This Land: A media analysis of Latinx representation in ‘woke’ advertising

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Abstract

It seems as of late the most acclaimed advertising campaigns have found a formula to commodify the politically correct through what has come to be described as “woke advertising”. This winning strategy has won public appeal for connecting with an ever-evolving audience that is young, diverse and liberal. Specifically, newcomer agency, Anomaly, has publicly proclaimed themselves as the “change-agent” in the space of advertising, capitalizing on the culture wars by positioning themselves as the leading advertising experts in challenging societal stereotypes and biases.

This is a case study that explores one of Anomaly’s 2016 campaigns for Johnnie Walker, “Keep Walking America”, as they attempt to engage in cultural politics with the Latinx community during a period of heightened political tension for immigrant populations. Through a Social Semiotics analysis and postcolonial criticism, the focus of this thesis is to explore how Johnnie Walker leveraged woke capital and consequently attempted to represent the lived experiences of marginalized groups whose stories are generally silenced.

Keywords: Latinx portrayals, woke advertising, semiotic analysis, postcolonial critique, alcohol advertising, United States culture wars
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1 Introduction

Ad agency, Anomaly launched Johnnie Walker’s “Keep Walking America” on November 7th, just one day before the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, as a way to tackle feelings of political isolation and cultural alienation (PR Newswire, 2016). As part of the campaign, Anomaly set out to create images and videos that celebrated cultural progress and diversity in America (PR Newswire, 2016). Their most lastly video representation of this campaign strategically came on President Trump’s inauguration day on January 20, 2017 as Johnnie Walker premiered a 2-min long music video “This land is your land” with local Los Angeles band, Chicano Batman. The music video doubles as a commercial for Johnnie Walker and features the band as they perform their re-interpretation of Woody Guthrie’s classic folk song “This land is your land” (1940). The song has since become the campaign’s anthem as a way to mobilize Latinx identity and politics tied to immigration.

Johnnie Walker released public statements explaining much of their objective for the campaign; to guide the messaging in the content, themes of unification, progression and open mindness, both nationally and globally, were embraced. At its core, the messaging is said to convey the idea of what “America has been and what America should be”, and that rewards are for people of all colors and creeds. All spokespersons for the campaign, including Chicano Batman, were carefully selected as part of the campaign for the reason that they were celebrated in the Latinx community. The careful production and reproduction in this campaign, including the music video, aimed at maintaining Johnnie Walker as a pioneer of cultural progress (PR Newswire, 2016). Ultimately, the campaign gained public praise and the music video even gained formal recognition from the Hispanic creative community as one of the five best ideas in the U.S. Hispanic market in the U.S.H. Idea Awards, organized by Circulo Creativo, making this campaign a breakthrough for Anomaly in the ad industry (Shootonline, 2018; Wentz, 2017).

The re-interpretation of “This land is your land” by Chicano Batman was widely praised by Latinx audiences. At the time of syndication, the song became the immigrant anthem young Latinx audiences needed to drown out “build the wall” rhetoric President Trump repeated throughout his campaign trail. At the time of this study, the Chicano Batman advert received 1.4 million views on YouTube with an estimated 93% “thumbs up” from users. Comments applaud the video’s uplifting and inclusive messaging, and some recognition goes as far as to directly claim brand loyalty: “Johnnie Walker, you have my business” (YouTube, 2017). This portion of the campaign also included a social media post from the band members announcing their partnership with #KeepWalkingAmerica. The full length 3 minute song has since become a single available for public streaming on audio streaming platform, Spotify. Needless to say, the re-interpretation of a politically charged song by a beloved Latinx indie rock band gave Johnnie
Walker the necessary woke capital to chime into the current culture clash present in the 2016 Presidential Elections.

Behind the Johnnie Walker’s “Keep Walking America” campaign is newcomer agency, Anomaly, whose experimental and non-conventional practices have generated industry applause; in particular for their campaigns and business practice culture, both of which challenge outdated advertising models. In particular, Anomaly publicly acknowledges their expertise in helping clients tackle the stereotypes and biases confronting today’s public dialogue (Anomaly, 2019). With a saturation of content, the advertising world has found itself competing for audience attention. Today’s conventional media and digital landscape exposes users to 10,000 advertisements a day (The Guardian, 2019). This environment has fueled the aesthetic and narrative practice of “woke advertising” that now persists in our culture.

Woke advertising is a term designated by the media to describe a growing aesthetic and narrative strategy that aims to position a brand within certain modern constructions of self concepts and group identities that have formed as part of the culture wars. The rise in woke capital is linked to the need to resonate with younger and more educated audiences who were raised in an era of hyper commercialization, and are thus asking more from companies. In addition, because American culture is marked by cultural and ethnic diversity, woke advertising creates a complex interaction between the many identities and ideologies. In this way, the purpose of this study is to examine the Johnnie Walker “This land is your land” music video as a case study to shed light on the advertising industry’s use of woke advertisements as a way to access commercial reward within a growing Latinx market.

Through the use of a multimodal critical discourse analysis I hope to answer the question: How does alcohol brand, Johnnie Walker engage with Latinx identity and cultural politics? In order to thoroughly answer the research question, the study explores the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent does the advert utilize woke capital?
2. What kind of Latinx themes and motifs are represented?
3. How are themes of location/land and belonging included?

