

Radha Hosad

Professor Bernstein

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“Thanks to Them”, Camila Noceda, and Affect Theory

In Sara Ahmed’s *Happy Objects*, the author describes the film *Bend it like Beckham* and as an extension the trope of conflicting happiness between the immigrant parents and the more westernized child. Ahmed describes this difference in happiness, the child’s desire to play soccer as a form of happiness and the parents wanting their child to be spared from societal rejection. They also describe how the “true happiness” of the daughter merges with British Nationalistic goals, being a national soccer player, and in a way the idea of integrating into British Culture. Ahmed is critical of *Bend it Like Beckham*, and the trope as a whole. However, it is not as if this trope is detached from reality. This struggle between generations is an exceptionally common one that a lot of people can relate to. At the same time, this trope can feel like a spectacle for the non immigrant eye. *Bend it Like Beckham* is successful because of its resonance with immigrant communities, but also because in a way it supports this white gaze into the Westernization and assimilation of someone against their initial culture.

This to me is why the latest *Owl House* Episode shines. It deals with the same idea of intergenerational conflict but is far more sympathetic to the mother character. For context, the impetus for the show is that Camila, the mom, is worried about Luz acting out in school and being too weird and so she decides to send Luz to a “think inside the box” camp. Luz instead winds up going into the mystical world of the boiling isles. By season 3, the fantasy world is in grave danger and Luz is thrust back into the human world with her new witch friends, all trapped

and separated from their families and homes. The episode deals heavily with Luz's guilt over running away and potentially causing the destruction of the boiling isles, as Camila tries her best to take care of all of the kids and make them feel safe.

Camila's perspective on the show is then revealed in a nightmare she has. It shows her supporting Luz's societal deviance throughout her childhood only to be scolded and mocked by other parents around her. In one scene, Luz shows excitement over a snake skin, discussing how cool it is that snakes "shed their pajamas." This frightens the other kids and they run away, Positioning Luz as an "Affect Alien" as Ahmed would describe. As Camila smiles and is proud of Luz's imagination and interests, she overhears other mothers gossiping about Luz and commenting about how she must have horrible parents. Before she can angrily respond and defend herself, it cuts to Luz's school play. Camila is similarly proud of her daughter's "weirdness" but hears other parents in the audience bullying Luz. Just as she tries to defend her daughter, it cuts to her in the principal's office. The principal is depicted to be much bigger, scarier, and covered in shadow than we have seen in real life. Camila tries to defend Luz's actions, but the principal brings up that Camila herself was bullied in high school. This is the final scene of the nightmare, as Camila wakes up to a sad Luz asking why she isn't mad at her for running away. Camila comforts her and says that she understands wanting to run away from things, but the important thing is that she came back.

One interesting thing about this scene is that it explores this common conflict through the eyes of the parent. Often it is the child that gets the lion's share of the sympathy and screen time, but recently there have been exceptions to this rule, like the popular film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* where the mother who is conflicting with her queer daughter is made the main character of the film. *Thanks to Them* is similar in showing the parental perspective (although

Camila is far from homophobic and is in fact a staunch ally, immediately accepting her daughters bisexuality and wearing a pride pin the rest of the episode). For at least this brief nightmare sequence, we see Camila's experiences of racism and ostracization and how they inform her decisions. It is implied that like Luz who has an obsession with fantasy books, Camila had an obsession with a Star Trek like series that she seems embarrassed by. We see her as a mother of color going through this ostracization for her parenting style, something that unfortunately is very common.

Luz and Camila are both Affect Aliens, in both their obsession with these fandoms but also subtextually because they are both Afro-Latina. The reaction to Luz' eccentricities being making a joke about her parentage reads as heavily racialized. White parents and others often show judgment over how parents of color parent their children, whether for being too strict or not strict enough. A lot of *Owl House* fans fell into this as well, condemning Camila's decision in season 1 and demonizing her for it. The scene does a great job of expressing how shame and calls to happiness uphold White Supremacy. Camila ends up making an out of character decision that ends up hurting her child, and it is obvious that she has a huge amount of guilt over it. It makes the conclusion of the scene, with Luz and Camila, mother and daughter, uniting over a shared guilt such a cathartic moment. It sets up the end of the episode, where Camila tells Luz that she shouldn't feel like she needs to stay in the human realm and she should instead help her friends and go to the Boiling Isles, this time with her mother by her side.

Works Cited

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