



# LUND UNIVERSITY

“Are you Danish enough to be in a beer  
commercial?”

*A selective analysis of representation and national branding in Danish beer  
advertising, 1980-2020*

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### **Abstract**

When brands like Carlsberg or Royal draw upon the national brand of Denmark, they not only run the risk of reception resistance, but also of challenges to their claims of cultural legitimacy from the same consumer public they hope to entice, be it domestic or international. Through qualitative content analysis of a sample comprising mainly of print media collected from domestic sources, the author investigated the representation of and references to Danish cultural citizenship and national branding in a representative selection of beer advertisements from the Carlsberg and Royal Unibrew corporations, dating from 1980-2020. Through reflections upon the empirical data collected through analysis, the author presents the outline of a pattern observed wherein brand culture, primacy and recognition for the breweries concerned came under increasing pressure from the consumer public due to a combination of a generational shift in brand loyalties, changes in consumption patterns, societal realities, and customer sensibilities.

**Keywords:** *national branding, brand culture, cultural citizenship, alcohol, beer, brand loyalty, cultural capital, cultural representation, alibi marketing, print advertising, qualitative content analysis, brand recognition, media authenticity, brand authenticity, media resistance, brand resistance, involuntary reception, jaded knowing, exoticism, commodification, semiotics.*

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### **Introduction**

Singapore, New Year’s Eve 2006. The author and his brother are in a taxi, heading out to explore the city’s nightlife and are discussing – in Danish - how to go about it based on recommendations received. The taxi driver asks where they are from, and upon being told Denmark exclaims “Ah! Denmark! Porn, blondes, and Carlsberg!”. No hesitation, no fishing for frame of reference – it was instantaneous. The “national brand” of Denmark and a commercial brand like Carlsberg has become so intertwined – or conflated if you will – that they are mentioned in the same breath without exertion. At least, it seems, from an external perspective. And in a culture where beer has been produced for millennia, it is no surprise that references to alcohol advertisements enter the common vernacular – and the collective conscious – very seamlessly. A joke that has enjoyed popularity in Denmark since the 1980’s claims that some Danes can only tell the big holidays apart by keeping track of what seasonal beers are available from the big breweries – Easter beer, Christmas beers, etc. When you land in Copenhagen Airport, chances are the first advertisement you see will be a massive banner ad for Carlsberg Beer. And yet at the same time, despite how fond Danes are of extolling their claims of progressivity, there are indications that the marketing tools employed when advertising alcohol still underperforms when it comes to representation of both minorities and the concept of Danish culture – or that they can be argued to perpetuate outdated stereotypes.

In this dissertation, I aim – through content analysis of a selection of advertisements in both print and video format – to do two things. Firstly, to explore the representation of “Danishness” and Danish culture within Danish beer advertising since the 1980’s and try to ascertain if (and how) Danish advertisers have genuinely embraced the multicultural nature of late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Denmark, or if they are still relying – if only to a point – on outdated, convenient, or overly controversial narrative devices when using minorities in their marketing of alcohol. To put it glibly, “they might be Danish, but are they “Danish enough” to be in a Carlsberg advert?”. Secondly, I intend to analyze how they employ – and interpret – the notion of Danish *national branding* in their marketing and explore the variations between domestic- and export-market output.

Originally, the intended timeframe of my analysis was significantly wider – I had picked 1928 as the placeholder “book-end” year, because this was the year Tuborg Boy Beer was launched on the African market, and it was an advertisement for this very beer that originally spawned the idea for

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this thesis<sup>1</sup>. The conflicts of messaging – from a modern standpoint – within one single media text triggered a process of reflection, as it got me thinking about how breweries promote their brands today – and the extent to which tangible progress has been made. However, a suggestion from my supervisor led to a reframing of the historical aspect – the timeframe was redrafted as starting in 1980 rather than 1928 and ending in 2020. This was motivated by the fact that the years following the Second World War saw not only a significant improvement in standard of living and an influx of new consumer goods, it also – particularly from the 1960’s onwards – saw a significant increase in immigration. As these newcomers established themselves as consumers on the Danish market, one could expect them to be represented in the marketing output (with time).

My preliminary research, however, indicated that this was not the case. As I hope to make clear in this dissertation, I observed what seemed to be a strong undercurrent of anti-confrontational visual coding in the marketing output produced by both the Carlsberg Group and Royal Unibrew. It is, for example, worth noticing that Carlsberg’s most recent *The Danish Way* campaign<sup>2</sup>, featuring the actor Mads Mikkelsen, plays heavily upon folkloristic connotations of “Danish” values – yet there are only a few non-white Danes in the campaign. Which, in itself, raises a number of questions, first and foremost about cultural citizenship and brand narrative. As I built upon my initial findings, however, the empirical basis for an analysis centered on minority representation proved insufficient, requiring a realignment from the original conception. In our modern, hypermediated world, where branding and brand culture is omnipresent in our daily lives, there are certain brands that transcend geographical origin, while at the same time, as in the introductory anecdote above, have become almost synonymous with their homeland. This is particularly true when dealing with alcohol brands. In this thesis, however, I hope to shed some light on the fact that while brands like Carlsberg and Tuborg retain a position as recognised icons of national branding within the Danish cultural polity, they also serve as icons of a commodified, artificial, often disputed synthetization of what is claimed to be legitimate Danish cultural values.

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<sup>1</sup> The commercial featured a Caucasian man in “colonial” attire being served a beer by a smiling African man of diminutive stature, dressed in a red butler’s suit. The name “Boy Beer” was inspired by a beer made by the German St. Pauli brewery known as *Girl Beer*. Tuborg’s product, aimed at the export market, ceased production in the late 1930’s, while the German brew is still in production as of 2022.

<sup>2</sup> “The Danish Way”, Youtube.com (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1v8n7IL-frA>). Retrieved January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

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Within the domestic market space, beer brands often profile themselves within the geographical context of their origins, and by extension become inherently associated - for better or worse - with this regional setting. With these developments in mind, the dissertation in its current, final form, is structured as follows: Firstly, a **Literature review** and **Methods** section, where I have attempted to situate my dissertation within contemporary, scholarly research, as well as provide some perspectives and reflections on the research process - and the obstacles and hindrances that emerged. Secondly, the main **Analysis**, divided into two narrative subdivisions. The first of these being a chronologically ordered analysis of selected samples by decade, contextualizing them within the sociocultural framework of both their era, and Danish cultural citizenship as a whole.

The second is a reflective analysis of how brand culture, national branding and media authenticity interact within beer advertising to express and commodify the concept of Danish culture. This is followed by my **discussion**, where I try to gather the divergent strands from the preceding chapters into a more coherent form. Finally, the **conclusion**, in which I reflect upon the thesis as a whole, the research questions, the obstacles and developments that occurred, and the potentials for further investigative research. For the sake of interpretative convenience, I made the decision to place the samples referenced in my analysis within the body of the text, rather than in the appendices.

## **Research questions**

From the proposal stage of this thesis, the scope and focus of the research questions underwent multiple modifications for reasons of empirical support and justification, as elaborated upon in the conclusion.

Ultimately, they were settled as follows:

1. How has cultural representation in Danish beer advertising developed within the timeframe (1980-2020)?
2. How are changes in Danish societal norms and dynamics represented?

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### Literature Review

#### Marketing the multicultural

The central conflict of my study – the conflict between the familiar and the other, identification and representation, is framed first and foremost by William O’Barr’s *Culture and the Ad* (1994). Centered on the issue of how ideologies of the *other* are constructed within the discourse of advertising, O’Barr talks about how “the representations of foreigners and other categories of outsiders who appear in advertisements provide paradigms for relations between members of advertising’s intended audience and those defined as outside it “ and goes on to reflect upon the fact that a significant quantity of advertising operates with a messaging centered on dominance & subordination. He also deals with themes such as audience reception – how often do you take holiday pictures that resemble the images and relationships depicted in adverts – as well as the inherent exoticism that continues to permeate minority representation in modern advertising. As a supplement to this, I included Graham Huggan’s *Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), as it deals with the commodification of cultural differences and our conscious and unconscious endeavours to domesticate the unfamiliar. In the 2020 essay “*Re-evaluating the Postcolonial Exotic*” Huggan reflected on his findings in the 2001 work and delivered a stern criticism of both what he calls *the exotic mode* and its ability to “refashion the relationship between, as well as within, the mutually informing categories of self and other” and the lack of critical scrutiny thereof within academic circles. One thing, however, that needs addressing when it comes to both O’Barr and Huggan is the question of age. With 2001 as the most recent year of publication, it was necessary to introduce something more recent to reflect developments within the field. For this purpose, I tracked down Caroline Koegler’s *Critical Branding: Postcolonial Studies and the Market* (2018) – which references Huggan – where Koegler frames the *market* as “a dimension of practice based on the definition and diversification of concepts such as commodification, valorisation and devalorisation, markets, market practices, products and profits, innovation, subversion, market forces, and market revolutions (i.e., a temporal perspective).” (Koegler 2018, p. 14). Koegler’s work also deals with the historicization of the debates from which the debates on how the ‘*entanglements in market forces*’ arose, as well as how discourse identity struggles and questions of imagination and integrity – from a postcolonial perspective – plays into engagements with economy.

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To flesh out the dynamic (and conflict) between “Danishness” and the “other”, I drew upon Joke Hermes’ conception of *cultural citizenship* in the context of popular culture, which she defines in her 2005 book *Re-Reading Popular Culture* as “the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture” (Hermes 2005, p. 10). Arguably, beer culture is an intrinsic part of Danish popular culture. It is referenced in music, literature, cinema – and slang. As my analysis developed, and I found it necessary to alter the scope and focus, the role of cultural citizenship as a concept within the body of my thesis grew in magnitude. It is, I would argue, inherently linked to both brand culture and national branding within the framework of this thesis – both on the national and local level. By its very definition, Hermes’ conception provides the framework for a key element of my analysis, as it lays out the field of contention between the authentic and the artificial. Without an idea of what it means to be “Danish”, one cannot define the antithesis thereof.

Yet as my analysis shall reveal, just like semiotic codes are always subject to dispute, so is any claim of representing “Danish culture”. Representation, whether positive or negative, is not just a question of visibility, but also authenticity. In order to strengthen the theoretical underpinning for this theme in particular, I went for Stuart Hall’s *Representation* (2013), the updated edition of his 1997 classic, wherein he defines the term as “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our mind through language”(Hall 2013, p. 16). In this interpretation, representation bridges the space between concept and language, enabling us to reference worlds or concepts both real and imaginary – or, in the context of this thesis, a fictionalized reality.

A good illustration of his argument is found in a recent (2015) campaign for Tuborg, aimed at the domestic market<sup>3</sup>. The primary characters are presented as “common man”, very working-class – and Caucasian, with an aesthetic that is very jovial, familiar (and sanitized). The characters are portrayed as relatable to the viewing public – but what *public* is it aimed at? The fact that a campaign like this was greenlit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century calls into question the underlying claim of *authenticity* made by it. Media authenticity and resistance– as presented by Trine Syvertsen & Gunn

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<sup>3</sup> ”TUBORG RÅ”, Youtube.com, September 17th, 2015. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ln8GaEo2j4>) retrieved March 25th, 2022.



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Enli in their 2020 article “*Digital detox: Media resistance and the promise of authenticity*” -plays directly into this core problematic of my research. The marketing of alcohol to the consumer public is rife with these claims of authenticity – be it authenticity of origin, manufacture, style, or flavour. Authenticity of representation likewise plays a role, especially since the success of a marketing narrative relies upon the intended (and unintended) audience buying into it. Carlsberg, for example, has succeeded (to a large part) in associating their brand with Denmark on the international market, but on the domestic front it is not as clear-cut. To showcase how the ethics of advertising practice is likewise a convoluted matter, I relied upon Murray et al. in their 2018 article on *alibi marketing*. This article, which came up during one of my initial rounds of reference research, introduced me to the rather nefarious concept which, as it emerged, provided important nuance for the thesis, particularly given the topic area. Alibi marketing is defined as a method “whereby core elements of a brand’s identity, such as a strapline, word, colour or shape, are used in advertising instead of the brand’s name or logo”. Thus, the article argues, by employing advertising that merely references the official branding of a product, companies are provided with an avenue for circumventing advertising bans and restrictions, so as to retain lucrative brand associations with sporting events.

This, in turn, ties into D. Kirk Davidson (2003) whose *Selling Sin* deals with the antagonism, stigma, and overt sociopolitical opposition encountered when marketing products that are subject to restrictions and deals with how errors in marketing practice can lead to increased hostility from the general public. While this book *is* written from an American perspective, I am convinced it will be able to provide constructive input to this Dano-centric case study – or at the very least provide material for a perspective-building section comparing public reactions in Denmark and the US.

To help bridge this gap, I was recommended to draw upon another work by Trine Syvertsen & Gunn Enli (with contributions from other scholars), *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era* from 2014. In this, the authors examine the Nordic media sector, its transition to a digital environment, and provide a “Nordic Model” for the media sphere. In a sense, one could argue that the Nordic region in itself embodies a brand - and brand culture - of its own, with the Nordic model (in the sociopolitical sense), progressive ideals and strong craft culture playing a key

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part. The Nordic tradition for conviviality, and the role played by food and drink within this folkloristic tradition, is something that is heavily referenced in both domestic and export market campaigns, to the point where a booklet published on the domestic market with tips on how to arrange "a solid Easter lunch" features plenty of beer, aquavit - and a guest appearance by a mascot-like Easter Bunny (fig. 1).

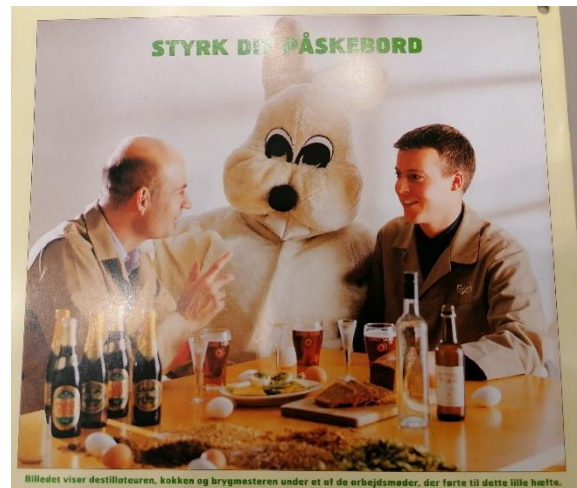


Figure 1: "Strengthen your Easter table", ca. 1997.

Naturally, given the risk of personal bias in my research and interpretation practice for reasons of nationality and experience, it was important to include a theoretical work that could underpin a critical reflection of my practice and approach as a researcher within this context. To this end, I was suggested Maria Sturken and Lisa Cartwright's "*Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*" (2018). An extensive work covering multiple methods of reading and interpreting visual texts and images, it provided an important piece of reflective, theoretical anchoring.