In order to contextualize the convergence of politics and culture, I will review recent political upheaval and how politics have come into converagence with culture, thus creating the breeding grounds for “woke advertising”. My thesis will then review literature that looks at culture capital as the driving force behind branding and localism, two elements for the basis of advertising’s relevance within culture. I will then explore how woke advertising utilizes and also constructs different representations of Latinx identity and attempts to cultivate a sense of belonging through brand intimacy with consumers of varying backgrounds. All of this to build the foundation for a
multimodal critical discourse analysis guided by social semiotics and a postcolonial critique to make determinations about the visual representations made within the Johnnie Walker advert.

Existing research within the media industry has either taken practical approaches to advertising tactics within minority groups in the U.S. in articles such as “A cross-national and cross-generational study of consumer acculturation to advertising appeals” (Jimenez et al., 2013), or critical approaches to the arts and literature in books like Symbolism 17: Latina/o Literature: The Trans-Atlantic and the Trans-American in Dialogue (Ahrens, et al, 2017). In this way, the ambition of my multimodal critical analysis is to blend a social semiotics and postcolonial approach in analysing the logic behind the cultural productions of advertising companies who mobilize a woke advertising style. With this intent, I hope to conduct a semiotic analysis that focuses on the truths the adverts hopes to tell, and what symbols and metaphors are utilized to tell truths about blended identities, stereotypes, and immigration. In order to take my findings and root them more critically, I will use a postcolonial lens rooted in Spivak’s contributions related to western capitalist subjugations and plural culturalism (de Klerk, 2010). This way, a semiotic approach and postcolonial discourse work in tandem to make revelations on what there is to know about woke advertisements.

Before moving forward, I would like to clarify that I refer to the Latinx community interchangeably through the use of Latinx, Latino/a, and Hispanic. Latinx attempts to broadly describe a person originating from Latin America and parts of the Caribbean, and is also used as a gender-neutral or non-binary term (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017). Whenever possible, I designated the more contemporary term Latinx.

2 Background

2.1 The ‘Culture Wars’

In order to understand the rise of woke advertising, it is necessary to first understand the ongoing “culture wars” in the United States and its fostering by the media. According to Scatamburlo-D’Annibale (2019), the current culture wars is rooted in years of cultivation by the right, or U.S. conservatives, to frame “political correctness” (PC) as a liberal ideology that threatens freedom of speech (p. 82). In turn, this positioning establishes the right as virtuous compared to the “leftists who hated ‘freedom’ and America itself” (p. 75).

Ultimately, the escalation of this culture war came front and center during the 2016 United States Presidential Elections when candidate, Donald Trump, revitalized conversations around political correctness to mask his controversial rhetoric. While there are many factors that played into the
election, central to his campaign, Scatamburlo-D’Annibale (2019) argues, was how Trump capitalized on the crusade against political correctness:

“Throughout his campaign, Trump derided PC, blaming it for a vast array of perceived social ills while concomitantly deploying anti-PC rhetoric—to inoculate his own racism and sexism from criticism—which his supporters celebrated as ‘telling it like it is.’ Trump positioned himself as a culture warrior rather than a politician and one of the distinguishing characteristics of his campaign was ‘giving the finger to ‘political correctness’ in the name of freedom of expression’ ”

(Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2019, p. 70).

With the help of the media, Trump became the protagonist of the anti-political correctness movement. Not surprisingly, coverage of conflict has historically rated high within media culture and thus has fed into this “PC [political correctness] hysteria” (Shinar, 2013, p.2; Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2019, p. 71). Just as with any other conflict the media rushes to cover, the culture war gives journalists the opportunity to showcase “vivid realities... clear-cut polarities, primordial sentiments and the thrill of the unexpected” (Shinar, 2013, p.2). This was clearly depicted by the media during the elections, and continues to play out vividly in Trump’s Presidency.

Now that Trump is in office, he has appointed many of the culture war “veterans” into the White House to guide U.S. policy that is in line with the anti-political correctness he crusaded with during his campaign (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2019, p. 91). In particular, the anti-PC frame has continued to target the Latinx population beyond the election trail. The Latinx community has become engulfed in the anti-political correctness of Trump beginning with references to the “Bad Hombres” during his campaign (Arnsdorf, 2016), to the recent actualization of harsher immigration laws that set out to criminalize brownness (Wright, 2017). For these reasons Wright (2017) connects the ongoing culture wars to recent policy set in place by the Trump administration. Surprisingly, this anti-PC frame was paved in part by the Obama administration, whose immigration rhetoric positioned Latinx immigrants as “hero-or-menace” (Wright, 2017, p.10). Ultimately, this positioning of some immigrants as “good” helped push through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), providing hundreds of thousands of young undocumented immigrants with legal documentation to live and work legally (p. 10). Now, the Trump administration is playing up the “menace” side of immigration with an emphasis on criminality of Latinx immigrants and in this way Trump’s policies around immigration are the anti-PC markers in these culture wars (p.10).

