happiness is identified with ways of life that have been eroded by the mobility of populations within and between nation states. Take the BBC programme, 'The Happiness Formula' aired in 2006. In the third episode in this series, the question of community is posed as central to happiness. Having a good, close, safe and trusting community is treated as one of the primary happiness indicators alongside marriage, entailing the following simple belief: if you live in such a community you are more likely to be happy. The narrator of this episode argues that the social project 'to make people happier' thus means to 'make societies more cohesive,' or to 'put glue back into communities'. Clearly, this involves a nostalgic narrative: the mission to put glue back into communities not only suggests that communities lack such glue, but also that they once had it. Happiness becomes what we have lost in losing glue. Or we could say that happiness is understood here as glue; we need to glue the world back together through happiness. The programme imagines a world where people are less physically and socially mobile as a happier world, offering a romantic image of a French village, where people stay put over generations, as if happiness itself resides in staying put.

The programme argues not only that happy communities are communities that have a strong social bond, but also that the bond of such communities is based on 'being alike'; communities are happier if they are alike. Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights in the UK, is interviewed during this episode. Phillips claims that 'multicultural communities tend to be less trusting and less happy', and that 'people frankly, when there are

other pressures, like to love in a comfort zone which is defined by racial sameness', and even that 'people feel happy if they are with people like themselves'. The argument is simple at one level: being amongst people with whom you are alike will cause happiness, and being amongst people from whom you differ will cause unhappiness. As such, this argument appears to withdraw social hope from the very idea of diversity – or indeed, multiculturalism as an imagined community of diverse peoples.

The programme does not simply give up on multiculturalism but suggests that we have an obligation to make multicultural communities happy, premised on the model of 'building bridges'. Trevor Phillips evokes unhappy instances of community conflict or violence between communities by claiming: 'this is exactly what happens when people who look very different, and think they are very different, never touch and interact'. The 'this' stands for all that is unhappy, sliding into forms of violence that are evoked without being named (from personal distrust, to inter-group conflict, to international terrorism). Unhappiness is here read as caused not simply by diversity, but by the failure of people who are different to interact. Phillips then recommends that communities integrate by sharing 'an activity' such as football, 'that takes us out of our ethnicity and connects us with people of different ethnicities if only for hours a week, then I think we can crack the problem'.

We can see here that the shift from unhappy to happy diversity involves the demand for interaction. The image of happy diversity is projected into the future: when we have 'cracked the problem' through interaction, we will be happy with diversity. That football becomes a technique for generating happy diversity is no accident: after all, football is proximate to the ego ideal of the nation, as being a level playing field, where aspiration and talent is enough to get you there, providing the basis for a common ground.<sup>7</sup> Diversity becomes happy when it involves loyalty to what has already been given as a national ideal. Or we could say that happiness is promised as a return for loyalty to the nation, where loyalty is expressed as 'giving' diversity to the nation through playing its game.

In this essay, I will consider how happiness functions as promise, which directs us towards certain objects, which then circulate as social goods. My primary example will be the film, *Bend it Like Beckham*. I have chosen this film not only given that it is a 'happy film' but also as it is one of the most successful British films at the box office. The film is marketed as a 'delightful, feel good comedy'. It is also a film that projects a happy image of British multiculturalism, whereby football becomes a way of re-imagining the national ground as 'happily diverse'. My reading of the film will explore how multiculturalism is attributed a positive value through the alignment of a story of individual happiness with the social good.

## HAPPY OBJECTS

Happiness, one might assume, is an emotion, or an inner feeling state. One feels happy. One is happy. In everyday life, it would be common to use happiness as a way of describing how one feels. However, although some psychological models do describe happiness as a private or interior feeling state, most writing on happiness does not. Indeed, the association of happiness with feeling good is a modern one: in circulation from the eighteenth century onwards, as

Darren McMahon shows in his monumental history of happiness.<sup>8</sup> In psychology, happiness is usually described as more than about 'feeling good', as involving cognition and evaluation: insofar as it is presumed that happiness must persist beyond this or that moment, it has been described as a way of evaluating one's life, as such. As Ruut Veenhoven argues, 'Happiness is then the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality-of-life-as-a-whole favourably'.<sup>9</sup> Or, as Michael Argyle and Maryanne Martin suggest, happiness involves affect and cognition insofar as it includes both joy and satisfaction.<sup>10</sup> Happiness is good to think with given how it mediates between individual and social, private and public, affective and evaluative, mind and body, as well as norms, rules and ideals and ways of being in the world. Happiness will allow us to consider how 'feeling good' becomes attached to other kinds of social good.