And of course, the cultural and historical context needs contextual underpinning as well. For starters, I singled out two works that provide cross-cultural and promotional culture perspectives, Macbeth & Schiefenhövel's *Liquid Bread* (2011) and Lawrence A. Wenner & Steven J. Jackson's *Sport, Beer, and Gender* (2009). *Liquid Bread*, whilst mainly containing articles dealing with the folkloristic and practical aspects of beer and brewing, contains a number of articles dealing with the marketing, promotion, and consumption of beer, both in Europe and internationally. Wenner & Jackson's work covers what they call *the circuit of commodification*, from production over representation to consumption. Though the book also has a significant emphasis on a particular type of masculine identity, it retains its applicability in the context of my study, particularly in that it explores the historical relationship between sports and beer, a relationship that has provided Danish breweries with an important promotional platform on domestic and international markets for decades. Through this, it ties in with Murray et al. and their work on *alibi marketing*.

For the purposes of analytical clarity, I employed - as I will elaborate on in my Methods section - an appropriated term borrowed from linguistics. Its function, however, is dependent upon a theorist that I had not immediately associated with my topic at hand but was suggested to me by a fellow

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student. The cultural literacy required not just for the practical interpretation of certain texts<sup>4</sup>, but also any claim of authentic Danish cultural citizenship, whether in the corporate or private sense, is at its core an expression of *cultural capital* as presented by Pierre Bourdieu in his 1986 article *Forms of Capital*. In his definition, cultural capital is represented in three states, *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalized*. While the topic at hand is not related to any conventional expression of the institutionalized state, I am basing my application of Bourdieu’s theory as operating in a hybrid space between the embodied and the objectified. Though not in any way a recognised authority on what embodies “Danishness”, a brand like Carlsberg could be said to hold, by virtue of its dominant position on the global market, an influential amount of cultural capital. That being said, when Danish breweries make use of visual language alluding to cultural codes and references, the interpretive space is not uniform between domestic and export audiences, as the familiarity with what could be considered legitimate Danish culture - and, by extension, the validity of the claim to legitimacy - is contested and unequal by its very nature.

As an illustration of this, let me put it this way. When a brewery heavyweight like Carlsberg hires the actor Mads Mikkelsen as the face of their most recent campaign, shoots the commercials in English and makes use of a visual language drawing upon the ‘fairy tale’ image Denmark still – to a large part – retains, at least for tourism purposes, you would expect it to be aimed at the export market. Mikkelsen’s public profile in Denmark is, at this stage, so multifaceted that the campaign message risks getting lost. It is in this issue of recognition and capital that you find the source of an observation made of contemporary domestic marketing campaigns. During my research trip to Copenhagen, I noticed that a considerable number of the big, nationwide campaigns have almost entirely eschewed human actors in favour of pack shots and/or brand typography.

At the same time, it made national headlines when a football club from the top division of Danish football replaced Carlsberg as their primary shirt sponsor with the Odense-based brewery Albani (see *Domestic vs. Export*), a move applauded by fans and industry observers as a display of regional pride and heritage<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See page 29.

<sup>5</sup> ”Leverandørskifte styrker fynsk identitet”, Food Supply 6/10/2017 ([https://www.food-supply.dk/article/view/559340/sponsorskifte\\_styrker\\_fynsk\\_identitet](https://www.food-supply.dk/article/view/559340/sponsorskifte_styrker_fynsk_identitet)) Retrieved May 7th, 2022.

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### Branding brews

Branding, in the marketing sense, is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “To apply a trademark or brand to (a product); to promote (a product or service) on the basis of a brand name or design.”, and a sizeable portion of the works covering this theme are in Danish, which makes sense given the overall topic. Flemming Steen Nielsen’s *Højt Skum* (2008), a catalogue publication produced in connection with an exhibit at the Danish Media Museum in Odense, was the point of origin for both my empirical research and the general search for references relating to the cultural context. It covers the development of Danish beer advertisements over the years, from commissioned works by established artists to edgy non-figurative adverts, and places them within the contextual framework of Danish cultural and art history. A point worth making about this work, is that it *is* a curated representation – and says little about the selection process that led to its composition and publication, which leaves an element of uncertainty. Through Nielsen, I was referred to Flakstad (2006), which provides visual material on Danish advertising in the interwar period. Although his book covers – in broad form – the trends and themes in Danish advertising between 1919-1939, and therefore falls outside the final scope of this thesis, chronologically speaking, Flakstad does make the interesting point that Danish interwar advertising had a marked emphasis on leisure and luxury goods – providing the relation between product and consumer with an aspirational tone that was previously subsumed. While hunting down Flakstad’s book, I was recommended two works by Asger Liebst, *Reklamens Århundrede 1901-2001* (2009) and *Reklamedrøm i det 21. Århundrede* (2003). In *Reklamens Århundrede*, Liebst deals with the cultural history of Denmark in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as portrayed through selected advertisements. Furthermore, he showcases how increases in standard of living, and the introduction of new commodities to the Danish market led to innovations and development in the marketing of consumer goods. *Reklamedrøm i det 21. Århundrede* is a more theoretical/methodological work, as it covers not just the structure, thematics and discourses surrounding advertising in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it also provides supplementary models for analyzing advertisements – illustrated by international examples. Supplementing these is Børge O. Madsen’s *Det var bare reklame* (1998), which provides the “industry insider” perspective for the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A book published by the Danish advertising industry, showcasing the trends, conflicts, themes, and developments as they played out in the offices, on TV, print, and the silver screen. One part of this book that I found particularly interesting – especially within the context of this thesis – is that it covers at length the

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disputes between the Danish advertising industry and the government authorities in charge of regulating advertising standards and consumer rights, thereby providing a case-relevant counterpoint to Davidson (2003)’s very US-centric analysis, as well as a number of valuable perspectives on the interaction between competing brands on the domestic market.

Sean Nixon, in his *Advertising Cultures* (2003) challenges the “*over-general and epochal*” nature of the models traditionally employed to place advertising in a historical or sociological context in favour of a *commercial culture* concept that emphasizes “the differentiated and multiple forms through which commercial relations and cultures are articulated”. Rather than a universal defining logic, he perceives commercial culture as a patchwork of actors, institutions and knowledge interacting within a social field. Given the focus of this proposed study, this concept resonates clearly. While it would be convenient to operate under the presumption that the messaging and value coding of a given advertisement would be received in a uniform, universal manner across the audience field, this is counterintuitive considering the realities of human existence. While the imposition of knowledge upon the social field by a given actor may be recognised, it is still subject to dispute, criticism, and outright rejection. Oversaturation can likewise lead to adverse interpretations by the consumer public, as the veracity of any claims of renewal will risk being met with skepticism.

Based on my preliminary findings, I made the decision to expand my scope somewhat from the original framing of my study. In the revised iteration, the emphasis shifted to be on national branding, secondly on minority representation in a chronological selection of campaigns aimed at domestic and export markets, within the framework of the research questions as established. The historical contextualization was interwoven in these segments to strengthen the framing. This modification draws upon the fact that big brands like Carlsberg and Tuborg have consistently relied upon tropes and notions associated with a sense of Danish cultural citizenship. In order to tie the themes of (nation) branding and representation together, I brought in *Inclusive Place Branding: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Practice* by Mihalis Karavatzis et al. (2018), which provides contemporary perspectives on the nature and practices of place branding, for the purposes of encouraging greater degrees of inclusivity and participation. Nadia Kaneva’s closing commentary on the dichotomy between brand utopias and lived experience provided particularly constructive underpinnings to my analysis.

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At the tail-end of my analysis, I found it necessary to flesh out a subsection of it – namely, the question of beer brands and tourist marketing. Given the dominant position of global brands like Carlsberg in our media landscape, it is sometimes easy to overlook things like the brew culture of the country of origin. Whilst mainly qualitative in nature, I was however able to track down a number of recent studies that provided some useful perspectives for my thesis. In *“Territorial brand management: Beer, authenticity, and sense of place”* (2020), T. C. Melewar and Heather Skinner analyzed the brand management of a Greek microbrewery, giving insights into consumer group targeting, questions of authenticity, and consumer perceptions. With a growing interest – particularly pre-Covid – in sustainable, craft-centric culinary tourism, brand authenticity has gained an additional dimension. Within the Danish cultural polity, the island of Bornholm has developed their regional brand with a particular emphasis on gastronomical experiences, with the island’s craft breweries playing a key part in the narrative.

For their part Daniel C. Knudsen and Amy M. Gray in their 2020 article *” Peircean Semiotics and Tourism Promotion: Some Advice We’d Give VisitDenmark if They Asked”* make the viable argument that the semiotic potential of contemporary Danish tourism campaigns is unfulfilled, as VisitDenmark, in their opinion, is playing it too safe rather than trying to educate *and* promote at the same time. Incidentally, in the latter case, I was left with a sensation of someone “hedging their bets” academically. Considering the self-assured nature of the headliner, you would expect something more remarkable to come out of the conclusion than arguments like “VisitDenmark ought to promote more than just “hygge”<sup>6</sup> and picturesque landscapes” and “single mothers as the face of a promotion can be misconstrued”. Whilst it *is* true that hygge, particularly at the time of its publication, was all the rage in Danish tourism marketing, and the idea of a single mother being the face of a promotional campaign would be considered risqué in a number of countries, it is worth pointing out that their findings were based on a trio of advertisements dating back to 2005.

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<sup>6</sup> “Hygge” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being; contentment from simple pleasures, such as warmth, food, friends, etc.”. The term is considered a core quality of Danish culture and plays a proportionally important role in the conception of something as “authentically Danish”.

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### **Domestic vs. Export**

Both the Carlsberg Group and Royal Unibrew have made use of divergent branding strategies between their export and domestic markets from very early on. And while the campaigns for both markets play heavily upon a “Danish” social imaginary with roots in folklore (and, to a point, stereotypes), the strategies and representations vary markedly. *Social* imaginaries, as described by Charles Taylor (2003): “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” is in this context employed with support from Syvertsen & Enli and their work on media authenticity and resistance.

As my analysis will show, the narratives presented in the export-oriented and domestic-oriented campaigns both play upon divergent semiotic presentations of a perceived cultural imaginary *while* making similarly divergent claims of authenticity – Danes know Vikings did not wear horns in their helmet, but that has not kept breweries from using the visual in their export promotions. On the other hand, the sense of communality and national branding can find itself challenged on similar grounds. As pointed out by Melissa Aronczyk in her book *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of Brand Identity* (2013), national branding is not merely a question of selling commodities, it “has become a solution to perceived contemporary problems affecting the space of the nation-state: problems of economic development, democratic communication, and especially national visibility and legitimacy amid the multiple global flows of late modernity” (Aronczyk 2013, p. 3). In this vein, Carlsberg has had such significant success with tying their brand to the *nation brand* of Denmark, that their product has in many respects become the “flag carrier brewery”, similar to Guinness in Ireland or Heineken in the Netherlands – to the point where it can be hard for non-Danes to separate country from company. Within this context, I am working with the term as defined by Keith Dinnie in his “*Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*” (2016, p. 5): “the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences.”.

This *culturally grounded differentiation*, however, is neither static nor universal within the polity of Danish cultural citizenship. And on the domestic market, this arguable “brand primacy” is equally disputed. Liebst (2003) touches upon how conditions on the domestic market were significantly more volatile at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Carlsberg and Tuborg than just 10 years prior. With a

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wider selection of discount brands becoming available to the price-conscious consumer, the big players were losing market shares at a steady rate as their premium status became an obstacle to constructive audience engagement. A contributing factor to this, which I hope to cover (to a certain degree), is the role of (regional) brand loyalty and how it plays into reception and perception of domestic marketing campaigns. For a country with just over 5 million inhabitants, the boundaries between beer brand loyalties are at times remarkably sharp in how they are drawn – you would be hard pressed finding a native-born *Fynbo*<sup>7</sup> picking a Carlsberg or Tuborg over an Albani<sup>8</sup> if offered the choice, since the latter has become intertwined with the *regional brand*, if you will, of Funen, in the same way Carlsberg has on the global stage. As touched upon by Liebst in *Reklamens Århundrede*, your choice of brew was never merely a question of taste – there were explicit and implicit messaging and values associated with every brand choice – even if you are no longer obliged to drink Stjerne Pilsner<sup>9</sup> to prove your working-class credentials. In the case of *Reklamens Århundrede*, however, it is important to underline that it – as opposed to his 2003 work – is less of an academic text and more of a general knowledge work, aimed at a wider public.

Simon Anholt, in his 2007 book *Competitive Identity* presents the argument that the self-perception of a nation’s populace is a powerful catalyst for the outward image, akin to what public affairs call “living the brand”(Anholt 2007, p. 56). In this vein, the idea of a Danish cultural citizenship becomes a catalyst for what you could call “nation brand resistance”. When Jonathan Gray (2021) talks about *involuntary* or *resilient reception*, he frames it within the emotional labour expected – consciously or unconsciously – of minority groups in general to “grin and bear it” when confronted with offensive commentary so as to “not spoil others’ enjoyment”. While my personal experience of this is obviously coming from a place of privilege within the context of this thesis, I would argue that the experience of a Dane – whether at home or abroad, confronted by an export-market oriented campaign by a familiar brand, falls within the auspices of the concept as well. You might not – at all – recognize or relate to the representation, values or commentary offered up by the

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<sup>7</sup> A person from the island of Funen.

<sup>8</sup> Odense-based brewery founded in 1859.

<sup>9</sup> The brewery known as *Stjernen* (“The Star”) was owned and run by the Danish Cooperative Association. Its flagship beer, Stjernen Pilsner, was rebranded in the 1950’s to *STAR Pilsner*, but sales faltered, and the brewery closed in 1964. A reconstruction of the Stjerne Pilsner has, however, been in production since the early 2010’s, and can be found at the Workers’ Museum café in Copenhagen.



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commodified, fictional representation of your homeland, but social norms and common courtesy prevents you from expressing this criticism so as to not “spoil the illusion”.

### **Filling the gaps**

Over the course of my reference search, I came to notice an absence in the scholarly work, not just within the field of media studies, but also in the broader sense. In their 2018 article “*Expanding the Scope of Strategic Communication: Towards a Holistic Understanding of Organizational Complexity*”, Heide et al. makes the point that while the practice of practitioners in the developmental process of strategic communication is well-disclosed in scholarly writing, knowledge of how practitioners conduct themselves at the stage of materialization is sparser. A significant amount of the articles and books written on alcohol advertising impact and reception were focused on the effects of advertising on adolescent consumption (Gunter et al 2008, Hansen & Gunter 2013, Molloy 2016), the targeting and proliferation of alcohol advertising on social media and its impact on youth consumption (Barry et al 2016 & 2018), community-specific commodification in advertising (Alaniz & Wilkes 1995), or a gender studies/public health perspective (Towns et al 2012) rather than a broader, critical approach to representation and nation branding in advertising. Wenner & Jackson goes some way towards remedying this shortcoming, but theirs is an American perspective rather than European, with the divergences in societal norms and values that come with it. And while Syvertsen et al. provides valuable “bridging theory” between the Nordic cultural context of my empirical data and the research on offer with a more transatlantic slant ( ), the parity of content analysis-based research of media representation within this field served as a potent source of motivation for my thesis research and analysis. Optimally, this thesis will serve to fill in a gap – or part of a gap – within this particular “sub-field” of media studies. As I see it, differences in consumption culture – and social norms – between the US and Europe, particularly when it comes to alcohol, cannot avoid colouring the nature of the research conducted. In the Nordic countries, consumption culture surrounding alcohol is generally more liberal in mindset, with it not being uncommon for young people to have their first taste of beer in their early teens. On a personal note, I had my first taste of beer at a family gathering when I was about 8 years old – which is, admittedly, early - and when my mother protested about this, the justification offered was that beer was “part of (my) culture” and that I “would have to get used to it sooner or later”. This is, of course, a rather blunt justification, but if you go by the statistics from

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the Danish Health Authority<sup>10</sup>, it is a sentiment that is not far from the truth, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>11</sup>. As of May 2022, the age limits for purchasing alcohol in Denmark are set at two benchmarks. 16 years (beer, wine) and 18 years (Buying alcohol in bars, hard liquor in shops).