2.2 Woke Advertising
At the backdrop of the culture wars, woke advertising emerged as the visual vehicle representing the ongoing political and economical reconfigurations. The use of the word ‘woke’ is derived from its use within the African American community rooted in Black intellectual thought that urged the community to “maintain a heightened conscious level about race and racism”, today it is mostly used to describe anyone who is aware of social justice issues (Grant, 2018, p. 327; AdNews, 2019). The term “woke” first made its appearance as slang within the African American community during the 1960s and later re emerged with its usage by contemporary musical artists, Erika Baduh in 2008 and Childish Gambino in 2016 (Merriam-Webster, 2017; Grant, 2018, p. 327). Accordingly, woke advertising is dubbed this way for its attempt to address the present inequities of historically oppressed groups (e.g. women, people of color, the LGBT and related communities) through new images and narratives that hold politically resistant messaging. Woke advertising has become the symbolic approach in which brands communicate “political correctness”. However, the designation of “woke” does not always hold a positive connotation. In some ways, it goes back to the Blaxploitation of the1960s and the Black power films that commodified its language, style, and aesthetic (Field, 2018, p. 221).

In the same way, the media has become critical of advertisers’ eager attempt to adapt a mold into a “woke” point of view, so much journalists are calling it ‘woke washing’ to describe an oversaturation of adverts that follow this style of narrative (Ad News, 2018). The most talked about attempts came in 2018 and 2019 when Nike and Gillette gained polarizing public and media attention in their latests commercials. To commemorate it’s 30 year mantra, “Just Do It”, Nike released a series of commercials, the first one narrated by NFL player and activist, Colin Kaepernick (Nike, 2018). After he was let go from his team for bringing too much negative attention to his public protest in the form of kneeling during the national anthem, it was unclear who would ever want to work with Kaepernick again. However, Nike did not shy away from their decision to make him their pick. The advert not only set off Twitter users, but also came into the political crossfire as media outlets eagerly reported its divisiveness. In particular, mainstream media focused on the reaction Trump gave to conservative media outlet, The Daily Caller, commenting that the commercial sends a “terrible message” for their choice in Kaepernick as a spokesperson (Time.com, 2018). In early 2019, just a few months after Nike, Gilette chose to give new meaning to their trademark mantra “The Best a Man Can Get”. The commercial, timed during ongoing public #MeToo conversation, aimed to criticize toxic masculinity (The Guardian, 2019). Just as Nike, Gillette’s woke advert turned into ammunition for conservatives to continue to propagate their fight against political correctness: “Far-right magazine, The New American attacked the advertisement’s message saying it “reflects many false suppositions”, adding that: “Men are the wilder sex, which accounts for their dangerousness – but also their dynamism” (The Guardian, 2019). Both responses to Nike and Gilette illustrate the convergence of the culture wars in politics and advertising. Lesser profiled ‘woke washing’ attempts include Airbnb’s “We Accept” ad which touched on the theme of borders and the
positive of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Pash, 2019). Similarly, Johnnie Walker’s “Keep Walking America”, the subject of this thesis, seeks out to make its own politically correct statement on immigration.

Despite the criticism, the rise of woke advertising affirms society’s growing value of symbolic capital and its materialization into the branding of the commodities we purchase. Woke advertisements did not just emerge from the boardrooms, consumers, in particular Millenial and Gen Z buyers, are asking brands to take a stand and become more transparent, making it more difficult for brands to stay neutral (AdNews, 2019). A recent Pew Research Center study in the United States found Millenial and Gen Z populations to be more accepting of growing racial and ethnic diversity, more intune with race inequalities than previous generations, and more approving of same-sex marriage and inclusivity when it comes to gender identity (Parker et al., 2019). This generational divide could be associated with the fact that Gen Z is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse generation the United States has seen (ibid). As woke adverts attempt to tap into the culture wars by achieving political correctness through images that speak to the issues most important to younger generations, it is clear woke capital is especially valuable to Millennial and Gen Z consumers. Woke adverts within our culture are important because visual images as a whole, especially those syndicated as widely as they are through advertising, have the power to configure social categories. Woke adverts, whether ulturistic in their approach, attempt to visually resist previously oppressed social categories of gender and race (as seen in the previous examples) as well as other categories such as sexuality and able-bodiedness. However, a postcolonial framework reminds us that institutionalized knowledge is rooted in colonialism (Merten & Krämer, 2016). A postcolonial framework comes into convergence in the discussion around woke advertising and in the analysis of the Johnnie Walker commercial by highlighting instances of regression in ideologies rooted in colonial language, values, and culture, all of which define the power structures and hierarchies of historical colonial powers (Merten & Krämer, 2016).

2.3 Anomaly Agency

In the midst of America’s newly found conscious, Anomaly, the agency for Johnnie Walker, neatly found their place in the advertising world in order to cater to the growing and diverse millennial population. Founded in 2004, Anomaly is said to have shaken up the industry with its progressive thinking; from it’s bold business model to its “do as you preach” creed, the agency is working hard to live up to its name. Blurring the lines between business and advertising, Anomaly reinvests its creative capital into business ventures - this has helped to not only generate a successful IP, but also assemble a diverse group of talent that ranges beyond advertising people and encompasses technologists, designers, and product development professionals (Forbes, 2012; Shootonline, 2018). In this way, Anomaly wants to be the
“change-agent” helping brands and businesses tackle stereotypes and biases in marketing and product innovations (Shootonline, 2018). CEO Karina Wilsher herself summed this up by saying: “we want the industry to get better, and of course, society at large” (Shootonline, 2018).