My starting point is always not to assume there is something called affect (or for that matter, emotion), that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, but to consider the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes near. It is useful to recall the etymology of 'happiness' relates precisely to this question of contingency: it is from the Middle English 'hap', suggesting chance. Happiness would be about whatever happens. Only later does 'the what' signal something good. Happiness becomes not only about chance, but evokes the idea of being lucky, being favoured by fortune, or being fortunate. Even this meaning may now seem archaic: we may be more used to thinking of happiness as an effect of what you do, say as a reward for hard work, rather than as what happens to you. But I find this original meaning useful, as it focuses our attention on the 'worldly' question of happenings.

What is the relation between the 'what' in 'what happens' and the 'what' that makes us happy? Empiricism provides us with a useful way of addressing this question, given its concern with 'what's what'. Take the work of John Locke. He argues that what is good is what is '*apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us*'.<sup>11</sup> So we judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain. Locke suggests that 'he loves grapes it is no more, but that the taste of grapes delights him'.<sup>12</sup> Locke describes happiness as the highest form of pleasure. So we could say that an object becomes happy if it affects us in a good way. Note the doubling of positive affect in Locke's example: we love what tastes delightful. To be affected by an object in a good way is also to have an orientation towards an object as being good.

Whilst happiness might be shaped by contact with objects, we could also say that happiness is intentional: it is directed towards objects. Happiness involves a specific kind of intentionality, which we can describe as 'end orientated'. After all, happiness is often described as 'what' we aim for: as a self-evident good, or an end-in-itself. In Aristotle's ethics, happiness is the name for *the end of all ends*, as what all human action is aiming towards. He says: 'Every rational activity aims at some end or good ... The end is no doubt happiness, but views of happiness differ ... What is the good for man? It must be the ultimate end or object of human life: something that is in itself completely satisfying. Happiness fits this description'.<sup>13</sup> In pursuing happiness one is pursuing what is good; indeed, happiness shows the purposeful nature of human action.

We don't have to agree with the argument that happiness is always an end-in-itself or the good of all goods to register the implications of what it means for happiness to be understood

in these terms. Happiness is directed towards certain objects, which function as a means to what is not yet present. If objects provide a 'means' for making us happy, then in directing ourselves towards this or that object, we are aiming somewhere else: towards a happiness that is presumed to follow. The temporality of this following does matter. Happiness is what would come after. Happiness does not reside in objects; *it is promised through proximity to certain objects.*

So the promise of happiness – if you do this, then happiness is what follows – is what makes things seem 'promising', which means that the promise of happiness is not in the thing itself. Consider that a promise comes from Latin *promissum* 'send forth, foretell' from *pro-* 'before' and *mittere* 'to put, send'. The promise of happiness is what sends happiness forth; it is what allows happiness to be public in the sense of being out. Objects that embody the feeling are passed around: they are 'out and about'. Happiness involves the sociality of passing things around.

Does happiness itself get passed around or transmitted through such objects? If we were to say yes to this question, then we might also suggest that happiness is contagious (see also Blackman, this issue). A number of scholars have recently taken up the idea of affects as contagious, primarily drawing on the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins.<sup>14</sup> As Anna Gibbs describes: 'Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another'.<sup>15</sup> Thinking of affects as contagious does help us to challenge what I have called the 'inside out' model of affect by showing how affects pass between bodies, affecting bodily surfaces or how bodies surface.<sup>16</sup> However, I think the concept of affective contagion tends to underestimate the extent to which affects are contingent (involving the hap of a happening): to be affected by another does not mean that an affect simply passes or 'leaps' from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contingency of how we are affected.

Consider the opening sentence of Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*: 'Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"'.<sup>17</sup> Brennan writes very beautifully about the atmosphere 'getting into the individual', using what I have called an 'outside in' model, also very much part of the intellectual history of crowd psychology and also the sociology of emotion.<sup>18</sup> However, later in the introduction she makes an observation which involves a quite different model. Brennan suggests here that, 'if I feel anxiety when I enter the room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an "impression"'.<sup>19</sup> I agree. Anxiety is sticky: rather like Velcro, it tends to pick up whatever comes near. Or we could say that anxiety gives us a certain kind of angle on what comes near. Anxiety is, of course, one feeling state amongst others. If bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation. This second argument challenges for me Brennan's first argument about the atmosphere being what is 'out there' getting 'in': it suggests that how we arrive, how we enter this room or that room, will affect what impressions we receive. After all, to receive is to act. To receive an impression is to make an impression.