By contrast, the American age limit is 21 across the board. What I was intrigued to find out when researching this topic, was that the legal drinking age was only settled at 21 at federal level as late as 1984 with the introduction of the *National Minimum Drinking Age Act*<sup>12</sup>. Prior to this, some states had their age limit set as relatively low as 18 or 19, but with the introduction of the act, states who did not toe the line were barred from federal highway funding. Young adult alcohol consumption is still surrounded by a significant amount of taboo and controversy, and this in turn provides a significant impetus for recurring, continuous investigations into the patterns of interaction, reception, and consumption. *Brand recognition* was far more prevalent (Gerber, Terblanche-Smit & Crommelin 2014, Gillespie, Joireman & Muehling 2013, Primack, Nuzzo et al. 2011), with representation employed more in the context of gender or regional targeting (Kaewpramkusol et al 2019, Atkinson et al. 2022). It would likewise be convenient to merely write off this shortfall of scholarly research as a question of funding, but I am not convinced that this is the case.

When I originally came up with the draft proposal for this thesis<sup>13</sup>, it was conceived as a multimethod case study combining content analysis with a limited amount of audience research. I made the argument that my lack of minority agency would have a negative impact on the analysis without the added element of qualitative, subjective input. As for the second half of my analysis, where I cover the marketing strategies of domestic contra export markets (as well as how nations market themselves) the picture was somewhat different, with a larger amount of recent research to

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<sup>10</sup> “Unge’s Alkoholforbrug”, Sundhedsstyrelsen 8/4/2022 (<https://www.sst.dk/da/viden/alkohol/fakta-om-alkohol/unges-alkoholforbrug>) retrieved 6/5/2022.

<sup>11</sup> ”Alcohol consumption among young people”, Nordic Welfare Centre 7/3/2019 (<https://nordicwelfare.org/en/nyheter/debate-article-alcohol-consumption-among-young-people-in-the-nordic-countries-is-falling-the-differences-need-to-be-examined/>) retrieved 6/5/2022.

<sup>12</sup> “The 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act”, APIS.com (<https://alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/the-1984-national-minimum-drinking-age-act>) retrieved 10/5/2022.

<sup>13</sup> As an exam paper for a methodology course.

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draw upon, although most of it (Nwokorie 2015, Carah et al 2014, Sudhinaraset et al 2016, Morgenstern et al 2016) came from the fields of business studies or strategic communication.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that quite a few of these dealt with either drinking culture research in itself (Aresi & Bloomfield 2021), the topic within the context of social media platforms rather than print or television commercials (Atkinson et al 2017, Carah et al 2021, Noel et al 2020) . Furthermore, my desire to go more in-depth with the Danish context in particular was inspired – as I shall elaborate upon in my conclusion – personal observations over a number of years, and my impressions stemming from these. There is an inherent discrepancy between the size of Denmark as a nation, and the reach offered by a brand of Carlsberg's magnitude. In summation, I would say this for my choice of literature given the analytical process as it panned out. I am aware that the retention of certain references even after the shift in focus may seem counterintuitive at face value.

However, I would make the argument that while Huggan and O'Barr's works deal with commodification of the other and exoticism in the dominant, postcolonial interpretation, there is still a case to be made that Carlsberg draws upon the very same practices in their version of "Danishness" as expressed through their branding and marketing. As my research showed, what is considered menial in one market can be exotic in another, and if you, for example, consider the success in recent years of the "Nordic Noir" genre and the proliferation of books, articles and television programmes espousing the virtues of the quintessentially Danish/Nordic concept of *hygge*, it is not far-fetched to see this as a product of "*Nordic exoticism*".

By this, I mean that Nordic media output and media coverage, national branding – as well as external conceptions and representations influenced by these factors – have cooperated to create one (or more) "idea of Denmark"/"idea of Scandinavia" that emphasizes the *othered* qualities, whether real or imagined. From the "native perspective", then, you find yourself – in a paraphrase of Gray (2021) on the involuntarily receiving end of any expressions thereof. As I will touch upon in the conclusion of this thesis, there were alternative methodological approaches with equal merit, for which the works cited would have served an equally viable purpose if supplemented as relevant.

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### **Method**

As pointed out in my literature review, studies based on audience research dominate the discourse surrounding the study of representation in alcohol marketing. Additionally, I would make the argument that a quantitative approach would not have been fit for purpose, since the authenticity of a certain representation is not qualified or settled by its predominance or quantity within the body of output, but rather through the interpretation and reflections, whether intended or involuntary (Rose 2016, p. 52), at the site of audiencing. As far as research strategies are concerned, I drew upon Denscombe (2007)’s framing of ethnographic research.

I have, in my choice of both references and method (see below) endeavoured to position both of these within contemporary research so as to strengthen its justification. As previously mentioned, when it comes to content-driven media studies the marketing of beer is underrepresented, despite a wealth of viable, available sources and its role in our sociocultural landscape for centuries. Over time, fragments of brand culture have entered our collective conscious and vernacular, our frames of reference, shaping even the common conception of sovereign states. And yet, it seems to me, when it comes to scholarly research, there is a predisposition towards focus groups and public health, rather than the more ontological and sociocultural qualities of its nature. And while this particular thesis is centered on the Danish perspective, I am convinced that the approach is applicable to any national context where a commercial brand – not just alcohol, but in general - has grown intertwined with the national brand.

When I first set out collecting data and references, as I will touch upon in my conclusion, I had a pretty clear-cut “research roadmap”. What emerged was more of a paraphrase of Robert Frost in that I found myself obliged to consider “the road not taken” with regards to emphasis. And while the application of certain references grew more abstract with the change in scope, I am still convinced of the viability. As far as the content analysis – and the interpretation of the findings – is concerned, I am working with a multi-layered approach. The basis is Gillian Rose’s *Visual Methodologies* (2016), as it provides the blueprint for content analysis of advertisements, as well as the basics of semiology. Specifically, it is the conceptualization of *cultural analytics* (Rose 2016, p. 85) and *social semiotics* (ibid. p. 136) that I have drawn upon in my content analysis for this thesis. As my analysis is heavily contingent on the interpretation of cultural codes and values as presented in the advertisements concerned, it proved a great help that Rose made it clear that her work was

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not intended as a comprehensive guide to visual analysis, but a genuine introductory tome (Rose 2016, p. 52).

Put briefly, my analytical structure was as follows:

1. Form and iconology
  - a. What is the basic form employed?
  - b. What visual cues are given to frame the message?
2. Contextual and cultural codes
  - a. What are the immediate cultural references
  - b. Are there any implied references?
  - c. What is the contextual setting and anchoring of the text?
  - d. What are the inclusionary (and exclusionary) elements?
3. Values represented (and omitted)
  - a. Who is the (presumed) audience?
  - b. What values are drawn upon, explicitly or implicitly?
  - c. Are there any conscious or unconscious exclusions or omissions?

Naturally, the sociological aspect plays a significant role in my analysis as well, but rather than serving as a stand-alone stage of my analysis, it was interwoven within each of the above steps. As a supplementary point, I find it necessary to address my use of a particular term within the analytical body of this thesis. Rose’s (intentionally) broad framing of social semiotics provided the basis, but I found myself dealing with cases (see p. 30) where the semiotic coding was more convoluted. From the phraseology of linguistics, I therefore appropriated the term *semiotic representation* for these purposes. By this appropriation I mean that the nature of the consumer audience’s engagement with and reception of the text in question – and, by extension, the success of its claims of validity and authenticity – is reliant upon not just semiotic interpretation, but also on a degree of cultural literacy that can and may be exclusionary. A degree of othering is likewise weaved into the visual composition, but it is not full-on erasure. Put glibly, the representation is there, you just need to know how to read the image to find it. Beer – and beer culture – is, arguably, an implicit part of Danish popular culture. It even – to a degree – shapes how people contextualize their Danish cultural citizenship.

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Linking beer to national events – like when Royal Unibrew launched a campaign boasting “Never has there been so many Danish Royalists” (fig. 2) to draw attention to their contribution to the national donation towards a present for Crown Prince Frederik on occasion of his wedding in 2004 – is far from uncommon. Building upon this I have included Richard Howells & Joaquim Negreiros’ *Visual Culture* (2019), as it elaborates on the concepts of *form*, *iconology* and *semiology* that is introduced by Gillian Rose (2016). For the purposes of cultural contextualization, Ben Highmore’s conceptualization of culture – both as contestation and in everyday life – plays well with some of the core themes of my case study. Initially, I found myself torn between conceptualizing my study strictly within his concept of *culture as contestation* or *culture as a way of life* – but based on initial findings I am working towards an argument that the study falls within a hybrid interpretation between the two. Firstly, the power dynamic – and struggle – described by Highmore is present. Secondly, the advertisements not only promote a common commodity – they promote them through often aspirational semiotic symbols. An application of either concept without the other would in this case hamper the analysis.

While this thesis is not anchored in audience research, it was – given the theme of representation, reception, and resistance - I was recommended Jonathan Gray’s *Dislike-Minded* (2021), which deals with such topics as media affect and resilient reception, as well as explores audience practices within their social contexts. He makes the point that dislike of a (media) text is not simply a question of “snobbery” or of conscious misinterpretation – it can just as well stem from emotional labour, concerns about the subject’s own lived experience and identity – or their (perceived, implied, or real) alienation from the community or sociality represented (Gray 2021, pp. 214-215). You might find yourself represented, but is it useful, genuine – or relevant? Finally, Chris Wharton’s 2013 *Advertising as Culture* deals with the *everyday* aspect of advertising – how it



Figure 2: "Never have there been so many Danish Royalists", Royal Unibrew 2004.

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features as a ‘common subject’ in our cultural lives. While written from a UK context, my first read-through of it provided some interesting pointers to further references and analytical angles. British alcohol (and promotional) culture bears a number of similarities to the Danish ditto, so it takes little reinterpretation to make the arguments “fit for purpose”.

For empirical data, I made the conscious choice to go for content analysis of a limited sample of advertisements, rather than an audience research-oriented approach. This was motivated by a desire to go more in-depth in my analysis in order to prove the viability of a mediacentric approach to a field of research more commonly associated with strategic communication ( ), public relations ( ) or business studies ( ). Practically speaking, I conducted my sample collection, largely consisting of print media, in accordance with the following criteria:

- DOI between 1980-2020
- Distinctive in its visual styling/brand messaging
- Reflective of contemporary sociocultural trends and/or norms

While I had originally hoped to source the majority of my empirical material with as few intermediaries as possible, I ended up having to re-orient my endeavours – specifically, my inquiries to Carlsberg were unsuccessful, as I was informed that their corporate archives are not open to the public, even for research purposes, and Royal Unibrew did not have an archival contact listed on their public pages. Accordingly - and in order to get a better sense of the current state of Danish beer advertising - I carried out an extended field work session in Copenhagen to collect data through archival research and take stock of tendencies and strategies in contemporary<sup>14</sup> campaigns.

The employment of archival research in a qualitative context merits some further elaboration (and justification). In their 2020 article *Archival Ethnography*, Stephen Decker and Alan MacKinlay makes the argument that qualitative researchers traditionally tend to prefer data sourced from investigative research, with archival documents serving a supporting/background function in their analysis (in Mir & Fayard (Ed.) 2017, p. 17). While their article is framed within a context of

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<sup>14</sup> Spring 2022.

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organizational rather than cultural research, their point about still holds relevance to the case at hand. Their reference to the researcher being at the mercy of “the kindness of an archivist” holds particular resonance with my personal experience – my initial overtures towards Carlsberg were politely yet firmly rebuffed on the grounds of company policy and (I suspect) brand strategy. And while it was certainly frustrating, and something of an obstacle to my general progress, I am in retrospect not entirely surprised by their rebuttal.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, I received nothing but courteous help from the staff of the small prints collection at the Royal Danish Library, who saved me a lot of confusion when they made it clear that they were happy to help me dig out potentially relevant material from the collection but warned me that they did not have a registry of contents for each of the boxes I was allowed to peruse.

Due to the collection being a product of archival practice rooted in national legislation, the contents of each box had been collected over certain periods (as outlined on the labels of each container), and I had to make sure to preserve the chronological stacking order when browsing the contents. Some of the material I was able to access through the small prints collection at the Royal Danish Library could easily be determined as sensitive business intelligence, and not all of it of the kind that is usually published for public access. In a world where brand identity, brand culture and brand-to-consumer interaction is extensive and expeditious in pace, controlling your brand message and image is of paramount importance.

From the original collection of archival materials, which I would estimate to be within the range of 6-700 prints and labels sorted as mentioned above, I picked out an initial sampling pool of 150 prints. This was then revised and reduced to the final sample of 30, which was subsequently supplemented by samples collected from books and online sources (YouTube etc.). To avoid cherry-picking in my selection, I prioritized samples which could be considered representational and (where possible) which were new to me, to avoid prejudicial interpretation. And from a personal, academic perspective, it was rather thrilling to conduct “analogue research” after two years of almost exclusively online research. And while I did not find a large amount of internationally

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<sup>15</sup> A point worth making in this context is that in the endnotes of *Reklamens Århundrede* (2009), Liebst has included a note thanking a named archivist at Carlsberg’s archives for “valuable research assistance”. While it is, naturally, the prerogative of any corporation to make changes to archival policy, it is still remarkable that their policy was (apparently) significantly more open to external requests just over a decade ago.



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oriented material in the archival material supplied by the Royal Library, I was still able to get a concept of key branding philosophies and strategies as presented by both Carlsberg and Royal Unibrew. The wide scope of the material collected also challenged my self-discipline as a researcher – I have always been prone to going off on tangents when researching something, so I relished the (implicit) challenge posed. As for international materials, I am very grateful to my thesis supervisor, Emil Stjernholm, who introduced me to the *Svensk Mediedatabas*<sup>16</sup> (Swedish Media Database) a collection that is part of the Swedish Royal Library, from where I was able to requisition a selection of video and audio commercials for Danish beers, primarily Tuborg that had aired in Sweden within the timeframe of my research.

In a sort of summary reflection upon my methods and sampling, I came to the realization that rather than being informed by objectivity, I had engaged in my research from a position of what Sturken & Cartwright refers to as “jaded knowing”(Sturken & Cartwright 2018, p.316). My conscious (or unconscious) predispositions towards the brands and their associated culture meant that, similar to how I found it necessary to maintain my discipline when it came to archival research, I had to maintain awareness of this socioculturally rooted interpretive horizon of mine.