This approach has won Anomaly awards. Most recently, in another Johnnie Walker campaign, the agency launched a limited edition ‘Jane Walker’ whiskey for International Women’s Day (Shootonline, 2018). The aim was for the brand to demonstrate its commitment to the progress of gender equality. However, this “progressive” approach may have pushed beyond limits in another recent ad. On April 2019, Anomaly’s campaign for Ancestry.com missed the shot in its commercial and was called tone deaf for romanticizing slavery to explain why African-Americans have European lineage (Adweek, 2019). Instead of tackling a difficult past narrative and aiming to move beyond biases, as they claim to do, Anomaly (in this instance) reinforced dangerous stereotypes and demonstrated a more regressive rather than progressive narrative.

Even so, the agency has gained a rolex of high profile clients and was able to claim Johnnie Walker globally after their national “Keep Walking America” campaign opened the door for the brand to connect with and advertise to an entirely new segment: the Hispanic community (Campaign 2019; Shootonline, 2017). When taking into account the economic incentive commercial brands have as a way to capture new profits within the Latinx community, it makes sense for them to take part in the mass education and transformative messaging in their advertising.

3 Theoretical Framework

As brands and marketers become increasingly interested in interjecting themselves into the culture wars, a social semiotics analysis and postcolonial criticism serve as tools to access the redemptive attempts of woke advertising. In the vein of semiotic theorist, Umberto Eco, who describes culture as a semiotic process (Sørensen & Thellefsen, 2017, p. 37), woke advertisements have embedded themselves into our cultural rules and is the invention that has given new meaning to the work of advertisers. As a whole, the images produced by advertisements themselves become important cultural artifacts; the images produced by advertisements give us an insight into the social order and powers of society for any given point in time. As Frankfurt theorists, Walter Benjamin (1935), puts it in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, media serves as “an orientation of reality to the masses” (Sørensen, & Thellefsen, 2017, p. 6). In this way, the images produced by the media are said to have a greater impact on reality than reality itself (ibid). Specifically, woke advertisements consciously set out to produce powerful images with the purpose of confirming certain beliefs about the world and
about people. The rule of woke advertisements dictate that the visual and linguistic narrative should enlighten audiences in the vein of political correctness. However, a direct social or political stance is not said or taken out right, except perhaps in a spokesperson’s press release outside of the advert itself. In woke adverts, political correctness is achieved through the symbols used within the adverts. In this way, woke adverts rely on a semiotic process to convey their stance within the culture wars.

3.1 Social Semiotics & Metaphors

In approaching woke adverts, a social semiotics approach allows for myself, the researcher, to organize my visual observations. When applied to images, social semiotics accounts for the social context and the way we use language to orient ourselves within society. Social semiotics is focused on how language or visual communication is utilized to realize an interest (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.18). Specifically in a multimodal critical discourse analysis, social semiotics attempts to not only conclude the means taken to achieve meaning, but what those means are, such as what type of language, what type of images, sounds, etc (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.18). Most importantly, these semiotic choices must be contextualized with the available resources, or whatever available contexts we currently have for comparison (p. 19).

As part of my semiotic approach, I will mobilize a semiotics approach rooted in Umberto Eco’s designation of the metaphor as a signifier of social realities. Metaphors are important within semiotics because they are fundamental to human thought and the way in which humans describe the world around them (Sørensen & Thellefsen, 2017, p. 13). Umberto Eco’s contribution to semiotics and its previous application to media and culture make him appealing in the critical analysis of this woke advert as a current cultural phenomena. His use of semiotics to get to the root of the logics that uphold culture help to make important revelations about the inner workings of society. Umberto Eco regarded semiotics as serving a deeper epistemological function; his contributions reaffirm the power media images have in molding reality itself (p. 5). According to Sørensen & Thellefsen (2017), Eco regarded semiotics as the study of everything used to tell a lie. As Sørensen & Thellefsen (2017) put it, this is because Eco viewed the study of signs as the act of unraveling the fiction we put forth in place of our reality (p.19). One of the ways Eco proposes we “unravel” the fiction is through our view of metaphors as a semiotic vehicle because they allow us to know the order of things within a rich cultural framework (p. 105) and for Eco, culture is tethered to social conventions (p. 39). Eco describes metaphors as arranged within what he calls “encyclopedias.” The “encyclopedias” referred to by Eco arrange the way in which we see the world, therefore, metaphors arrange how we think about the world (p.107). While Eco’s semiotics approach will guide my observations, it is a postcolonial criticism that will help make final conclusions and highlight the importance behind woke capital and
advertisements. Alone, Eco’s semiotics approach to unravel truths does little beyond make the revelation.

3.2 Postcolonial Critique

When it comes to woke advertisements, it is more regularly argued over its potential as a business and advertising strategy rather than its social consequence. These adverts are not discussed for the way they present social structures and group identity. For this reason, a postcolonial critique offers the right vantage point into making critical judgements of its outcome. A postcolonial framework is regularly called upon in areas of cultural studies and visual arts, making it an integral lens for the mainstream (Chabal, 2012, p.15). I argue the current culture wars has created new tensions between social identities, and it has become more important for companies to leverage woke capital in order to compete in this new market characterised by tension. As a result, woke advertisements serve to represent the lived experiences of marginalized groups whose stories were generally silenced, or the missing voice of marginalised and subaltern actors (Tsikata, 2015, p.101). One comparison of this changing landscape can be seen in the Nike advert with Colin Kaepernick which praises and admires Colin for his activism, while historically African American activists has been portrayed negatively by the media. This was the case in the 1968 Olympics when two African American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos took part in a silent protest during the *The Star-Spangled Banner*. What was originally “blasted by critics” was later reframed by the media and celebrated 40 years after at the 2008 Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly (ESPY) Awards (Ratchford, 2012). This is one example of how certain stories were originally silenced by the media and are now not only celebrated by the media, but also made for profit as a result of the value in woke capital.