So we may walk into the room and 'feel the atmosphere', but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles. How many times have I read students as interested or bored, such that the atmosphere seemed one of interest or boredom

(and even felt myself to be interesting or boring) only to find students recall the event quite differently! Having read the atmosphere in a certain way, one can become tense: which in turn affects what happens, how things move along. The moods we arrive with do affect what happens: which is not to say we always keep our moods. Sometimes I arrive feeling heavy with anxiety, and everything that happens makes me feel more anxious, whilst at other times, things happen which ease the anxiety, making the space itself seem light and energetic. We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency, given the hap of what happens; we do not know 'exactly' what makes things happen in this way and that. Situations are affective given this gap between the impressions we have of others, which are lively, and the impressions we make on others.

Think too of experiences of alienation. I have suggested that happiness is attributed to certain objects that circulate as social goods. When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap. If we are disappointed by something that we expected would make us happy, then we generate explanations of why that thing is disappointing. Such explanations can involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (why I am not made happy by this, what is wrong with me?) or a narrative of rage, where the object that is 'supposed' to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment, which can lead to a rage directed towards those that promised us happiness through the elevation of the object as being good. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments.

So when happy objects are passed around, it is not necessarily the feeling that passes. To share such objects (or have a share in such objects) would simply mean you would *share an orientation towards those objects as being good*. The family for instance might be happy not because it causes happiness, but because of a shared orientation towards the family as being good. Happiness is precarious; it does not reside in subjects or objects, but is an effect of what gets passed around. What passes through the passing around of happy objects must remain an open question. Objects become sticky, saturated with affects, as sites of personal and social tension. After all, the word 'passing' can mean not only 'to send over' or 'to transmit', but also to transform objects by 'a sleight of hand'. Like the game Chinese whispers, what passes between proximate bodies, might be affective because it deviates and even perverts what was 'sent out'. What interests me is how affects involve perversion; and what we could describe as conversion points.

One of my key questions is how such conversions happen, and 'who' or 'what' gets seen as converting bad feeling into good feeling and good into bad. We need to attend to such points of conversion, and how they involve explanations of 'where' good and bad feelings reside. The sociality of affect involves 'tension' given the ways in which good and bad feelings are unevenly distributed in the social field. When I hear people say 'the bad feeling is coming from "this person" or "that person"' I am never convinced. I am sure a lot of my scepticism is shaped by childhood experiences of being a feminist daughter, at odds with the performance of good feeling in the family, always assumed to be bringing others down, for example, by pointing out

sexism in other people's talk. Take the figure of the kill joy feminist. We can place her alongside the figure of the happy housewife. Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Or does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced or negated under public signs of joy? Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that saturate objects get brought to the surface in a certain way? The feminist after all might kill joy precisely because she refuses to share an orientation towards certain things as being good, because she does not find the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising. By not expressing happiness in response to proximity to such objects, the feminist becomes an affect alien; she 'brings things down'.

I have learnt most about the politics of affect and emotion from feminist writers such as Marilyn Frye and Audre Lorde who both point to how good and bad feelings are unevenly distributed in the social field. For Marilyn Frye, 'it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful'. Indeed, she suggests that 'anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry, or dangerous'.<sup>20</sup> So for an oppressed person not to smile or to show a sign of being happy is to be seen as negative: as the origin of bad feeling. Consider also the figure of the angry black woman. As Audre Lorde describes: 'When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are "creating a mood of helplessness," "preventing white women from getting past guilt", or "standing in the way of trusting communication and action"'.<sup>21</sup> The angry black woman could also be described as a kill joy; she may even kill feminist joy by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. The black woman must let go of her anger for the white woman to move on.

These conversion points between good and bad feeling do matter; some bodies are presumed to be the origin of bad feeling insofar as they disturb the promise of happiness, which we can re-describe as the social pressure to maintain the signs of 'getting along'. This is why I do not describe the sociality of affect in terms of transmission or contagion, where feelings pass between proximate bodies, but in terms of the politics of attribution and conversion. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who affects whom, or who introduces what feelings to whom. Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with.