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<sup>16</sup> Svensk Mediedatabas (<https://smdb.kb.se/>) retrieved 22/4/2022.

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### Analysis



Figure 3: Enamel sign advertising the beers and soft drinks of the Stjernen (Star) Brewery, 1932.

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Unless otherwise stated, all images are © Danmarks Mediemuseum/Det Kongelige Bibliotek/Carlsberg A/S/Royal Unibrew A/S.

My late grandfather always told me that when he was younger, your choice of beer reflected the profile you wanted to show off to the rest of society. On the island of Zealand, if you drank Carlsberg Hof, you signaled familiarity with and support for the sciences and fine arts, even if you were working-class, because of Carlsberg’s extensive charity towards these fields. Tuborg was associated with popular culture, jazz music and modern art. Until it closed down in the early 1960’s, however, a good Social Democrat was expected to opt for Star Pilsner (fig. 3), the flagship of the collectively owned brewery. Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling, in their

introduction to their 2006 book *Brand Culture*, makes the argument that since we are living in a “branded world”, brands both infuse culture with meaning and provide, through their cultural performance, a contextual grounding for analysis purposes. The world, they argue, has been transformed into “a commercial brandscape”(Schoreder & Salzer-Mörling 2006, p. 10) where the production and consumption of signs matches physical consumption. While I do agree with their assertion, I would, within the context of this thesis, make the assertion that this transformation is not a 21<sup>st</sup>-century novelty – rather, it has merely expanded in scope and pace.

In a training guide from around 2012 (fig. 4) aimed at international markets and partners, the Carlsberg Group presents what they call the “brand essence” of their premium brands Carlsberg and Tuborg. The former’s essential values are listed as being cosmopolitan, contemporary and with a “passion for excellence”, while the target values of Tuborg are framed around youth, freedom, and easy living. “Probably the best beer in the world” is contrasted with “Live life to the fullest!”. While these brand essences neither are nor have been static, they will provide a point of reference for the analysis as follows. As a point of order for the remainder of this thesis, I find it necessary to clarify one piece of terminology. Royal Unibrew, as it is known today, came into being in 2005 after the

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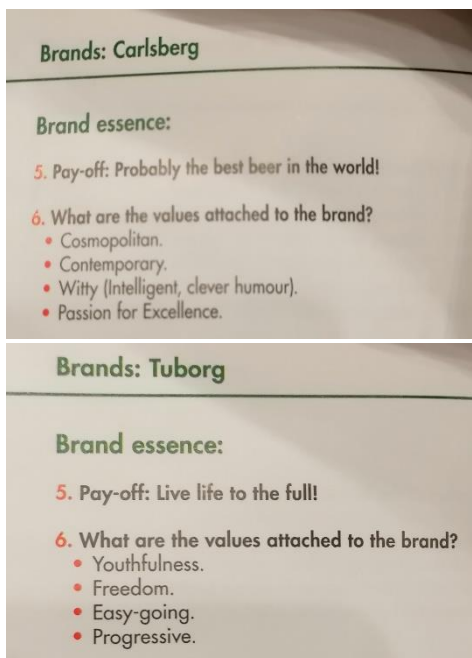


Figure 4: "Brand Essences" from a Carlsberg training guide, ca. 2012.

*Bryggerigruppen* conglomerate – consisting of the breweries Faxe, Ceres, Urban & Thor – had merged with the Albani brewery from Odense in the year 2000. For the first ten years of my timeline, the “founding 4” were thus competitors on the market, with Faxe operating independently and the remaining three joined together under the name *Jyske Bryggerier* until the 1989 merger that created *Bryggerigruppen*. However, for the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the breweries in question – unless otherwise explicitly stated – by the Royal Unibrew brand name. As mentioned in the introduction, this analysis is structured in two parts – the first part, comprising three chapters organized chronologically, covers the historical contexts and developments as reflected by the data collected, while the

second part covers the question of nation branding, media resistance and cultural citizenship.

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### Transatlantic influences and commercialized nostalgia

In the early 1980's, Denmark found itself in a transitory state on a number of levels. Economic stagnation, a recent influx of immigrants, and an increased cultural influence from abroad (and the United States in particular) led to a very motley media landscape for the average consumer to navigate. In a 2006 interview with *Berlingske Tidende*<sup>17</sup>, the Danish advertising executive Henrik Juul reflects upon his career in the business, and particularly on the state of affairs when he started his career. A large number of the advertisements were very non-confrontational, aspirational, lifestyle-driven – and bland. And the marketing of beer was no exception to this rule.

As a result, it caused something of a sensation when Carlsberg announced in 1984 that their luxury brew 'Carlsberg 25'<sup>18</sup> was to be rebranded and relaunched as 'Sort Guld' ("Black Gold") with a new bottle and black/gold labels, accompanied by a marketing campaign that drew upon references to film noir, jazz culture and pulp fiction literature (fig. 5). Here was

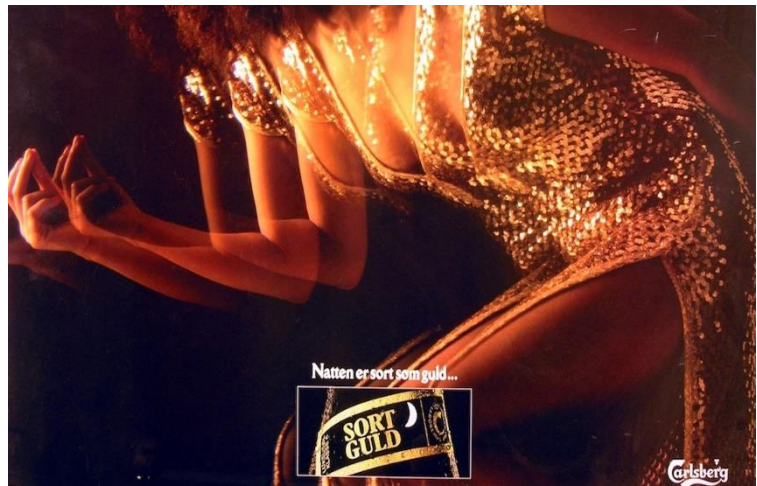


Figure 5: "The Night is black as gold...", 1984.

a reinvigorated product, marketed at the dynamic, nightlife-frequenter, pleasure-seeking Danish youth, with a visual profile that set it apart from the competition (the practice of Danish breweries branding export-strength/"Gold" beer with black writing on a gold/burnished gold background was an established one going back decades) – including Tuborg Gold, another product from the brewery's own portfolio. But it is also in this campaign that we find one of the first – within the timeline of this thesis – examples of commodified sexual exoticism used as an advertising tool. The Dano-Swedish singer Caroline Henderson played the role of the temptress/siren in billboard advertisements for the rebranded brew, her exotic looks central to the visual framing – though not in

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<sup>17</sup> "En reklame skal være ærlig", *Berlingske.dk* 1/2/2006. (<https://www.berlingske.dk/kultur/en-reklame-skal-vaere-aerlig>) retrieved 3/4/2022.

<sup>18</sup> It was sold in compact 25 centiliter bottles and had only been released on the domestic market as recently as 1978.

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a way that signifies “Danish”. Rather, her character is explicitly, exotically other, drawing upon the dynamism of futurist art as well as cinematic fantasies of New York or Parisian nightlife with their implicit promises of erotic adventures. This stylistic referencing of a culture whose sociocultural norms when it comes to alcohol consumption vary significantly from the Danish is interesting, but not surprising. Contemporary youth culture was – as it in many ways still is – heavily influenced by Americana in all its forms, and by tapping into this attraction, the campaign for Sort Guld presents the product almost as an agent of self-assertion and expression “American Style” – but still anchored in the familiar brand culture of Carlsberg. Compare this to the campaigns launched at the same time for the corporation’s flagship brews, Carlsberg Hof and Grøn Tuborg, and you find strikingly different approaches brought into

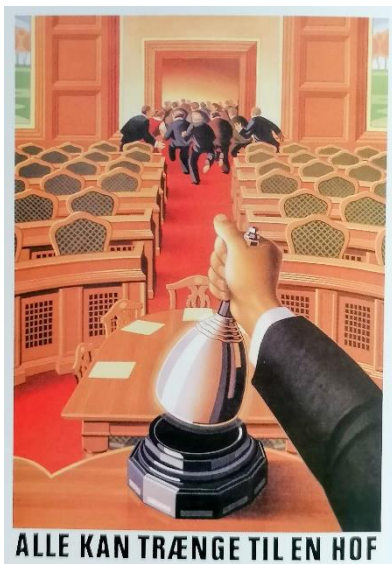


Figure 7: “Anyone can need a Hof”, 1984.

play. You still have the urbane angling of the Tuborg campaigns – the brand has long been associated with supporting the performing arts, and music in particular<sup>19</sup> - in

contrast to the nostalgic feel emanating from a number of the Carlsberg Hof campaigns. But the edges asserted by Tuborg are more “rounded off” than in the Sort Guld campaign. You see a stylized skyline of Copenhagen, with a similarly styled bottle of Green Tuborg added to the spires (fig. 6). The skyline is framed by a window frame, of the type found everywhere in Denmark, with the windows open. With the tagline “What is it that makes life a



Figure 6: “What is it... that makes life a little greener?”, 1984.

little greener?”, the messaging is clear: Drink our beer to get a sip of big city living, Danish-style. In the case of Hof (fig. 7), Carlsberg teamed up with Saatchi & Saatchi to produce a series of posters where the visual style is nostalgic, drawing clear references to in-house campaigns from the early

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<sup>19</sup> Tuborg has been the primary sponsor of Roskilde Festival for decades. Up until a few years ago, they were also associated with the Copenhagen Jazz Festival, but were replaced as “Beer Partner” by Svaneke Bryghus from the island of Bornholm.



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20<sup>th</sup> century. By associating Hof with a folkloristic conception of “the good old days” – and drawing upon their own branding history – the flagship brew is touted as a constant, a pillar of sociocultural Danishness in an ever-changing world. But I cannot help but detect a level of escapism, of anti-confrontational marketing strategy in this advertisement. The 1980’s were a time of political and societal upheaval in Denmark, with violent clashes between not just ethnic Danes and immigrants, but also between right-wing and left-wing activists. As I will elaborate on later, the ripples from these upheavals continued into the following decades – and continued to influence how Carlsberg in particular expressed their brand identity – and how these expressions were received. Against this tumultuous backdrop, the messaging takes on a comforting tone – “the world may be going crazy, but Carlsberg remains the same”.

At this time, the Carlsberg group was still dominant on the domestic market, a dominance that was not, however, uncontroversial. Madsen (1998, p. 362) shines some light on an aspect of the dynamic between Carlsberg and their competitors on the domestic markets in this era. In 1982, after a successful campaign saw them gain significant market shares by calling themselves “By appointment



Figure 8: Comparing to the intercontinentals, 1981.

to the Danish People”, the Faxe brewery (now part of the Royal Unibrew group) was accused by the Danish Advertising Board of advertisement malpractice and “*goodwill-leaching*”. Put briefly, the smaller Faxe brewery had launched a campaign which included a poster featuring one of their Faxe Fad beers flanked by a bottle of Carlsberg Hof and a bottle of Green Tuborg, superimposed with a speech bubble reading “To think that I would end up in such tasteful company!” Carlsberg filed a complaint citing copyright infringement, and it was re-emphasized that only Carlsberg had the license to publish advertisements featuring their product range. As for the export market campaigns in the same era, there was no tangible print material in the boxes placed at my disposal by the Royal Library, but I was able to track down a number of video advertisements aimed at international

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markets. The first one (fig. 8), from 1981<sup>20</sup>, is explicitly tailored towards American consumers, drawing upon price point comparison with competing domestic brands Budweiser and Miller before espousing the pedigree and popularity of the “true European taste of Tuborg”. The subdued lighting, simple cinematography and jovial narration lets the American consumer decide whether “the beer brewed the same on both sides of the Atlantic” is worth a try. The only explicit reference to Denmark is a quick shot of the “certificate of authenticity” that used to be printed on the neck labels of Tuborg beer bottles (fig. 9). With the benefit of hindsight, I find the accusations leveled at Faxe at the time somewhat baffling, if not flat-out hypocritical.

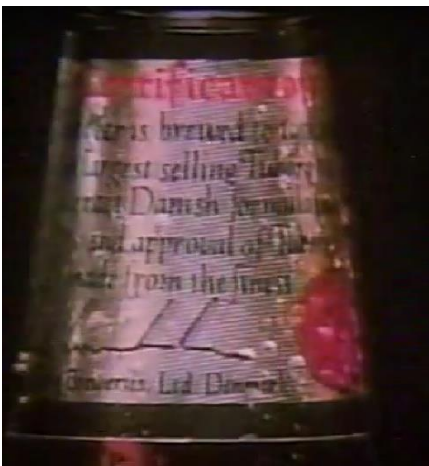


Figure 9: *Certified Danish, 1981.*

Firstly, the use of competing brands in the promotion of your own brand is in no way alien to Carlsberg’s own marketing. Secondly, if the bone of contention regarding Faxe’s use of “By appointment to the Danish People” is what ticked off the Carlsberg Group, then that only reinforces the bad impression left by their conduct in this matter. The titling “By appointment to the Royal Danish Court” held by Carlsberg is a protected term, but the smaller brewery’s referencing of it is evidently tongue-in-cheek. Madsen does not cite the details, but the fact that the consumer public responded well to the campaign offers

a hint. In brief, the larger brand saw its brand vision as the “flag carrier” brew of the Danish people threatened by a creative campaign launched by a smaller competitor, and the positive response from the consumer public became a cause for concern. This abuse of (market) position – something which is, incidentally, considered distinctively “un-Danish” within the Danish cultural polity - leads me to think that while the latter, comparative campaign was of course commissioned for a market and an audience that was presumably unfamiliar with the domestic market conditions of a small Scandinavian country, the fact that at the same time as they were complaining to domestic authorities about competitors leeching on their brand recognition, they were introducing their own brands to an international audience using the very same method leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

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<sup>20</sup> “Tuborg Gold 1981 Beer Commercial”, Youtube.com April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7d2GS2CoQk>). Retrieved April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

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In the case of the second one, the presentation (and composition) is strikingly more surreal and “artistic” (fig. 10). With a soundscape provided by British avant-garde pop group Art of Noise’s 1986 song *Legs* but overlaid with a repeated refrain of “*Tu-Tu-Tu-Tuborg*”, the commercial features a steam locomotive comprised of black-clad models walking in tandem while dressed as a locomotive,

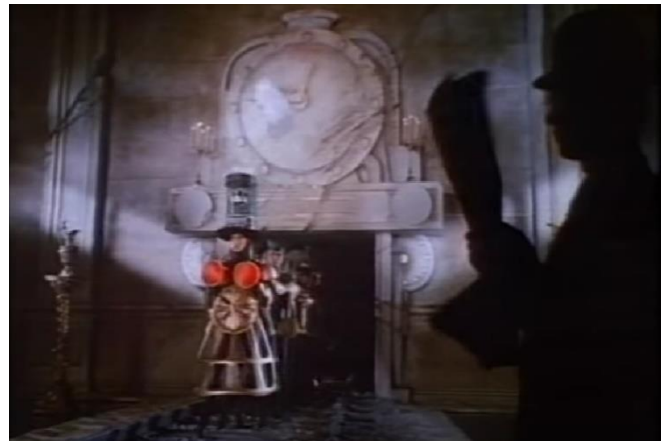


Figure 10: “*Tu-Tu-Tuborg*”, ca. 1986-87

businessmen in suits and bowler hats watching the “train” pass by, interspersed with shots of Tuborg being poured into a pint glass. Finishing with a shot of an androgynous merman diving head-first into a massive pint of beer, an unseen announcer delivers the slogan “*Tuborg – it’s a different world!*”. And at face value, this somewhat confusing commercial *can* seem rather opaque without any clear references to the brew’s country of origin – or to any brand values for that matter. In 21<sup>st</sup> century terms, it appears to be *forcing the meme*<sup>21</sup>, to be going for “random for random’s sake”. I would, however, make the argument that this is not the case.