From a postcolonial perspective, the current culture wars, as it relates to immigration, marks the tension the ‘West’ faces with the non-west at “home”. In *The End of Conceit: Western Rationality After Postcolonialism*, Chabal (2012) explains the root of these tensions are related to the new makeup of the West, and how tensions have risen from the open opportunity to renegotiate identities:

> “Current debates in much of Western Europe – at least if the arguments that have engulfed recent elections are any guide – centre on a cluster of issues that relate to economic tensions to the social make-up of our societies”

(Chabal, 2012, p. 39)

As a clarification, Chabal (2012) defines “The West” as less about geographical areas and more concerned with the rational of societies who “went on to industrialise first and then to colonise the rest”(p. 4), and for that reason her perspective can be applied in this instance to the United
States. In order to make assessments on the social consequences and agency of these portrayals within woke adverts, I call on Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial contributions around the “subaltern” (Ray & Schwarz, 2000, pp. 451 - 466). Gayatri Spivak adapted and extended postcolonial thinking around the “subaltern”, a term used to signify subordinate or marginalized social groups, as a way to counter the imbalance attention of the colonized within the field (p. 452). With regards to the subaltern, Spivak is most concerned with the distorted representations made by those who exploit them (p. 453). Accordingly, her postcolonial criticism serves to uncover the amount of agency the subaltern has to represent themselves and make their interests and experiences known on their own terms (p. 453). As woke advertising is focused on companies taking on social justice and activism, it is important to view this critically to uncover whether it is to the benefit of the minorities being portrayed.

In answering the research question, it is important to assess the representation of Latinx compared to previous untrue or “distorted” representations made by those with historical power, as well as how these new representations position the community within society. Tsikata (2015) used the subaltern frame to critically discuss a twitter firestorm that took place in 2013 after Justine Saccoo, a PR executive tweeted: “Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white” (p. 91). Tsikata (2015)’s article explores the wider systemic, historical, ideological and political influences necessary to understand the tweet (p. 93). This brings into convergence the long term effect of media’s misrepresentation of Africans (ibid). In addition, her discussion point to the lack of power the subaltern have in challenging both colonial and mass media frames (p. 94). When media and postcolonial studies merge in this way, they remind us that mass media has historically served as a form of establishing and maintaining the systems of power (Merten & Krämer, 2016). It is only through interrogating and challenging these various representations and how they engage with the world in many ways that we begin to understand the power and access we have to cultural productions, the manufacturing of identities, and the source of knowledge for those identities (p. 94). As Tsikata (2015) puts it:

“If the critical approach highlights power differentials in general, the postcolonial places these power differentials in their specific contexts – the dominant versus the subaltern in an interconnected world”

(Tsikata, 2015, p. 95)

In the same way that Tsikata (2015) points to the importance of words as they are tied to historical and political tensions for their usage, I would like to extend onto images.

It is fitting that both Eco and Spivank’s ideologies stand within post structuralist ideology, which I have also adopted in my analysis. Both Eco and Spivak are interested in the way structure and language work together to create social realities and in this case, structuration serves as an
ontological framework for their study of human activities. As post structuralist their focus is on
questions of the dilemmas between the individual and society, or ‘agency’ and ‘structure’, and
“between deterministic and voluntarist theories of human behaviour” (Blaike, 2009, p. 157). This
is especially important in the case of advertising where images have begun to illustrate social
norms and social realities. Human action and determination begin to feel more tied to how and
why the media is talking about us (Latinx) and whether we have the agency to act beyond those
determinations.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Cultural Capital

In order to understand woke capital and the practice of woke advertising within the industry, it’s
important to quickly reflect on Bourdieu’s theory of capital. Bourdieu’s theory of capital is
useful within an advertising context because it describes the symbolic exchanges that exist in
society that goes beyond monetary transactions (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 280). The 20th and 21st
century brought on mass production and with it the exponential rise in value of symbolic capital.
As a result, the advertising industry has grown in importance for their expertise in cultivating the
symbolic capital necessary for products to compete with one another (Banet-Weiser, 2012). I
argue woke capital is a subset to cultural capital that is especially relevant today as a result of
changing cultural and political landscapes.

Bourdieu (1986) describes capital as the result of labor which is then channeled into productive
use by society (p. 280). Bourdieu outlines three forms of capital that function within an economy
of exchange: economic, cultural and social. While economic capital is directly understood as a
monetary exchange, the other two are symbolic forms that have the potential for conversion into
economic capital, as well as reproduced for its “identical or expanded forms” (p. 280-281).
Cultural capital exists in three subtypes: embodied, or the personal qualities of an individual of
both body and mind; objectified, or the material cultural goods that resonate within a culture; and
finally, institutionalized, or the symbols of social competence an individual can receive (p.
282-285). Social capital relates to the potential of your network, which in return become your
resources or entrance into elevated memberships within society (p. 286). Social capital also
exists in both a material and/or symbolic state (p.286). Each form of capital works to give you an
advantage within society.