## JUST HAPPINESS

Some objects more than others embody the promise of happiness. In other words, happiness directs us to certain objects, as if they are the necessary ingredients for a good life. What makes this argument different to John Locke's account of loving grapes because they taste delightful is that the judgment about certain objects as being 'happy' is already made, before they are even encountered: certain objects are attributed as the conditions for happiness so that we arrive 'at' them with an expectation of how we will be affected by them, which affects how they affect us, even in the moment they fail to live up to our expectations. Happiness is an expectation

of what follows, where the expectation differentiates between things, whether or not they exist in the present. For instance, the child might be asked to imagine happiness by imagining 'happy events' in the future, such as a wedding day, 'the happiest day of your life'. This is why happiness provides the emotional setting for disappointment, even if happiness is not given: we just have to expect happiness from 'this or that' for 'this and that' to be experienceable as objects of disappointment.

The apparent chanciness of happiness can be qualified: we do not just find happy objects anywhere. Happiness is not casual: certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken. Our 'life courses' follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of 'being directed' in a certain way (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death), as Judith Halberstam has shown us in her reflections on the 'temporality' of the family and the expenditure of family time.<sup>22</sup> The promise of happiness directs life in some ways, rather than others. For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course.

When we consider the cultural politics of happiness, we need to consider the relationship between 'this' (an action, belief, a way of living) and 'that' (what is presumed to follow). Happiness is not only promised by certain objects, it is also what we promise to give to others as an expression of love. I am especially interested in the speech act, 'I just want you to be happy'. What does it mean to want 'just' happiness? What does it mean for a parent to say this to a child? In a way, the desire for the child's happiness seems to offer a certain kind of freedom, as if to say: 'I don't want you to be this, or to do that; I just want you to be or to do "whatever" makes you happy'. You could say that the 'whatever' seems to release us from the obligation of the 'what'. The desire for the child's happiness seems to offer the freedom of a certain indifference to the content of a future decision.

Take the psychic drama of the queer child. You could say that the queer child is an unhappy object for many parents. In some parental responses to the child coming out, this unhappiness is not so much expressed as being unhappy about the child being queer, but as being unhappy about the child being unhappy. Queer fiction is full of such moments. Take the following exchange that takes place in the lesbian novel, *Annie on My Mind* (1982) by Nancy Garden:

'Lisa', my father said, 'I told you I'd support you and I will ... But honey ... well, maybe it's just that I love your mother so much that I have to say to you I've never thought gay people can be very happy – no children for one thing, no real family life. Honey, you are probably going to be a very good architect – but I want you to be happy in other ways, too, as your mother is, to have a husband and children. I know you can do both ...' *I am happy*, I tried to tell him with my eyes. *I'm happy with Annie; she and my work are all I'll ever need; she's happy too – we both were until this happened.*<sup>23</sup>

The father makes an act of identification with an imagined future of necessary and inevitable unhappiness. Such an identification through grief about what the child will lose, reminds us that the queer life is already constructed as an unhappy life, as a life without the 'things' that



make you happy (husband, children). The desire for the child's happiness is far from indifferent. The speech act 'I just want you to be happy' can be directive at the very point of its imagined indifference.

For the daughter, it is only the eyes that can speak; and they try to tell an alternative story about happiness and unhappiness. In her response, she claims happiness, for sure. She is happy 'with Annie'; which is to say, she is happy with *this* relationship and *this* life that it will commit her to. She says we were happy 'until' this happened, where the 'until' marks the moment that the father speaks his disapproval. The unhappy queer is here the queer who is judged to be unhappy. The father's speech act creates the very affective state of unhappiness that is imagined to be the inevitable consequence of the daughter's decision. When 'this' happens, unhappiness does follow.

One of the most striking aspects of the film *Bend it like Beckham* is how the conflict and obstacle of the film is resolved through this speech act, also addressed from father to daughter that takes the approximate form: 'I just want you to be happy'. How does this speech act direct the narrative? To answer this question, we need to describe the conflict of the film, or the obstacle to the happy ending. The film could be described as being about the generational conflict within a migrant Indian Sikh family living in Hounslow, London. Jess the daughter is good at football. Her idea of happiness would be to bend it like Beckham, which requires that she bends the rules about what Indian girls can do. The generational conflict between parents and daughter is represented as a conflict between the demands of cultures: as Jess says, 'anyone can cook Aloo Gobi but who can bend the ball like Beckham'. This contrast sets up 'cooking Aloo Gobi' as common place and customary, against an alternative world of celebrity, individualism and talent.