Rather, the semiotic codes and references are there – but they are occluded. First of all, the image of the locomotive is a classic trope in visual culture – and especially in marketing culture – used to signal qualities like progress, vivacity, speed, tenacity, and modernity. Secondly, the music and visual style signals (for its time) “cutting edge”, cultural awareness and progressivity – “there’s a new thing



Figure 11: *The merman takes a plunge*, 1986-87.

coming your way, and you don’t want to miss it!”. Thirdly, the argument could be made that the use of the merman (fig. 11) is an oblique semiotic representation of Danish culture – specifically by way of the works of H. C. Andersen. His fairy tales – and in particular *The Little Mermaid* - have

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<sup>21</sup> “Forcing the meme” refers to an overenthusiastic or repetitive effort to bring a particular meme, or visual joke, to prominence – or, alternatively, to oversaturate social media with iterations of the given meme, thus wearing out its novelty and impact (and shortening its “lifespan”).



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become so arguably enshrined in Denmark’s cultural brand from an international perspective, that the featuring of merfolk can serve as an origin cue. And yet, for all its seemingly progressive assertions and qualities, there is a stark absence in the storyline – minority representation. Naturally, the argument could be made that the faceless businesspeople on the platform, watching the train pass, could serve as a canvas for aspirational self-projection, rendering the requirement for explicit representation moot. That said, even this interpretation is debatable. Henrik Juul in his Berlingske interview<sup>22</sup> criticized the state of affairs in Danish advertising in the 1980’s for being driven by “not causing a fuss”, and I would, based on my readings of both domestic and export-market advertisements, tend to agree with him.

From my findings I got the impression of a decade wherein Carlsberg, having gone some way towards consolidating their position by buying up Tuborg in 1973, found themselves under increasing pressure from both consumers and competitors, forcing them to prove that their brand culture remained dynamic enough to retain sociocultural relevance among target demographics – but without ostracizing the more conservative segments of society. That the amount of explicit othering, or references to the exotic other, was scarce within the available material is thus of little surprise. In the decade to come, however, grabbing attention and fighting your corner creatively would only grow in importance, as the playing field widened.

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<sup>22</sup> See page 25.

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### A product of its time

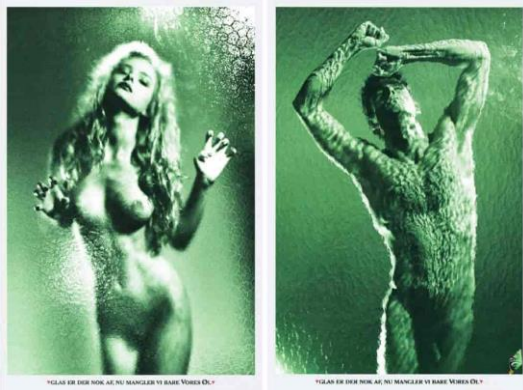


Figure 13: "There's plenty of glass, now all we need is Our Beer", 1990.

In the early 1990's, once more with the help of advertising industry giants Saatchi and Saatchi, Carlsberg set out to prove that they were still willing and able to push the envelope. In 1990, Carlsberg produced a campaign of two posters – one with a male model, one with a female (fig. 13). The models are playing up to the audience from behind matted glass – and are completely naked. Madsen (1998) recounts how the campaign caused some uproar, but also led to a revision – and

liberalization – of Danish advertising standards. Another change has also come to the domestic market, a change brought about by a developing liberalization of said market in the late 1980's. The brewing giants on the Danish market saw their position threatened (or even, if you will, undermined) by discount brands and resurgent regional breweries, which again forced them to get creative when it came to their marketing. And when considered from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, some of the output stemming from this increased competition could be considered rather blunt or even problematic. As an example, a 1996 advertisement for Tuborg Gold produced for viewing in Danish cinemas holds focus extensively on the curvaceous figure of the alluring brand mascot, a leggy, animated waitress, superimposed



Figure 12: A golden invitation. Still from *Guld Tuborg* advertisement, 1996.

on a beer glass being filled, before finishing off with a coy slogan inviting the consumer audience to “take me after the movie” (fig. 12). The export-strength beer had undergone a rebranding in 1995 to commemorate its centenary year where the mascot was added to the label, so the risqué styling was

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evidently meant to imprint the new look upon the consumer public. Another advertisement, for Tuborg’s flagship beer, sees a man living through an erotic hallucination with every sip of his lager, turning the ponytail-wearing anonymous woman sitting at the table across from his into an alluring, (implicitly) promiscuous sexpot – only to revert back to her ‘genuine’ state when he downs the last gulp, which causes him to frantically ask for a refill. (fig. 14) Neither of these have explicit references to any national branding, they are aimed at the “everyman” of the 1990’s, with potential for proliferation on both domestic and export markets. What we are seeing in at least two out of three of these examples, is a 1990’s expression of what I – in paraphrase of Wenner(2009, p. 122) would call the consumption stimulant of the idealized masculinity.



Figure 14: From steamy fantasy to stark reality.

Without straying too far from the topic at hand, the power dynamic on offer is clear and machismo laden. As we have thus seen, in the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century you needed to push the envelope to get the attention of the buying public.

And yet, there is a continuous absence from the marketing output, at least on the domestic market – anyone with darker skin. The early 1990’s saw yet another shift in the discourse surrounding the immigrant-background population in Denmark. In the daily vernacular, a new term had emerged to supplement – or supplant – existing terms and monikers. The term was *nydansker*, literally ‘new Dane’, and though it was coined to provide an inoffensive umbrella term to cover non-ethnic Danes it did not prove uncontroversial. It was pointed out that since some of these ‘New Danes’ were born and raised in the country, they could hardly be considered “new”. And yet they were largely absent from the nationwide promotional campaigns. As I will elaborate in the discussion, the process of data collection and initial analysis led to me needing to re-align the emphasis of my general analysis. To put it bluntly, I found more references to fictional characters with a folkloristic role,

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like the Easter Bunny<sup>23</sup>, or deceased Danish notables<sup>24</sup>, than non-ethnic Danes within the collected material. I got the impression from the data collected that rather than this apparent omission – and the gradual shift towards pack shot-centered campaigns that seemed to gain traction during the 1990’s – being deliberate on part of the breweries, at least with regards to the domestic market, it seemed to be a product of caution and a wish to preserve brand integrity and identity. On



Figure 15: Referencing Nagel and Palmer, 1990

the export front, Tuborg’s mantra “*It’s a different world*” dished out in the rather surrealist commercial mentioned earlier<sup>25</sup>, has been replaced with “*Where the taste is*” for the US/UK market, as showcased in a very colourful 1990 commercial<sup>26</sup>. Retaining the Art of Noise song – albeit in a modified form – as the theme, and with a visual style that appears partially inspired by British photographer Terence Donovan’s videos for Robert Palmer<sup>27</sup> and the artwork of American artist Patrick Nagel<sup>28</sup> (see fig. 15), the message is simple: Tuborg offers a premium product, with a wide appeal, at an affordable price. And yet the only space within the commercial that could be argued to provide a reflective space for minority consumers is an implied one, expressed through close-up shots of hastily walking legs and feet. Which, in turn, caused me to reflect upon what patterns I had observed so far – and my own unconscious preconceptions surrounding the topic. At least when it came to the output collected from the first two decades of my timeframe, I was hard pressed to find material with explicit minority representation – rather, it seemed, there was an emphasis on re-

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<sup>23</sup> See page 7.

<sup>24</sup> See page 40.

<sup>25</sup> See page 29.

<sup>26</sup> “Tuborg Lager 1990”, Youtube.com May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLsEmQvqiBY>)

<sup>27</sup> British photographer and artist Terence Donovan (1936-1996) directed two music videos for British recording artist Robert Palmer (1949-2003), *Addicted to Love* (1986) and *Simply Irresistible* (1988). The video for *Addicted to Love* was named by The Guardian as “fashion’s favourite video” in a 2019 retrospective.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Nagel (1945-84), American artist and illustrator, noted for his representations of the female form in a style descended from Art Deco and Pop Art. Designed the cover for Duran Duran’s album *Rio* (1982).

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Figure 16: A glimpse of the future (?), 1992.

asserting brand relevance and recognition through the use of risqué visuals, ironic humor, and cinematic styling. In a 1992 advertisement for their flagship beer, Carlsberg takes what could be seen as a tongue-in-cheek jab at the perceived technophobia of certain Danes. A nondescript industrial robot arm, holding a pint of “Hof”, is depicted on a poster with the slogan “first they took our jobs, next they’ll be taking our beer”(fig. 16). As I see it, there is an interpretative dichotomy within this advert – you have the face value, or (presumably) intended reading, which from my perspective seems symptomatic of a brand trying to maintain relevance within the Danish cultural polity, without a wholesale compromising of their brand essence. Similar to the “window ad” for Tuborg from 1984, the robot signals progress and modernity, while the imposition of the beer signals familiar,

folkloristic continuity. But at the same time, the poster is opening itself to more nefarious interpretations where the robot doubles as a metaphor for “the other” and their influences upon the Danish way of life. The mechanical limb comes across as sterile, unfeeling, and artificial – in other words, the antithesis of the cozy conviviality that Carlsberg aims to associate their brand with. This brand-philosophical emphasis of the simple, premium qualities of the product is brought to the front in a piece of print material that is – at least at a subconscious level – referencing the German *Reinheitsgebot* from 1516<sup>29</sup>. On the cover of “*The Story Behind a Glass of Beer – from Barley to Beer*” (fig. 17) the Carlsberg Group presents their core product as an icon of simple purity, promising insights into how it is made.

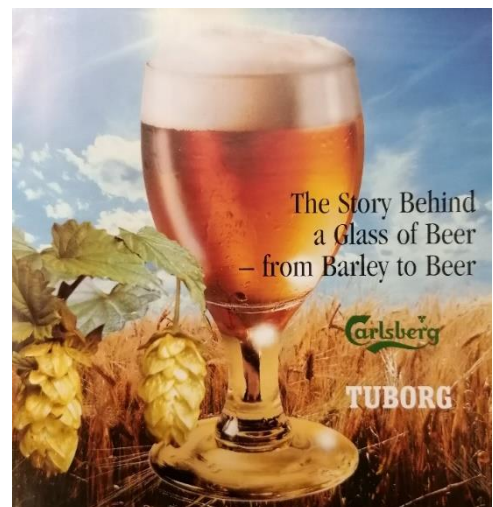


Figure 17: A fairy-tale foam. Cover of a Carlsberg Group promotional booklet, ca. 1995.

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<sup>29</sup> The *Reinheitsgebot* stipulated what was permitted as ingredients in beer within the states of the Holy Roman Empire. Only barley, hops and water were allowed.



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By the end of the 1990’s, it is clear from the archival material that a brand like Carlsberg has woven itself – for better or worse – into the increasingly branded cultural polity of Denmark. While it is no longer the sponsor of the national squad<sup>30</sup>, the brand is still prominently associated with prominent domestic and international clubs<sup>31</sup>. However, the range of options available to the Danish consumer grew, competitors were consolidating, brand loyalties were being challenged, and customer sensibilities were changing.

### **New era, same values(?)**



*Figure 18: A clash of stereotypes(?) Zlatko Buric facing down a Swedish customer in advertisement for Grøn Tuborg, ca. 2002.*

By the turn of the millennium, developments in cinematic style had begun to make inroads into the world of advertising – just like the continuous competition for market shares made their mark. As a result of a sponsorship deal in the early 2000’s, the Carlsberg Group ran a lengthy campaign (fig. 18) featuring the Croatian actor Zlatko Buric in the lead role as the acerbic, ornery owner of a nondescript

“ethnic” corner shop of the kind you find in most Danish cities. Buric’s character, through interactions with other “everyman” characters, extols the virtues of Green Tuborg (and their then-new plastic bottles). The campaign, with its rugged familiarity – at least to the intended audience – is, however, not without its stings in the proverbial tail. Yes, the character of the shopkeeper – for all his flaws – is relatable, his customers look like people you would see on the street, and there are even cameos by characters from other, then-contemporary campaigns. The representation of minority characters is strikingly one-dimensional and stereotypical – the blonde, mullet-haired Swede who is quick to threaten the shopkeeper with the police, the loutish butch lesbians who make little effort to hide their racist attitudes – and the fellow immigrant who accuses Buric’s character of

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<sup>30</sup> See page 46. The sponsorship deal ended in 1987.

<sup>31</sup> On the domestic front, Carlsberg has been associated through sponsorships with F. C. Copenhagen (2002-2021) and OB (2001-2018). Internationally, the most prominent sponsorship deal has been with Liverpool F. C. (1992-2010).

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trying to con him with beer in plastic bottles, only to be sent off with a “*You owe me money!*”<sup>32</sup> once he is out of the door. There is a duplicitous undercurrent – whether conscious or unconscious – within the portrayal of Buric’s shopkeeper, wherein it is implied that you should not only laugh at the “minor tokens” he is confronted by – but also the shopkeeper as a token “in his own right”. He is integrated enough to speak Danish, enjoy Danish beer, and engage in sarcastic, *schadenfreude*-laden banter with his patrons – but at the end of the day, he is unmistakably other(ed). While I am lacking the empirical evidence at this time to provide a definitive answer, it is worth, at least as a rhetorical question, to ask if the commercial reality of representation was so seemingly binary – that it was either a question of inferred representation where your presence is merely hinted at, or a more tokenistic representation – with associated involuntary reception – where your representative is reduced to comic relief.

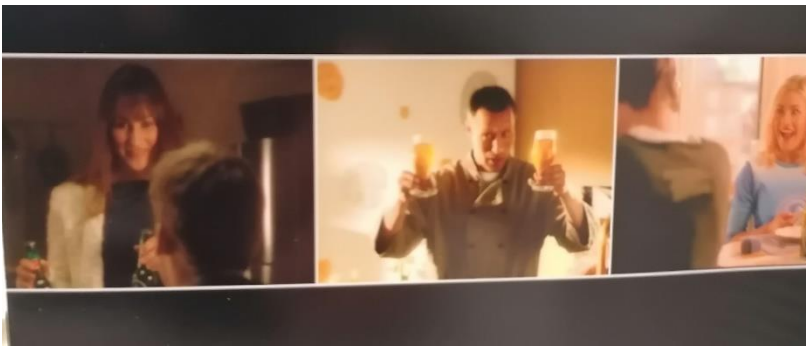


Figure 19: Visual references from media production guide published by Carlsberg, ca. 2003.