From this, woke capital has come into existence as a combined product of the rise in cultural
capital and the configurations of today’s society. Bourdieu emphasizes the ever changing climate
for cultural capital by stating: “Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending
on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously” (p. 283). From this perspective we can say, woke capital is valued in the United States because it is a marker of political correctness, and political correctness has come to be associated with greater cultural capital. Therefore, woke capital is one of the ways in which a commodity now generates its objectified value for consumers. The following sections set out to define and detail the use of branding, localism, and practices of woke advertising as important facets in cultivating cultural capital.

4.1.1 Branding

In today’s competitive marketplace, branding has evolved from the literal practice of trade mark protection to a complex economic tool that leverages cultural capital (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Beginning in the 18th century commodities began to take the place of cultural value for the unique ways in which products began to be packaged and distributed (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 6). Since then, mass production encouraged new and unique ways of packaging and distributing products, which now has only intensified into more symbolic forms of communicating a product’s cultural capital. Banet-Weiser (2012) chronicles branding as a social necessity in an America marked by immigration, social and cultural conflict, and political turmoil brought on by war, which resulted in consumers’ urgency for common bonds and a common vernacular language (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 6). The 21st century has only increased the need for branding as social relations and cultural life have become increasingly commercialized (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Spaces such as religion, creativity, politics and the self are now overtaken by branding strategies in the quest to create “authenticity” (Barak-Brandes & Lachover, 2016). Today’s culture wars is a clear indicator of America’s social and identity clash, which has left open the opportunity for today’s companies to brand themselves in an intimate way through identity and cultural politics.

Branding is how woke advertising has come into being. Branding requires the building of loyal relationships which need to be constantly nurtured (Barak-Brandes & Lachover, 2016). The advertising process of building a brand, Banet-Weiser (2012) describes the practice as the creation of a relationship guided by the ethos of intangible qualities; and as the experience of brands becomes similarly to that of a relationship between two people, brands have become “the cultural spaces in which individuals feel safe, secure, relevant, and authentic” (p. 9). Similarly, Larry Fink of BlackRock, a giant asset manager, wrote in his latest annual letter to chief executives: “society is increasingly looking to companies, both public and private, to address pressing social and economic issues. These issues range from protecting the environment to retirement to gender and racial inequality.” (The Economist, 2019). It is no surprise, companies have turned to woke capital as a strategy to make themselves look and feel like the safe space consumer can turn to in times of social tensions.
Ultimately, Banet-Weiser (2012) argues, the practice of branding justifies the organization of cultural meaning in terms of opportunity for economic exchange; in this way, individuals themselves are also designated a value (p. 6). In the same way, to become “woke” within the media industries is a means of branding in an attempt at commodifying social justice. Joe Tompkins (2018) criticized Hollywood for prioritizing African-American representation on the big screen only after the Black blockbuster success of the *Black Panther* movie. In his critique, he notes the exchange for racial social justice within the industry was predicated upon the film’s total gross (p. 1). On a market front, the Latinx community is being discussed for their purchasing power. The Pew Research Center describes the demographics of the Latinx community as the second-largest racial and ethnic group, the youngest, increasingly college-educated, and increasingly acculturating into a blended Latinx-American identity (Flores, 2017); it is estimated that the second generation of Latinx will outnumber the first generation of Latinos in the United States as the share of foreign-born immigrants in the population continues to decline (Delgado, 2005). As of 2016, the Pew Research Center accounted Latinos for 58 million of the total national population (Flores, 2017). As a commercial opportunity for brands, the Latinx consumer has become a brand in its own right, requiring its own design.

### 4.1.2 Localism

At the same time, localism has become a growing political and social movement, making it of growing importance to culture capital and the branding strategies utilized by the advertising industry. Localism is nothing new to American politics and can be traced back to Thomas Jefferson’s support for American self-governance or “little republics” (Ali, 2017, p. 8). The resurgence of “the local” can be linked to the distancing effect digital media has had on society, creating the experience of “no sense of place” in people (Ali, 2017, p. 6). Similarly localism is the means through which branding practices now mobilize sentiments of authenticity, as Kuehn (2015) explains, “localism’s broader appeal relies primarily on the (false) nostalgia of a more “authentic” past” (p. 208).

Politically, localism calls for the rescaling of politics, greater local power, and a belief in the higher efficiency that comes with the autonomy to address economic, social, environmental and political problems (Ali, 2017; Kuehn, 2015). Socially, localism evokes the idea of community and its sense of local values, culture and tradition (Ali, 2017). As it has gained grounds among the public, localism has reoriented consumption behaviors. Kuehn (2015) gives the example of the “localvore”, the pure consumption of locally grown food, as an example of shifting consumer behavior as a result of the growing knowledge around the unsustainability of mass consumption. Marketers cultivate feelings of authenticity by appropriating this form of “micro-resistance” into
advertising messages, one such example is when marketers promote a “living local” message (Kuehn, 2015, p. 207-208).