It is possible to read the film by putting this question of cultural difference to one side. We could read the story as being about the rebellion of the daughter, and an attempt to give validation to her re-scripting of what it means to have a good life. We might cheer for Jess, as she 'scores' and finds happiness somewhere other than where she is expected to find it. We would be happy about her freedom and her refusal of the demand to be a good girl, or even a happy housewife. We might applaud this film as showing the happiness that can follow leaving your parent's expectations behind and following less well trodden paths. Yet, of course such a reading would fall short. It would not offer a reading of the 'where' that the happiness of this image of freedom takes us.

We need to think more critically about how cultural differences are associated with different affects: we have a contrast between the open space of the football pitch, where there is movement, sound, and laughter, and the domestic interiors of Jess's home full of restrictions, demands and conflict. In other words, these two worlds are not given the same affective value. The happiness promised by football is over-determined. The desire to be like Beckham has a narrative function in the film. In the opening humorous shots, presented as Jess's fantasy (she stares at a poster of Beckham before the scene unfolds), Jess takes up a place beside Beckham on the football ground, and is the one who scores the goal. Football signifies not only the national game, but also the opportunity for new identifications, where you can embody hope for the nation by taking a place alongside its national hero. By implication, the world of football promises freedom allowing

you not only to be happy, but to become a happy object, by bringing happiness to others, who cheer as you score. The inclusion of Jess in the national game might be framed as Jess's fantasy, but it also functions as a national fantasy about football, as the playing field which offers signs of inclusion and diversity, where 'whoever' scores will be cheered.

In her other world, Jess experiences frustration, pain and anxiety. The shots are all of domestic interiors: of dark and cramped spaces, where Jess has to do this or do that, where freedom is lost under the weight of duty. In her Indian home, she is the object of parental shame. Her mother says to her: 'I don't want shame on the family. That's it, no more football'. For Jess, playing football means having to play in secret, which in turn alienates her from her family. What makes her happy becomes a sign of shame, whilst her shame becomes an obstacle to happiness. In this secretive life she forms new bonds and intimacies: first with Jules who gets her on the girl's team, and then with Joe, the football coach, with whom she falls 'in love'. In other words, this other world, the world of freedom promised by football, puts her in intimate contact with a white girl and white man. In this narrative, freedom involves proximity to whiteness.

For Jess, the dilemma is: how can she be in both worlds at once? The final of the football tournament coincides with Pinkie's wedding. This coincidence matters: Jess cannot be at both events at once. Unhappiness is used to show how Jess is 'out of place' in the wedding: she is unhappy, as she is not where she wants to be: she wants to be at the football match. We want her to be there too, and are encouraged to identify with the injustice of being held back. At this point, the point of Jess's depression, her friend Tony intervenes and says she should go. Jess replies, 'I can't. Look how happy they are Tony. I don't want to ruin it for them'. In this moment, Jess accepts her own unhappiness by identifying with the happiness of her parents: she puts her own desire for happiness to one side. But her father overhears her, and says: 'Pinkie is so happy and you look like you have come to your father's funeral', and then, 'if this is the only way I am going to see you smiling on your sister's wedding day then go now. But when you come back, I want to see you happy on the video'. Jess's father lets her go because he wants to see her happy, which also means he wants to see others witness the family as being happy, as being what causes happiness.

Jess's father cannot be indifferent to his daughter's unhappiness: later he says to his wife, 'maybe you could handle her long face, I could not'. At one level, this desire for the daughter's happiness involves a form of indifference to the 'where' that she goes. From the point of view of the film, the desire for happiness is far from indifferent: indeed, the film works partly by 'directing' the apparent indifference of this gift of freedom. After all, this moment is when the father switches from a desire that is out of line with the happy object of the film (not wanting Jess to play) to being in line (letting her go), which in turn is what allows the film's happy ending. Importantly, the happy ending is about the co-incident of happy objects. The daughters are happy (they are living the life they wish to lead), the parents are happy (as their daughters are happy), and we are happy (as they are happy). Good feeling involves these 'points' of alignment. We could say positive affect is what sutures the film, resolving the generational and cultural split: as soon as Jess is allowed to join the football game, the two worlds 'come together' in a shared moment of enjoyment. Whilst the happy objects are different from the point of view of

the daughters (football, marriage) they allow us to arrive at the same point.