At the same time, in a production guide for advertisements published by Carlsberg, notions of contentment, “hygge” and an element of aspirational living standards (fig. 19), while trying to avoid accusations of snobbery or disingenuous representation of (Danish) conviviality<sup>33</sup>. Given the

historical context, I cannot help but see this latter emphasis as an attempt at pre-empting consumer (and competitor) criticisms. At this point in time, Carlsberg’s market dominance was under threat from both domestic brands and international competitors, many of which were produced under license in Denmark by Royal Unibrew. When this brochure was published, I was about 15 years old, and I remember quite clearly that Carlsberg Hof was considered somewhat obsolete (associated with our parents’ generation), overpriced, and underwhelming by those of my contemporaries who

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<sup>32</sup> The phrase, shouted in a thick, nondescript “Balkan” accent, became a catchphrase for some time after the campaign ran.

<sup>33</sup> The guide references “interiors of a kind found in larger cities, in the homes of people of a certain income level”, but without it being elitist or braggadocious.

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had tried beer – “like drinking perfumed toast”, as a friend of mine put it. We simply could not relate to the brand message, no matter how often we were exposed to the “Vores Øl” (Our Beer) slogan. Liebst (2003) talks about the “three standpoints on advertising”, the *business-related*, the *critical* and the *ironic* (Liebst 2003, pp. 17-22). In this context, I would – upon reflection – place our response squarely within the latter. We interpreted the coding with an ironic distance and did not buy into the messaging that drinking Hof would signal a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

In contrast, Royal Unibrew’s 2004 campaign<sup>34</sup>, as innocuous as it seems at first glance, does lend itself to certain uncomfortable semiotic interpretations. A common point of argument surrounding the monarchy in Denmark is that it is a socially cohesive factor, something explicitly referenced by the advertisement – but the representatives of this body of fictionalized royalists are strikingly Caucasian. As I see it, to fully understand the codes and references expressed in this advertisement, you need to be familiar with the role of the monarchy within the cultural collective conscious of



Figure 20: The Queen of Denmark chastising her subjects, 1984. © Danmarks Radio.

Danish cultural citizenship – and how the Queen has, through her becoming something akin to a folkloristic point of reference in this sociocultural power dynamic, influenced the discourse surrounding Danish identity and immigration. To put it briefly, it centers on her public performances. In her annual New Year’s Eve speech in 1984 (fig. 20), she took the opportunity to chastise her countrymen and subjects for how they approached (and interacted

with) the immigrant minorities, calling out and criticizing them for using “Danish humor” as a front for xenophobic remarks and acts<sup>35</sup>. This sent ripples through Danish society and triggered a lot of debate about the veracity of her assertions and criticisms – as well as about the tone of the

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<sup>34</sup> See page 19.

<sup>35</sup> See page 62 for a translation of the controversial passage from the speech.



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immigration discourse in Danish society. On the other hand, the discourse surrounding the commodification of Queen Margaret and her family is a minefield in and of itself – they feature on postcards, fridge magnets, posters, and other touristy trinkets – but alcohol advertising is a different beast. Her late husband produced his own wine<sup>36</sup>, but explicitly using her (or her family) to sell alcohol would land any brand in hot water with a significant segment of Danish consumers.

By extension, I cannot help but see Royal Unibrew’s editorial choices when it comes to the aforementioned campaign as an attempt at “playing it safe”. Despite socioculturally normative expectations of her functioning as an apolitical head of state, with the prerogative to (at least attempt to) mediate in societal crises, and despite the republican cause having a very limited following in Denmark as a whole<sup>37</sup>, she is still, as an “artifact” of Danish cultural identity, associated with more conservative world views – at least within the public discourse. As Howells & Negreiros (2021, p. 134) puts it, “the better known the text, the more controversial any ideological interpretation is likely to be”. And since an considerable proportion of non-ethnic Danes do not drink alcohol for religious reasons, there would be little incentive to cause a stir by featuring darker-skinned Danes in a campaign tying itself to a royal event. The potential for controversy and backlash would have been significant, even without the degree of social media activity we have today. To paraphrase Highmore, their predicament is an example of “a politics of culture”(Highmore 2015, p 72.) – by omitting non-white Danes from their campaign, they expose themselves to accusations of discrimination, reactionary values and making assertions concerning what “authentic” Danish cultural citizenship encompasses. Yet as a counter to this, it could just as well be argued – with a nod to Highmore’s point that it is “a conservative cultural politics that insists on arts’ role as being non-political”(ibid, p. 94) - that the inclusion of non-ethnic Danes in their campaign could equally well have fostered criticism for politicizing what was ostensibly

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<sup>36</sup> The royal couple bought the Occitan vineyard Chateau de Caix, ancestral home of the Prince Consort’s family, in 1974.

<sup>37</sup> As late as 2018, in a nationwide poll by Voxmeter, as many as 70% polled in favour of the monarchy in Denmark. Source: ”Opbakning til kongehuset: Over 70 procent vil have et monarki frem for en republik”, Jyllands-Posten March 2nd, 2018. (<https://jyllands-posten.dk/indland/ECE10364430/opbakning-til-kongehuset-over-70-procent-vil-have-et-monarki-frem-for-en-republik/>). Retrieved May 5th, 2022.

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intended as a public display of affection towards the newlyweds, of being politically correct, or of tokenistic representation.

### Ubiquitous but not unanimous

When I was explaining the topic of my thesis to some of my friends, one of them made a remark regarding the role of a brand like Carlsberg in Denmark's national branding that I found interesting. He explained that "when I am abroad and I see Carlsberg advertised or sold in shops, I feel quite proud that such a major brand stems from my little homeland. But I am equally proud when I see my little local brewery being sold in the big supermarkets in Århus or places like that, because that's like my neighbour, my local community doing well. I am not too keen on Carlsberg Export,

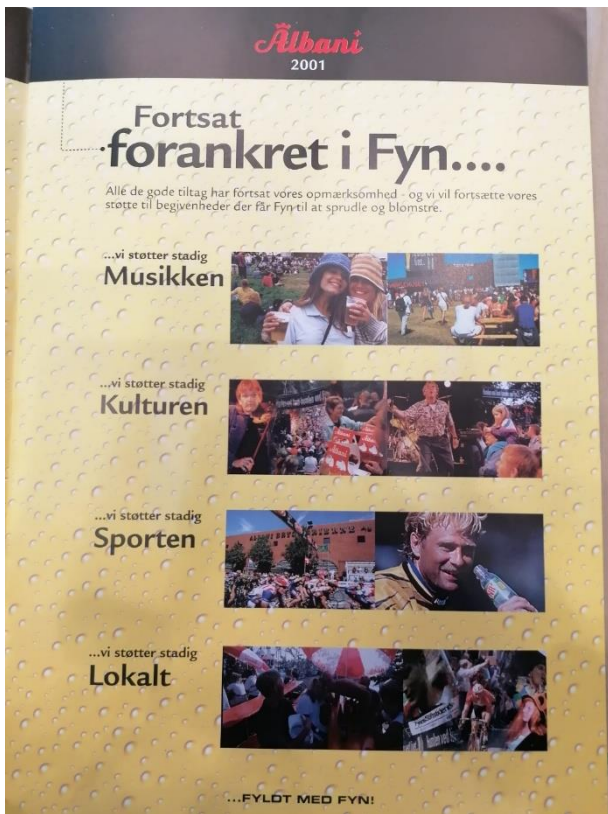


Figure 21: "Anchored in Funen", Albani/Royal Unibrew 2001.

though!". I found it fascinating that he was able to compartmentalize his reflections and thoughts in such a way – that Carlsberg is part of his conceptualization of Danish culture, but while he feels a degree of belonging to it, its position is contested.

And in this, he touches upon an aspect of Danish beer culture that is remarkably potent, given the size of the country in particular – the role of regional brands in the identity-building practices of the regions in question. When carrying out archival research at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, I came across a number of promotional and marketing material published by the Albani brewery in Odense. One of these, a newsletter aimed at customers in the retail sector,

opened with a brief mission statement of sorts outlining the brewery's commitment to anchoring itself in the island of Funen, its people, culture, and unique qualities (fig. 21). Also featured in the same newsletter was a reproduction of a new advertisement for the brewery's *H. C. Andersen* beer, a brew originally launched to commemorate the city's millennial anniversary in 1988.

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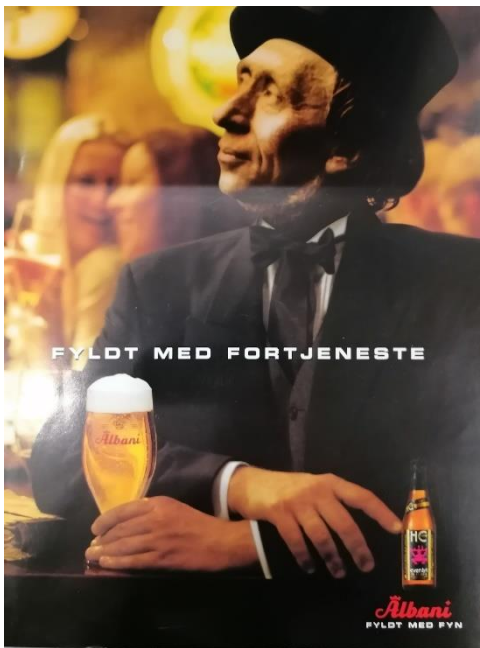


Figure 22: "Full of Reward", Albani/Royal Unibrew 2001.

Featuring the namesake author (who is, arguably, the most famous person to be born in the brewery's hometown of Odense) enjoying a pint of the product (fig. 22), it fuses tradition with modernity, all while maintaining a subtext of the aforementioned "Funen values". Within the context of Danish folkloristic culture, the island is widely associated with a very pastoral, earthbound (and verdant) brand of *hygge* – and with a strong tradition for horticulture. Similar to how the county of Kent has been known as "the garden of England" for centuries, Funen is commonly referred to as the garden of Denmark.

By referencing this folkloristic context, the brewery is sending a clear signal to its consumers and business

partners: our product is the essence of all that is Funen – the earthbound, meticulous, convivial way of life – in bottled, hoppy form. While not commodification of the exotic in the classic sense as presented by Huggan (2016), I would argue that there is an element of (very localized) exoticism in this brand culture presentation by Albani/Royal Unibrew. Similar to how Tuborg compared themselves as the European David measuring up to the beer Goliaths on the US market, Albani is broadcasting the subliminal message that the competing premium brands have lost touch with authentic Danish brewing culture, whilst Albani, rooted in the loamy soil of Funen, claims to retain this folkloristic heritage of values. One could even go as far as to point out the implicit jab at the international prominence of the competitor – they have grown "too big for their boots" and have lost touch with *the real thing*. Continuing in the vein of values and authenticity, given the significant emphasis on egalitarianism in Danish society, it should come as no surprise that the consumer public does not react well to bullying tactics by the big players, especially when those players make, as we have seen, consistent claims to an association with authentic Danish cultural values and norms. Wharton (2003) makes the point that social and cultural identities are a potential flashpoint for cultural struggles, where audiences contribute their own experiences to create a negotiated or oppositional decoding of a campaign (Wharton 2003, p. 77). As an illustration of this contestation, I am reminded of what you could call the *Pisner affair*. In 2015, a project was launched at Roskilde Festival as a cooperative effort between the festival, the Danish Agrarian

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Board and other actors, where nearly 60,000 liters of human urine were collected from the festival urinals to be used for barley fertilizer. The Carlsberg Group, primary beer partner of the festival, supported the project initially, but ultimately refused to create a brew using the unusual malt, so a smaller brewery stepped in<sup>38,39</sup>. When the product was bottled and ready two years later, however, the smaller brewery won themselves a lot of acclaim – both domestic and international<sup>40</sup> – for being willing to take on the unusual project, and despite Carlsberg’s claims that they were not trying to impede the distribution, the smaller brewery was still refused permission to sell it or promote it at the festival.

Thus, a central pillar of the project was undermined by the festival’s main sponsor, a fact which, among other things, inspired a number of shopkeepers in the Roskilde area to buy up shipments of the beer and put it on special offer during the festival. The underdog had persevered, while the industry giant came across as inflexible, petty, even vindictive. And when you consider the influence – both conscious and unconscious – that Axel Sandemose’s *Jante Law*<sup>41</sup> still holds over the Danish collective psyche, it is easy to see why the reaction evolved as it did. For better or worse, there is a dominant self-image within the Danish cultural polity – or at least a self-image that is aspired to. In this, Denmark is conceived as something of an idyll, a cozy, democratic place where the people are open-minded, charitable, and upstanding. We pride ourselves on invention and creativity – but our collective conscious is at the same time permeated by an unspoken, subliminal adherence to societal norms as satirized by Sandemose.

As mentioned in the introduction, a long-running gag within the Danish cultural polity makes light of the fact that our everyday culture has become so increasingly commodified, you would not be surprised if there was a fellow Dane somewhere who used seasonal brews in lieu of a holiday

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<sup>38</sup> “Carlsberg vil ikke ‘drikke sit eget pis’”, Fødevarewatch 15/3/2017.

(<https://foedevarewatch.dk/Drikkevarer/article9432164.ece>). Retrieved 10/4/2022

<sup>39</sup> ”Danish brewery Norrebro Bryghus makes ‘Pisner’ beer from urine”, Financial Review 9/5/2017.

(<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/food-and-wine/danish-brewery-norrebro-bryghus-makes-pisner-beer-from-urine-20170509-gw0iix>). Retrieved 10/4/2022.

<sup>40</sup> “Pisner Lancering”, Danish Digital Award. (<https://danishdigitalaward.dk/project/pisner-lancering/>) Retrieved 10/4/2022.

<sup>41</sup> The “Jante Law” was put into words by the Dano-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose in 1937. Conceived by Sandemose as a satire on the biblical Ten Commandments, it can be summarized in the phrase “*Don’t think you are better than us, smarter than us, or more important than we are!*”.

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calendar. Within the Danish cultural context, the arguably dominant brand in this regard is Tuborg’s Julebryg (Christmas Brew).

First launched in 1981, the beer is associated with a distinctive visual profile (dark blue branding) and a commercial that has – with minor modifications – been in use since the product was launched (fig. 23). Released annually in late October or early November in a national event commonly referred to as “J-Dag”(J-Day), the brew dominates seasonal beer sales in Denmark during the winter months<sup>42</sup>. In a display of cultural resistance, the ubiquitous nature of the product – and its aggressive promotion – has led to “anti-J-day” events being arranged in parallel, usually in beer bars, where patrons can go to enjoy alternatives to what some call “the blue menace”. In other words, the market saturation – and claims to folkloristic authenticity - of a dominant brand culture, to the point where it influences the scheduling of police traffic stops<sup>43</sup> is being contested by less dominant market actors.