The growing trend of localism is especially relevant to the Latinx community both socially and politically. Latinx communities are concentrated in metropolitan areas, with nearly half of all Latinos living in a central city (Delgado, 2005). Much of what Latinx community identifies as familiar and as part of their experience is linked to these segregated areas. In addition, support for localism is also relevant and most visible in the tension between local and national immigration policy. On the political stage, a new legal landscape termed “immigration localism” argues for more localized immigration laws. This legal framework paved the way for the creation of sanctuary cities throughout the nation (Gulasekaram & Villazor, 2019). Thus sanctuary cities have come to be defined as “a city or police department that has passed a resolution or ordinance expressly forbidding city or law enforcement officials from inquiring into immigration status and/or cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)” (O’Brien, B. G. et al., 2019, p. 4). In this way it can be argued that localism finds an authentic space in the social identification of the Latinx consumer. Together, branding and localism build up a company's woke capital within advertisements.

4.2 The Media & Latinx Community

As a growing demographic, Latinx representation in the media has become an important facet of the Latinx experience in the United States. A fluctuation of media messages and sentiments of various groups nothing new, the way in which the media represents various minority groups is “dynamic, fluctuating with the cultural Zeitgeist, or “spirit of the times” (Short, & Magaña, 2002, p. 701). However, social determinations are dangerous. They not only reveal social sentiment of minority groups, but also impact Anglo sentiments of a minority group in the United States.

In 1980, in light of growing Latino activism around media, Gutierrez (1980) detailed the three levels in which Latino concerns take place within the media systems: Anglo media, Spanish language media, and alternative media bilingual bicultural media (p. 6). Latino activists have found the importance in identifying and critically analysing these subsystems because it is the productions and motivies made in each of these systems can hinder or encourage progress in Latino lives (Gutierrez, 1980, p. 6). This matters because it shapes both perception and the individual formation of identity in the Latinx youth. Previous media research has looked how mainstream media representation of Latinos has effected White viewers who “are more likely to report a belief in the veracity and evenhandedness of these portrayals” (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005, p. 111).
Most importantly, media studies has started to take a deeper look at the negative effects unfavorable media representation of minorities has on minorities themselves (Erba, 2017; Tukachinsky & Yarchi, 2017). Specifically, Tukachinsky and Yarchi’s (2017) content analysis found a link between media representation and group esteem among minority groups. According to their results, marginalized group members may experience negative emotions when negative stereotypes are confirmed in mediated contexts (Tukachinsky & Yarchi, 2017, p. 542). Just the same, the results reaffirm the importance of ethnic role models within media representations; for example, *The Cosby Show* (Tukachinsky & Yarchi, 2017, p. 551). In this way, media representation of the Latinx community relate to the postcolonial conversations of appropriations which keep those with a colonial past, oppressed. As Tukachinsky and Yarchi (2017) explain:

“[G]roup memberships can constitute a central facet of one’s identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Accordingly, belonging to an esteemed group is psychologically rewarding (potentially boosting self-concept, esteem, and attitudes toward one’s group), whereas association with a devalued group can have negative psychological consequences (including a deflated sense of self-worth and group esteem, among others)” (p. 541).

4.2.1 Latinx Media Stereotypes

Years of media studies only confirm the lack of Latinx in media representation with terms such as the “invisible minority” and more recently “network brownout” (Gutierrez, 1980, p.6; Vargas & DePyssler, 1998 p. 409). These terms serve to describe the limited airtime Latinos and Latino focused stories receive in broadcast media (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 409). A 1998 study found that when Latinos are present in news broadcasting, they were often times represented as a group, rarely as individuals; these reportings depict Latinos, specifically Mexicans, as outsiders, unable to assimilate (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 409). This and other analysis of news media found the use of “illegal aliens” or immigrants to conjure up images of Latinx as drains to the economy, stealing jobs and overall as a threat to the economic position of Anglo citizens (Erba, 2017, p. 85; Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 409).

Interestingly, the representations of Latinx as criminals cultivated by the news has found its way into mainstream films. Hollywood has commodified representations of Latinx characters and storylines as criminals in films like *The Border* (starring Jack Nicholson in 1982 (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 409), and in a more contemporary example, in Netflix’s original 2013 series *Orange is the New Black*. As a result of recurring negative Latinx narratives, researchers in the field have identified and regularly reference six stereotypes that appear on Television and in Films: the dark lady, the Latin lover, the female clown, the male buffoon, the half-breed harlot, and the bandito (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 410). The earliest stereotypes of Latinx peoples were of the dark lady and Latin lover, established by early Hollywood with the prototypes of two
fair-skinned European-looking Latinos, Dolores del Rio in the 1930s and Rudoph Valentino in the 1920s (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 410). These stereotypes are found to be used in combination, but what is most problematic is the reduction of a large social group to characteristics that highlight underclass and race distinctions within the Latinx group (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 410).

While improvements in the industry are taking place, Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005) carried out an analysis of Latinx Representation on primetime television and found many of these historic stereotypes taking on new forms. In general, their study found depictions of Latinx characters as lazier, less intelligent, less articulate, more hot-tempered, and Latinas as more verbally aggressive than their on-air counterparts (Mastro and Behm-Morawits, 2005, p. 121-124). Today, researchers continue to see these representations, including in new forms of media. Out of 100 user-generated YouTube videos, Guo and Harlow (2014) found all but one to incorporate the stereotypes of Latinx as criminals and unintelligent (Erba, 2017, p. 85).