And yet, the film does not give equal value to the objects in which good feelings come to reside. Jess's happiness is contrasted to her sister Pinkie, who is ridiculed throughout the film as not only wanting less, but as being less in the direction of her want. Pinkie asks Jess why she does not want 'this'. Jess does not say that she wants something different; she says it is because she wants something 'more'. That word 'more' lingers, and frames the ending of the film, which gives us 'flashes' of an imagined future (pregnancy for Pinkie, photos of Jess on her sport's team, her love for her football coach Joe, her friendship with Jules). During the sequence of shots as Jess gets ready to join the football final, the camera pans up to show an airplane. Airplanes are everywhere in this film, as they often are in diasporic films. In *Bend it Like Beckham*, they matter as technologies of flight, signifying what goes up and away. Happiness in the film is promised by what goes 'up and away'. In an earlier scene, the song 'Moving on Up' is playing, as Jess and Jules run towards us. They overtake two Indian women wearing *Salwar Kameez*. I would suggest that the spatial promise of the 'up and away' is narrated as leaving Indian culture behind, even though Jess as a character articulates a fierce loyalty to her family and culture. The desire to play football, to join the national game, is read as leaving a certain world behind. Through the juxtaposition of the daughter's happy objects, the film suggests that this desire gives a better return.

In reading the 'directed' nature of narratives of freedom, we need in part to consider how the film relates to wider discourses of the public good. The film locates the 'pressure point' in the migrant family; who pressurises Jess to live a life she does not want to live. And yet, many migrant individuals and families are under pressure to integrate, where integration is a key term for what we now call in the UK 'good race relations'. Although integration is not defined as 'leaving your culture behind' (at least not officially), it is unevenly distributed, as a demand that new or would be citizens 'embrace' a common culture that is already given.<sup>24</sup> In this context, the immigrant daughter who identifies with the national game is a national ideal; the 'happy' daughter who deviates from family convention becomes a sign of the promise of integration. The unconventional daughter of the migrant family may even provide a conventional form of social hope.

## MELANCHOLIC MIGRANTS

The happiness of this film is partly that it imagines that multiculturalism can deliver its social promise by extending freedom to migrants on the condition that they embrace its game. Multiculturalism becomes in other words a happy object. I want to quote from one film critic, who identifies the film aptly as a 'happy smiling multiculturalism':

Yet we need to turn to the U.K. for the exemplary commercial film about happy, smiling multiculturalism. *Bend it like Beckham* is the most profitable all-British film of all time, appealing to a multicultural Britain where Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary, recently declared Chicken Tikka Massala the most popular national dish. White Brits tend to love *Bend it like Beckham* because it doesn't focus on race and racism — after all many are tired of feeling guilty.<sup>25</sup>

What makes this film 'happy' is in part what it conceals or keeps from view. What makes this film happy might precisely be the relief it offers from the negative affects surrounding racism. You might note that the negative affects are not attributed to the experience of racism, but to white guilt: the film might be appealing as it allows white guilt to be displaced by good feelings: you do not have to feel guilty about racism, as you can be 'uplifted' by the happiness of the story of migrant success. The film 'lifts you up'.

And yet of course to evoke 'happy multiculturalism' in the United Kingdom is to use a political language that is already dated. Multiculturalism is increasingly evoked as an unhappy object, as a sign of the failure of communities to 'happily integrate'. Multiculturalism has even been declared dead.<sup>26</sup> We do need to register this political shift as a shift. But we also need to register what stays in place through this shift.

I would argue that integration is what keeps its place as a place holder of national desire. Earlier multiculturalism was read as a sign of integration, but is now being read as a symptom of its failure. For example, in the reports on the 'race-riots' in the North of England in 2001, multiculturalism is described as failing to deliver its promise of integration and harmony amongst others. The report argues there is nothing wrong with people choosing 'to be close to others like themselves', but that: '*We cannot claim to be a truly multicultural society if the various communities within it live, as Cattle puts it, parallel lives that do not touch at any point*'.<sup>27</sup> Multiculturalism is here associated with integration, with the very points at which lives would touch. So without integration, 'we cannot claim to be a truly multicultural society'.