*Figure 23: The classic advertisement for Tuborg Christmas Brew, in use since the launch in 1981.*

Going back to the brand essences mentioned in the introduction, the marketing material I was able to access through the Royal Library gave me the clear impression that the essences as outlined in the 2010’s were essentially the same as they had been in the 1980’s – with the development being largely in expression. Rhetorically speaking there is only a short distance between “live life to the fullest” and “it’s a different world!”. And as for cosmopolitan values, you would be hard-pressed to find a more suitable, contemporary Danish actor to be the face of your brand than Mr. Mikkelsen at the moment. But the gap between idea, ideal, and lived experience remains.

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<sup>42</sup> As of 2018, Tuborg Julebryg held a market share of 55%. Source: “Tuborgs markedsandel i Danmark er stor – men stagnerende”. FødevareWatch 22/11/2018. (<https://fodevarewatch.dk/Drikkevarer/article11023265.ece>). Retrieved May 11th, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> ”Politiet gennemfører landsdækkende spirituskontrol på J-Dag”, Politi.dk November 4th, 2021. (<https://politi.dk/rigspolitiet/nyhedsliste/politiet-markerer-jdag-med-landsdaekkende-spirituskontrol/2021/11/04>) retrieved May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022.



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### The idea(l) of Denmark



Figure 25: "Our Beer, just like our Father used to drink it". Carlsberg, 1999.

In his 1994 work "*Culture and the Ad*", O’Barr makes the observation that when “stripped to their skeletons”, most advertisements are characterized by a faulty logic, asking consumer audiences to form conclusions on the basis of limited information (O’Barr 1994, p. 205) As shown in the preceding segments, the samples from the marketing portfolios of both Royal Unibrew and Carlsberg

outline a narrative pattern that plays upon national branding in a folkloristic sense. Whether presenting a conceptualization of Danish identity and culture in a comforting, nostalgic manner, a contemporary manner, or a self-aggrandizing manner, the linking of (in particular) Carlsberg to Danishness is markedly prevalent. The nostalgic angle is well-represented by another marketing print uncovered during my research, specifically the cover of “Vores Øl som Far drak den” (fig. 25) from 1999. A little booklet, roughly A6 format in size, kept in subdued, patinated tones, it draws heavily upon cultural references to the domestic space, the folkloristic and the familiar. By presenting their brand pedigree through images and text, Carlsberg lays claim to a level of robust, cultural continuity the competing brands (arguably) cannot. Times and customs change, but “Our Beer” remains the same.



Figure 24: Cover and interior page of the "Key West" catalogue, Tuborg/Cottonfield 1994.

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If you, on the other hand, consider the framing of the export marketing, it becomes rather more convoluted. I was surprised to come across the *Key West* catalogue from 1994 (fig. 24), a presentation of a range of casual sportswear designed in collaboration with the Cottonfield label and the Carli Gry design house, selling a dream of ‘the easy life’ on the Florida Keys, with implied references to Hemingway and Hollywood

to the consumer. Tuborg was definitely trying to (re-)establish themselves as a premium international brand by launching this “aspirational” line – but there is very little tangible reference to the Nordic origins of the brand. Rather, it is the idea of the good life in the sun, espoused by



Figure 26: Presenting Tuborg Sommer, 2013.



Figure 27: Just your average Dane riding his bike through your average Danish home (?), 2017.

(then-)contemporary shows like *Melrose Place* and brands like Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger – but presented here with a Scandinavian flourish. The brewery branding is discreet on the articles of clothing, with more emphasis given to the designer than the “mother brand”. One could even make the argument that they are referencing the reputation of *Danish Design* – “wear- our clothes, drink our (premium) export beer, and you can live the good

life too, no matter where you may be!”. I am reminded of Gracia Arnaiz’ (in Schiefenhövel & Macbeth 2011, p. 220) argument that when it comes to the marketing of beer, “they all end up being for consumers just what the commercials say they are”. As a counterpoint, drawing on both Gray’s concept of involuntary reception and Syvertsen’s concept of media resistance, with a modicum of personal experience added in, I would put it like this: The Denmark that is presented to export markets is sanitized, stylish, manageably quirky (fig. 27) and with an ontological quality of light that plays into presumed preconceptions surrounding Nordic/Scandinavian living. In a number of ways, it still plays upon the aspirational incentives and inferences that I covered in the preceding segments. But from a native perspective, it has a distinctively disingenuous feel to it – the Danish cultural identity presented is not unanimous but caters to a commodified, almost “Disneyfied” *idea*

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of Denmark. But just like there is more to Danish beer than just Carlsberg, there is more to Denmark than the Little Mermaid, Nyhavn and idyllic beechwood forests. While my sample – for reasons of practicality and timeframe – is not comprehensive enough to make definite conclusions, I found it remarkable how sanitized, and to a degree monocultural, the conception of the Danish national brand within these export-market advertisements were – on the occasions that they featured human beings in their promotional material at all.

Over the course of the timeframe for this study, I also noticed a pattern wherein the emphasis increasingly moved from persons to pack

shots. When considered from a brand perspective, this makes a lot of sense marketing-wise. By removing the human factor from the visual profiling of your brand, you do, by extension, also remove a potential point of contention. And at the same time, you broaden the receptive appeal – rather than semiotic representation, tokenism or straight-up exemption, the product becomes a blank



*Figure 28: Presentation of the Faxe range of brews in Royal Unibrew catalogue, ca. 2014.*

slate of relation building between consumer and brand. And from a personal perspective, throughout my analysis of the material collected, I found myself disengaging both consciously and unconsciously from certain presentations of my homeland - the output comes across as lazy or at the very least uninspired. In an age where public response to an advertising campaign is instantaneous, thanks to social media, I am a bit concerned by the impression that Carlsberg, given its international position, is still banking – to an extent - on goodwill, history, and consistency, rather than try to continually push the envelope with something more edgy. But at the same time, I would be disingenuous if I blamed them uncritically for this. Because while the “Pisner” affair<sup>44</sup> proved a public relations challenge for Carlsberg, and their venture into renewing the shandy for the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See pp 40-41.



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century was a disappointment<sup>45</sup> the launch of their RÅ beer proved that even a successful launch can still leave you facing challenges and criticism<sup>46</sup>. It is worth stressing that Royal Unibrew for their part has likewise produced output that struck me as equally caricatured (fig. 28). Another avenue of marketing where Carlsberg in particular have made their mark, both on the domestic and international front, is sports sponsorships. On the domestic front, I was surprised to learn that it was a sponsorship deal signed between Carlsberg and the Danish Football Association in late 1977 (Madsen 1998, p. 167) that acted as the catalyst for the national squad turning fully professional<sup>47</sup>. Thus, Carlsberg gained a direct brand association with one of the most visible, uncontested symbols of Danish cultural identity. And yet at the same time, they have in the past been called out for making use of *alibi marketing* during sporting events, in order to circumvent advertising restrictions on alcohol in the host countries.

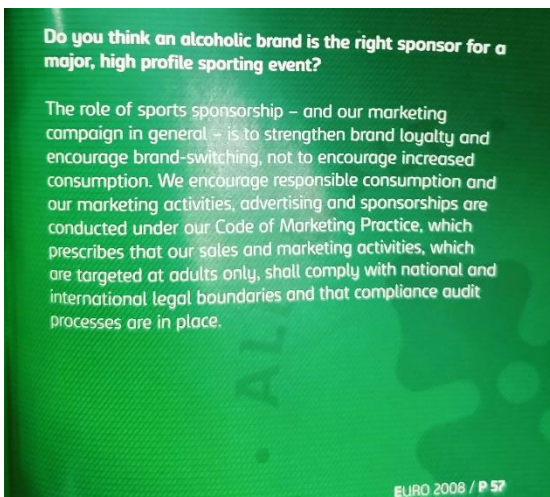


Figure 29: Excerpt from an event guide published for use at the UEFA Euro 2008.

In their 2018 article “*Carlsberg alibi marketing in the UEFA euro 2016 football finals: implications of Probably inappropriate alcohol advertising*”, Murray, Breton et al. lays out how Carlsberg made use of alibi marketing – defined by them as the process “whereby core elements of a brand’s identity, such as a strapline, word, colour or shape, are used in advertising instead of the brand’s name or logo” – to circumvent the so-called *Loi Evin*, which prohibits television advertising of alcohol in France. The authors argue that the sheer

<sup>45</sup> The *Shandy* or *Radler* is a mix of beer and (usually) lemonade. In 2013, the ready-to-drink shandy product *Tuborg Sommer* was launched with a massive promotional campaign, including an elaborate promotion at Roskilde Festival featuring a themed beer garden and free samples. It failed to catch up with target demographics, however, and was discontinued a few years later. See also fig. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Tuborg RÅ, an unfiltered, organic version of their flagship Green Tuborg brew, was originally conceived as an exclusive product to be sold only at Roskilde Festival. But the launch – and the product – proved so successful that the general public flooded Carlsberg with requests for them to release it into general distribution. After their initial offer – a release outside the festival, but only in bars and restaurants, was rejected by consumers, they eventually relented and released RÅ into general distribution.

<sup>47</sup> Up until the end of the 1970’s, the Danish football association and the national squad were strictly in favour of the amateur athlete ideal, with several iconic Danish players of the post-war period being barred from the national squad for signing professional contracts with international clubs. It was not until 1971 that the Danish Football Association revoked the amateur status clause for national squad selection.

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volume of brand exposure Carlsberg received during the finals makes it clear that the current legislation is not working, in particular if the public health messaging implicit in sports events is to avoid further tarnishing. In this context, it was intriguing – and fortunate – to come across an event guide from the Uefa Euro 2008 tournament, where one of the pre-written answers to provide if asked about the corporation’s involvement with the event explicitly dealt with this issue (fig. 29). Based on the empirical evidence, it seems there had been a development – in a more nefarious direction - in policy between the 2008 tournament and the 2016 event, as reflected in Murray et al’s article. Which, as I see it, is if not defensible, then at least interesting. The controversy surrounding sponsorships by fast food corporations or breweries has been ongoing for years, with no sign of moving towards a resolution. Given this state of affairs, having everyone “on message” is of paramount importance. But the discrepancy in practice bears the simple, rhetorical question: If they were so eager to claim dedication to corporate social responsibility and transparency in 2008, why did they find it justifiable to circumvent French domestic legislation regarding alcohol promotion eight years later? From a personal perspective, this is something I would like to investigate further in the future.

As an example of less controversial – but still risqué – brand association, it was rather refreshing to dive into the associative choices made by Royal Unibrew in their marketing. I was particularly enthused by a campaign created in collaboration with the Tivoli amusement park in Copenhagen (fig. 30). Pictured on the flyer is the raised hand of “Pjerrot”, the mascot of Tivoli<sup>48</sup> - but he is giving the “horns up” gesture while holding up a can of Royal Export. And like with the “surrealist train” commercial from the 1980’s<sup>49</sup>, there is more to this seemingly spartan piece of marketing than first surmised. The immediate target is the



Figure 30: "Tivoli's silverback has switched to Royal", ca. 2015-2017.

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<sup>48</sup> The character Pjerrot, or *Pierrot* (“Little Pierre”) as he is known in French, has his origins in Asia Minor, but came to Denmark by way of the Italian Commedia dell’arte tradition in the year 1800, where the Price family introduced the character at the Dyrehavsbakken amusement park.

<sup>49</sup> See page 29.

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demographic concept of the “silverbacks”, a phrasing that draws upon traditionally masculine values. But there is a subliminal layer of semiotic inference, a layer contingent upon the cultural literacy of the audience engaging with the text. By using Pjerrot, Tivoli is self-referencing its very role and function within the Danish cultural conscious – an amusement park popular with families, and for many Danes associated with fond, nostalgic childhood memories. However, the addition of the beer alters the messaging – Tivoli is not just somewhere you go with your kids, or on dates, it is a perfectly legitimate place to go with your mates, enjoy some good music (and drink some of our good beer). In her closing commentary to *Inclusive Place Branding* (2017), Kaneva reiterates that “place branding intersects with a global market for the production, circulation, and consumption of mediated commodity-signs”(Karavatzis et al. 2017, p. 187) – and in this context, this is relevant not just for Denmark’s brand, but also specifically Tivoli’s. This advertisement is not aimed at the international consumer audience, yet given its domestic proliferation, chances are good that a tourist would have been faced with this unfamiliar interpretation of the cosy old amusement park. While I am not in a position to make sweeping conclusive statements, I would summarize my impression of the “Denmark on offer” in the context of the empirical material as follows:

- Strong emphasis on conviviality, familiarity, and continuity.
- Assertion of brand position and recognition through self-referencing.
- Attempts to position the brand within modern context without eschewing heritage.
- Application of broad folkloristic/patriotic references.
- Reliance upon brand goodwill.

At the outset of this analysis, I asked myself why I felt only limited resonance with the representation of Danish culture expressed in the empirical material. And while I have not reached a definite answer to this question, I continually find myself coming back to the question of authenticity. Yes, the Danish flag is prevalent in Carlsberg’s contemporary branding, and Royal Unibrew likes to show that it is modern yet heritage-aware by cooperating with Tivoli. But in a day and age where craft culture is gaining in popularity, and Denmark is eager to profile itself as a standard bearer of sustainability and innovation, I cannot help but think that maybe it is time for Carlsberg to share the spotlight on the global stage with some of its “younger siblings” to a greater extent. There remains within the body of output from both major actors what I would, to borrow a phrase from Huggan (2001), call an *anxiety over ownership and authentic origin* (Huggan 2001, p. 175).

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### **Discussion**

If anything, this case study turned out very mutable in nature. I set out to investigate ethnic representation, as I was curious to find out how much of a factor it was within the field of alcohol advertising in Denmark. My initial research made it clear that there was an absence of scholarly research of the subject matter rooted explicitly in content analysis rather than audience research – or a combination of the two. Hence also why I ended up inverting the emphasis and order of my research questions – as it turned out, I had insufficient data from content analysis alone to support the original hypothesis. And while I appreciate the implicit irony in my original intent to investigate the presence of prejudicial representations turning out to be – at least in part – unconsciously prejudiced in nature, I am satisfied that my realignment turned out constructive still. To further illustrate Huggan’s point about the perpetuity of exoticism, one needs only look at a campaign like the “Duborg” campaign from the early 2000’s<sup>50</sup>. The campaign became such a phenomenon that phrases from it entered the Danish lexicon. But even when accounting for when it was conceived, the campaign is raked with problematic elements. The representation of minority characters is strikingly one-dimensional and stereotypical – the blond Swede with a mullet who is quick to threaten the shopkeeper with the police, the loutish lesbians who make little effort to hide their racist attitudes – and the fellow immigrant who accuses Buric’s character of trying to con him with beer in plastic bottles, only to be sent off with a “*You owe me money!*” once he is out of the door. There is a duplicitous undercurrent – whether conscious or unconscious – within the portrayal of Buric’s shopkeeper, wherein it is implied that you should not only laugh at the “minor tokens” he is confronted by – but also the shopkeeper as a token “in his own right”. He is integrated enough to speak Danish, enjoy Danish beer, and engage in sarcastic, *schadenfreude*-laden banter with his patrons – but at the end of the day, he is unmistakably other(ed).