In more recent policy frameworks, multiculturalism becomes an unhappy object by being associated with segregation. In his preface to the Commission for Racial Equality's Guide, *Good Race Relations*, Trevor Phillips suggests that: 'Multiculturalism no longer provides the right answer to the complex nature of today's race relations. Integration based on shared values and loyalties is the only way forward'.<sup>28</sup> Integration becomes what promises happiness (if only we mixed, we would be happy), by converting bad feelings (read un-integrated migrants) into good feelings (read integrated migrants). Integration is read not only as promising happiness, but also as a matter of life and death. The heading for Trevor Phillips's preface reads: 'Integration is not a dream: it is a matter of survival'. *Bend it Like Beckham* gives us a story of integration as being a dream and a form of survival. This film, released in 2001, could be read *simultaneously* as dated, insofar as it gives us an image of happy multiculturalism that has now been given up, and as anticipatory, insofar as happiness is promised as the reward for integration.

Although *Bend it Like Beckham* seems to be about the promise of happiness, I would argue that injury and bad feeling play an important narrative function in the film. As you know, I am interested in how bad feelings are converted into good feelings. What are the conversion points in this film? We can focus here on two speeches made by Jess's father: the first takes place early on in the film, and the second at the end of the film:

When I was a teenager in Nairobi, I was the best fast bowler in our school. Our team even won the East African cup. But when I came to this country, nothing. And these bloody gora in the club house made fun of my turban and set me off packing ... She will only end up disappointed like me.

When those bloody English cricket players threw me out of their club like a dog, I never complained. On the contrary, I vowed that I would never play again. Who suffered? Me. But I don't want Jess to suffer. I don't want her to make the same mistakes her father made, accepting life, accepting situations. I want her to fight. And I want her to win.

In the first speech, the father says she *should not play* in order not to suffer like him. In the second, he says she *should play* in order not to suffer like him. The desire implicit in both speech acts is the avoidance of the daughter's suffering, which is expressed in terms of the desire not to repeat his own. I would argue that the father is represented in the first speech as melancholic:<sup>29</sup> as refusing to let go of his suffering, as incorporating the very object of own loss. His refusal to let Jess go is readable as a symptom of melancholia: as a stubborn attachment to his own injury, or as a form of self-harm (as he says: 'who suffered? Me'). I would argue that the second speech suggests that the refusal to play a national game is the 'truth' being the migrant's suffering: you suffer because you do not play the game, where not playing is read as a kind of self-exclusion. For Jess to be happy he lets her be included, narrated as a form of letting go. By implication, not only is he letting her go, he is also letting go of his own suffering, the unhappiness caused by accepting racism, as the 'point' of his exclusion.

The figure of the melancholic migrant is a familiar one in contemporary British race politics. The melancholic migrant holds onto the unhappy objects of differences, such as the turban, or at least the memory of being teased about the turban, which ties it to a history of racism. Such differences – one could think also of the burqa – become sore points or blockage points, where the smooth passage of communication stops. The melancholic migrant is the one who is not only stubbornly attached to difference, but who insists on speaking about racism, where such speech is heard as labouring over sore points. The duty of the migrant is to let go of the pain of racism by letting go of racism as a way of understanding that pain.

It is important to note that the melancholic migrant's fixation with injury is read not only as an obstacle to their own happiness, but also to the happiness of the generation-to-come, and even to national happiness. This figure may even quickly convert in the national imaginary to the 'could-be-terrorist'. His anger, pain, misery (all understood as forms of bad faith insofar as they won't let go of something that is presumed to be already gone) becomes 'our terror'.

To avoid such a terrifying end point, the duty of the migrant is to attach to a different happier object, one that can bring good fortune, such as the national game. The film ends with the fortune of this re-attachment. Jess goes to America to take up her dream of becoming a professional football player, a land which makes the pursuit of happiness an originary goal. This re-attachment is narrated as moving beyond the unhappy scripts of racism. We should note here that the father's experience of being excluded from the national game are repeated in Jess's own encounter with racism on the football pitch (she is called a 'Paki'), which leaves to the injustice of her being sent off. In this case, however, Jess's anger and hurt does not stick. She lets go of her suffering. How does she let go? When she says to Joe, 'you don't know what it feels like', he replies, 'of course I know how it feels like, I'm Irish'. It is this act of identification with suffering that brings Jess back into the national game (as if to say, 'we all suffer, it is not just you'). The film suggests that whether racism 'hurts' depends upon individual choice and

capacity: we can let go of racism as 'something' that happens, a capacity that is both attributed to skill (if you are good enough, you will get by), as well as the proximate gift of white empathy, where the hurt of racism is re-imagined as a common ground.