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<sup>50</sup> See page 35.

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It needs to be said, of course, that marketing beer - or any alcohol - to Muslims is a non-starter, for obvious, cultural reasons. But at the same time, any wholesale omission of non-ethnic Danes from any brand narrative could prove equally problematic. And based on the material I was able to access and analyze, I began to see the outlines of a pattern. In a sense, the marketing strategies of Danish breweries seems to have undergone a transition from localized, tailored campaigns with human actors – especially in the domestic market – to a more universal approach to marketing, defined by broad-scoped international campaigns where the emphasis is on the brand itself, and the spartan, pack shot-focused promotional material (fig. 31) provides a blank slate for building and maintaining brand associations and relations on the part of the customer. And yet at the same time, there were examples of consumer resistance to attempts at innovation or development in/of the familiar brands - even if the intentions are presented as commendable. In August 2021, the Carlsberg Group announced a redesign of the label art for their Tuborg Gold export strength beer, with the serving tray being replaced by a bottled beer. The argument behind the rebranding was to give the brand more cultural relevance - the “Golden Lady” (which is also the colloquial nickname of the beer in question) would now be participating in the conviviality on an equal rather than subservient footing. There was one group in particular that made their reservations about this rebranding known - individuals working as waitstaff in the hospitality industry. By revamping the Golden Lady, it was claimed, the Carlsberg Group and their advertising partners were guilty of erasure and implying that servers were not fit for representation. Interactions like these, and the cases covered in the analysis segment reminds me of how the Danish band TV-2 scored a massive, nationwide hit in 1996 with a song mocking the propensity among their countrymen towards complaining about everything and nothing.



*Figure 31: Template for promotion of Carlsberg Lager, ca. 2019.*

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My reinterpretation of the linguistic term semiotic representation, as mentioned in the Methods section, was motivated by what I perceived as a terminological shortcoming in the existing research. Whether for reasons of style, sensibilities, or scope – or something entirely other – I found it remarkable how subsumed any reference to nationality, ethnicity and/or “the other” was in a number of the samples. And while I could not justify marking it down as simple tokenism or omission, as the data would not support that, I was not convinced that attributing it to simple social semiotics would be sufficient either. Furthermore, as I touched upon in the literature review, divergent social norms (and taboos) between the Nordic countries and the United States must necessarily affect the nature – and angle – of the research conducted when it comes to the marketing of restricted or controversial products. In the final chapter of *Selling Sin*, Davidson makes the point that “If an organization is to maximize its return to its shareholders, it must maximize its contribution to the society in which it operates. This means earning and maintaining the trust of that society – *in other words, establishing the firm’s legitimacy* – and marketers have a critical role to play in this” (Davidson 2003, p. 229, my emphasis). The culture surrounding alcohol in Denmark – for better or worse – is distinctively different to American sensibilities, with it not being uncommon for teenagers to have their first beer at their confirmation<sup>51</sup>.

One point worth making with regards to this, from a personal perspective, is that despite Carlsberg Hof and Green Tuborg being produced by the same company since the early 1970’s, the distinction between those who drink Carlsberg and those who drink Tuborg remains, at least to a degree, intact to the present day. And with the strong sense of localized brand loyalties that remain between certain domestic brands and their place of origin, it is of little surprise that they are sometimes used to reinforce negative regional stereotypes. To illustrate the latter point, I will draw upon another personal anecdote. In 2011, while doing my national service in the Danish Army, I was discussing sports and beer preferences with some of the sergeants at a regimental party in Jutland, when the captain in charge of our company joined our table. He exclaimed with an exasperated tone about something being an outrage, before turning to me, and interjecting that “I am aware that you are

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<sup>51</sup> From a folkloristic perspective, this is tied to the fact that traditionally, confirmation marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. Once you were confirmed, you were eligible – and often expected – to find occupation as a farmhand, a tradesman’s apprentice, or the like. It was likewise common for boys to be given either their first pack of cigarettes and a lighter, or a pipe with tobacco and utensils.

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from Copenhagen, so it might not carry the same weight for you - but it’s the principle of it!” The outrage in question? That you could not get “a decent beer in this God-forsaken place - all they have are bloody *Copenhagener-beers* - We are 20 kilometers from Århus, yet you can’t get a Ceres<sup>52</sup>!”. If you disassemble this statement analytically, it ties into a number of points made over the course of the analysis. Firstly, there is the jaded knowledge of the Carlsberg Group’s dominant position on the domestic market and the geographical ties to Copenhagen. Secondly, you have a perception – on the part of the consumer - of a local brand holding greater cultural legitimacy and authenticity, despite being part of a major corporation itself, and thirdly, there is a degree of unfulfilled expectation anchored in local patriotism.

## **Conclusion**

As touched upon both in my analysis and discussion, I originally conceived of this study from a perspective of investigative curiosity surrounding minority representation. In a country that likes to promote progressive values, the question of nationhood and identity remains a delicate one. With the discourse surrounding immigration particularly volatile, it is understandable if breweries prefer to err on the side of caution, at least on the domestic front. As for the question of authenticity, I will say this. A brand like Carlsberg has managed to establish an association – particularly in international markets – between their own brand culture, and the national brand of Denmark as a whole.

In this regard, Carlsberg is up there with brands like Budweiser and Guinness when it comes to near-instantaneous brand recognition and association. When I moved to Sweden from Denmark in 2018, I was surprised to find Sort Guld - a beer that is only rarely available on the domestic market in the 21st century - widely available at Systembolaget, while a beer like the Tuborg Classic, a dark lager type popular in Denmark, is not in distribution on the Swedish market. During one of our supervision sessions, my supervisor recounted how Sort Guld had been a bit of a “special occasion brew” in his youth, something you had to go to Denmark to get hold of.

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<sup>52</sup> Brewery founded in Århus in 1856, now part of the Royal Unibrew group. Introduced the *Royal* product range. Production at the Århus facility shut down in 2008 but continues at other Unibrew facilities. Closely associated with the city and the city’s football team AGF.

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And while the maintenance of a viable portfolio is, naturally, a continuous effort - I came across advertisements for multiple domestic products I had never heard of - I still found it intriguing that a brand that was originally moved from export to domestic to fill a gap, had vanished from the domestic market some 40 years later. By contrast, Royal Unibrew appears to take a more eclectic approach, at least in recent years, to their promotional material messaging. In their international marketing material, they draw upon somewhat archaic stereotypes surrounding the Nordic region<sup>53</sup>, make very little use of human actors in their promotions, and stress the convivial, congenial and, in some cases, health-related qualities of their portfolio. On the domestic front, I got the impression of a corporation eager to stress its association with the familiar, the sturdy, the earthbound and genuine - yet with a modern twist.

There is an undercurrent of “teasing the older sibling” in their campaigns, of consistent claims to cultural capital - but from the “native” perspective, their efforts reinforce the risk of a jaded response. Because at the end of the day, a place like Tivoli will never be genuinely “rock’n’roll”. In part because the Danish cultural polity would not, from my perspective, permit it. That I was not able to source empirical material directly from the “wellspring” was of course a significant setback, but in retrospect I would, had I been familiar with the small prints collection at an earlier stage, probably have chosen to eschew the corporate archive avenue entirely and dive even deeper into the public archival offerings. Throughout the research process, both before and after the realignment of focus, my intention - though they were, in retrospect, influenced by personal unconscious biases - remained to investigate if any patterns can be outlined – or at least marked out – when it comes to cultural representation within the context of Carlsberg and Royal Unibrew brand cultures. And as a sort of summative round-up of the materials analyzed from the 1980’s and 1990’s, I will say this. When it comes to the output aimed at both the domestic and international markets, I am left with an impression of an industry attempting a tightrope act, as they try to navigate new genres, formats – and societal norms. My countrymen are a fickle lot - we like to boast about the great men we have fostered, our (self-)perceived progressivism, our welfare state, and our ability to “punch above our weight” in various contexts. But at the same time, we can be very reserved and conservative in our

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<sup>53</sup> See page 45.



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values and habits, unreceptive to radical changes and reluctant - or even inflexible - in our engagements with controversial topics.

In the last 20 years of my timeframe, the drastic innovations in branding or product range are few and far between. Even from my admittedly jaded perspective, I am left with an impression of a domestic strategy where the market actors are aware of the sociocultural realities of the domestic market but choose to steer clear of them to avoid any risks of controversy. Both major actors opted for campaigns with a solid, folkloristic anchoring for the domestic market, with the major innovations being improvisations on familiar brand themes. In contrast to the diversified approaches of the 1980's and 1990's, I observed a growing emphasis on brand cohesion and uniformity - rather than diverse targeting, you had minor, localized adjustments to a general strategy. On Royal Unibrew's part in particular, the strategy appeared to be on associating their key brands with folkloristic continuity - similar to what Carlsberg attempted in the 1980's - while their international brand portfolio provided the exotic. And while outside the immediate scope of my analytical framing, one cannot reflect upon the interactions between brand and consumer without factoring in the social media element. When the Roskilde Festival crowd flooded Carlsberg with requests to see the RÅ pilsner released in general distribution, the efforts were coordinated through social media. When a new product is teased or launched, breweries and their marketing partners can get an almost immediate reading of the reception from the comment sections and “trending” pages of various platforms. And again, from a “native perspective”, these efforts can easily come across as disingenuous. As the craft beer culture took root in Denmark, the big players responded by either launching new brands, buying up craft breweries, or strengthening the small-batch segments of their existing portfolios. But even with the creative branding and label art, these efforts are still impaired by jaded consumer associations with the “mother brands”, and their claims to craft culture authenticity challenged from the outset. In 2017, during the redevelopment of the old brewery compound in Valby into a new mixed residential district, unopened bottles dating back to 1883 were found with viable yeast cultures inside. The reconstructed lager was later put on sale as “Carlsberg 1883” with a promotional campaign heavily referencing the brand essence mentioned in the introduction. Craft beer by proxy if you will. When I perused the yearly reports and conference materials that had been archived along with the distributor catalogues and promotional flyers, I noticed repeated occurrences of a particular region being singled out for praise because they had re-launched or re-established a small local brewery to former glories within their market. Even in the

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21st century, on the international market, both the Carlsberg Group and Royal Unibrew are guilty of the very same goodwill leeching that the former accused a founding member of the latter of back in the early 1980’s.

When reflecting upon this, I was reminded of a simple fact often overlooked when the discussion turns to beer brand preferences in Denmark – the generational aspect. As mentioned in the introduction, beer plays a key role in the conception of Danish cultural citizenship. And in a generational sense, Carlsberg has succeeded in “latching their brand to the *Dannebrog*” at a deeper level among my parents’ generation<sup>54</sup> than my own<sup>55</sup>. Some years ago, I was at a craft beer bar in Copenhagen when a group of middle-aged men and women walked up and asked the bartender if he served “any Danish beers”. When the selection of Danish craft brews currently on offer were pointed out to them, the group spokeswoman interjected “no, no - I mean do you have any *proper* Danish beers, like Carlsberg or Royal?”. Her reaction, in retrospect, is symptomatic of both an unspoken *epochal bias*, as Nixon (2003, p. 16) calls it, on her part, and of a key semiotic conflict within my sample. In a sense, the natural brand loyalty is a thing of the past, and the modern consumer has a broader palette of options. I can, off the top of my head, think of very few people my age who would actively go for a Carlsberg when buying beer, similar to how I am yet to meet an Australian my age who would enjoy drinking a Foster’s. If anything, if I was offered a Royal Pilsner, my first question would probably be if there was anything else to be had. Consumption patterns and patterns of preference are stubborn in nature, they can be illogical in their justifications, and often deeply rooted within cultural polity and heritage. And yet, if you go abroad, you will find the cultural association between the Carlsberg brand and Denmark’s national brand remaining as strong as ever. When that Australian taxi driver mentioned “Porn, Blondes and Carlsberg” upon hearing his passengers were Danish, my brother responded by telling him how many *different* varieties of Carlsberg we had in Denmark. In turn, the driver quipped that he ought to get to Denmark sooner rather than later – and in retrospect, that is quite a remarkable tribute to the efficiency of this conflation of national brand with corporate brand.

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<sup>54</sup> Born in the early 1960’s.

<sup>55</sup> Born 1988.

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From a personal, academic perspective, the remarkable parity of content-based research carried out within this subsection of media studies intrigued me. Yes, there was plenty of research dealing with reception and impact, but very little on representation and visual interpretation. As part of the proposal process, we were encouraged in a seminar to boil down our pitch to a quick catchphrase. The phrase I came up with, is the one I used as a title for this dissertation. And while conceived as a rhetorical question, I would, in reflection upon my findings, offer a counterpoint - namely whether brands like Carlsberg and Royal are Danish enough to claim cultural legitimacy in the 21st century? One could say that a beer like Carlsberg, by merit of its brand presence and culture, is no longer merely "Vores Øl". The Danish cultural polity has given it to the world, but in doing so, has aided in an exoticized commodification of itself, in an expression that glosses over the complexities of the Danish lived experience.

Like their primary competitor Royal Unibrew, they have expanded their portfolios with international brands and brand licenses to a point where the heritage can easily get lost. Seeing how this dissertation was built on subjective, qualitative content analysis, I am in no position to make any universally conclusive claims at this time. What I will claim, however, is that I have - at least to a degree - justified the relevance of a critical, mediacentric approach to a field of study otherwise dominated by more quantitative schools of thought, without resorting to qualitative interview data. The findings I made, based on ultimately subjective content analysis, only served to strengthen a growing personal interest in building upon the findings by including audience research in the future. My primary point of uncertainty with regards to this expansion of scope is what type of audience research would be feasible and determining the size of the sample. To put it a bit bluntly, in the case of the Carlsberg Group, my research left me with a reinforced sensation of a market-dominating actor who, in their desire to be recognised as "quintessentially Danish" internationally, commodified and repackaged the representation of their sociocultural and folkloristic heritage to the point of misrepresentation. Royal Unibrew, for their part, seem to be more focused on things like making their sponsorship deal with Tivoli look authentic and edgy to their domestic audience rather than pushing the representational envelope on the international market. The question remains whether these patterns will change or continue apace until the validity of their claims to cultural legitimacy are reduced to the value of a stylized certificate printed on a beer label.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix I: Excerpt of Queen Margrethe II’s New Year’s speech, 1984.**

*(Author’s own translation)*

“From very disparate origins, refugees come to our shores, sometimes injured in both spirit and body. We receive them and are maybe even a little proud that they decided to come to our little paradise in particular. But when we then see them struggling with our language and our way of life, the hospitality grows scant very quickly, and the disappointment is mutual. The guest workers and their families have likewise been subjected to this since times are tougher now than when a majority of them arrived here. Those who have not been assimilated into our everyday life over the course of generations are particularly exposed since they find it harder to adapt. And then we meet them with our “Danish sense of humor”, with our brash quips, with coolness. From there, it is only a short distance to outright harassment and uncouth behaviour, And that is simply not right!”

- Source: “*Dronningens nytårstale skaber debat – 1. Januar 1985*”, P3 Essensen. Youtube.com October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On\\_UxFO6Y2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On_UxFO6Y2s)). Retrieved May 6th, 2022.