The love story between Jess and Joe offers another point of re-attachment. Heterosexuality becomes itself a form of happy return: promising to allow us to overcome injury. Heterosexual love is what heals. It is worth noting that the director of the film Gurinder Chadha originally planned to have the girls falling in love. This decision to drop the lesbian plot was of course to make the film more marketable.<sup>30</sup> We can see here the importance of 'appeal' as a form of capital, and how happiness can function as a moral economy: only some scripts can lead to happy endings given that happiness is both a good that circulates as well as a way of making things good. In *Bend it Like Beckham*, the heterosexual script involves proximity to queer. Not only does the film play with the possibility of female rebellion as lesbianism (girls with short hair who wear sports bras are presented as 'could be' lesbians rather than as 'being' lesbians), it also involves the use of a queer male character, Tony, in whom an alternative set of desires are deposited. As Gayatri Gopinath notes, the film 'ultimately reassures viewers that football-loving girls are indeed properly heterosexual by once again using the gay male figure as the "real" queer character in the film'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, we could argue that the narrative of bending the rules of femininity involves a straightening device: you can bend, only insofar as you return to the straight line, which provides as it were our end point. So girls playing football leads to the male football coach. Narratives of rebellion can involve deviations from the straight line, if they return us to this point.

Heterosexuality also promises to overcome the injury or damage of racism. The acceptance of interracial heterosexual love is a conventional narrative of reconciliation as if love can overcome past antagonism and create what I would call 'hybrid familiarity': *white with colour, white with another*. Such fantasies of proximity are premised on the following belief: *if only we could be closer, we would be as one*. Proximity becomes a promise: the happiness of the film is the promise of 'the one', as if giving love to the white man, as the ego ideal of the nation, would allow us to have a share in this promise.

The final scene is a cricket scene: the first of the film. As we know, cricket is an unhappy object in the film, associated with the suffering of racism. Jess's father is batting. Joe, in the foreground, is bowling. He smiles as he approaches us. He turns around, bowls, and gets the father out. In a playful scene, Joe then 'celebrates' and his body gestures mimic that of a plane, in a classic football gesture. As I have suggested, planes are happy objects in the film; associated with flight, with moving up and away. By mimicking the plane, Joe becomes the agent that converts bad feeling (unhappy racism) into good feeling (multicultural happiness). It is the white man who enables the father to let go of his injury about racism and to play cricket again. It is the white man who brings the suffering migrant back into the national fold. *His body is our conversion point*.

Such conversions function as displacements of injury from public view. We need to get beyond the appeal of happy surfaces. And yet, some critics suggest that we have paid too much attention to melancholia, suffering and injury and that we need to be more affirmative. Rosi Braidotti, for example, suggests that the focus on negativity has become a problem within feminism, and calls

for a more affirmative feminism. She offers a bleak reading of bleakness: 'I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom'.<sup>32</sup> In her more recent book, the call for affirmation *rather* than negativity involves an explicit turn to happiness. Braidotti suggests that an affirmative feminism would make happiness a crucial political ideal. As she argues: 'I consider happiness a political issue, as are well-being, self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. These are fundamentally ethical concerns ... The feminist movement has played the historical role of placing these items at the centre of the social and political agenda: happiness as a fundamental human right and hence a political question'.<sup>33</sup>

What concerns me is how much this turn to happiness actually depends on the very distinction between good and bad feelings that presume bad feelings are backward and conservative and good feelings are forward and progressive. Bad feelings are seen as orientated towards the past; as a kind of stubbornness that 'stops' the subject from embracing the future. Good feelings are associated here with moving up, and getting out. I would argue that it is the very assumption that good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed that allows historical forms of injustice to disappear. The demand for happiness is what makes those histories disappear or projects them onto others, by seeing them as a form of melancholia (you hold onto something that is already gone) or even as a paranoid fantasy. These histories have not gone: we would be letting go of that which persists in the present, a letting go which would keep those histories present.

I am not saying that feminist, anti-racist and queer politics do not have anything to say about happiness other than point to its unhappy effects. I think it is the very exposure of these unhappy effects that is affirmative, which gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or at least better life. If injustice does have unhappy effects, then the story does not end there. Unhappiness is not our end point. If anything, the experience of being outside the very ideals that are presumed to enable a good life still gets us somewhere. It is the resources we develop in sharing such experiences that might form the basis of alternative models of happiness. A concern with histories that hurt is not then a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return. If anything we might want to reread the melancholic subject, the one who refuses to let go of suffering, and who is even prepared to kill some forms of joy, as offering an alternative social promise.

## NOTES

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