4.2.2 Alcohol Advertising

An ever growing marketing interest for the Latinx community within advertising has experienced a continual uprise. 30 years ago, the Latinx consumer was considered an “untapped market” and a “gold-mine” for advertisers who began to realize the household potential marketing power, as they rushed to hire Hispanic ad agencies and Spanish-language media to (Delgado, 2005; Gutierrez, 1980). Much of this advertising has taken place within Spanish-language media, while in mainstream media Latinx portrayals are very low (Vargas & DePyssler, 1998, p. 410). But long before the mainstream caught on, alcohol and tobacco industries had already forged their own marketing strategies with Hispanic consumers in extensive and profitable advertising campaigns (Delgado, 2005).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2015) revealed Latinos consume higher volumes of alcohol than non-hispanic whites. This pattern of heavy drinking creates higher alcohol dependency which in turn leads to alcohol related health issues, particularly for Hispanic men who are already at higher risk for liver disease (NIAAA, 2015). The social consequences of heavy drinking for Latinos also come at a high cost. Mexican American men and women and South/Central American men receive citations for driving under the influence at higher rates than the general population (NIAAA, 2015; Delgado 2005). Similarly, while the non-hispanic white population demonstrates patterns of moving away from heavy to lighter drinking throughout the individual’s lifetime, rates of heavy drinking remain the same for Latinos (Delgado, 2005; NIAAA, 2015). When it comes to seeking treatment Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanic whites to seek professional help or join Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), even though AA is available for free and in Spanish (NIIAAA, 2015).
Even so, a 2014 CDC report revealed consumption of Alcohol among Hispanics in the United States is lower than the rate of consumption among non-Hispanic Whites (NIAAA, 2015). However, the Latino population is complex when taking into account generational status and level of acculturation in the United States. One trend that is on the rise across young Latinos of all socioeconomic status is the rise in alcohol consumption due to acculturation. Acculturation is defined as “the cultural, behavioral and psychological changes that occur within immigrant groups individuals as they interact with peers, teachers, and other individuals or social institutions” (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2016). In the U.S., acculturation is changing alcohol-related attitudes and norms for young Latino/as who are adopting US cultural habits (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2016). As a result, youth alcohol consumption of Latino/a youth is on the rise.

As Delgado (2005) puts it:

“In 2000, among 12th graders, 31 percent of the Latino adolescents reported heavy drinking compared to 35 percent for white, non-Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2002). They represent a potential growth market from a beer and other alcohol industry perspective with prodigious health, economic, and social consequences for this community.” (Delgado, 2005)

As mentioned earlier, the convergence of culture and advertising through the practices of branding, make advertising messages even more important to the creation of self and communal identity. The process of acculturation reveal that the Latinx community is even more readily accessible to these cultural messaging in the process of acculturation. The young Latino demographic, presents alcohol companies with a market opportunity for increase profit making and an incentive on capturing the market through new forms of messaging that utilize woke advertising, Latinx representations and a sense of belonging.

5 Research Design

As detailed in the previous sections, the 2016 Presidential Election marked a climatic moment in the culture wars on the left and the right. President Trump’s 2016 campaign witnessed many moments of politically incorrectness, much of it targeted at the Latinx community. In order to utilize this moment in exchange for woke capital, Johnnie Walker set out to create a transmedia campaign called “Keep Walking America”. This campaign featured visual content for TV, print, and billboards, and sound bites for radio, that captured the stories of people of color throughout America, a majority of these stories focused on Latinx people and were broadcasted on Spanish media. While Johnnie Walker never publicly stated this was a pro Latinx immigrant initiative, public applause pointed to the need for this type of uplifting messaging during times of
disappointment (Wentz, 2017), alluding to the anti-immigrant political rhetoric. As part of my semiotic analysis, I have selected to analyze all scenes of one video content from the entire campaign: the reinterpretation of the classic folk song, “This land is your land” by Latinx band, Chicano Batman.

5.1 Material

A 2 minute re-interpretation of “This land is your land” by local Latinx band, Chicano Batman was first released on Johnnie Walker’s YouTube profile page on January 18, 2017. This is just 2 days before President Trump’s inauguration day. Portions of the video were later broadcasted as commercials on both Spanish and English TV stations. In addition to the video, the full 3 minute song was released and can still be found on streaming platform, Spotify. In contrast to the rest of the content for the “Keep Walking America” campaign, this advert was pushed out digitally first and successfully disguised itself as a cover and music video for the young and upcoming band, Chicano Batman. The decision to have the advert live on YouTube past the campaign’s relevancy makes it an interesting choice for analysis compared to the rest of the content which has since been forgotten. As with many media campaigns, the print and radio fade away into unknown archives once the campaign has finished, even social media posts become ancient and irrelevant in the noise of whatever is new and trending. A music video becomes a cultural artifact that gets filed under the musical artist’s list of acts, easily found and rewatched or listened to by fans. 2 years later, the video still has user comments that date back to 2 months from the date of this analysis. As for the format of the video content, a music video gives room for creative flexibility and is most rooted in the imagination of the director, which in this case is the advertising agency, Anomaly. In their most artistic attempt yet, anything is possible, which lends itself to metaphors and symbols that make cameos all throughout. It is up to a multimodal critical analysis to unravel what Johnnie Walker hopes to say, and a semiotic and postcolonial approach to decipher how they do so.

5.2 Methodology

To approach the Johnnie Walker music video, I rely on a multimodal critical discourse analysis that looks to social semiotics and Eco’s approach to metaphors. A multimodal critical discourse analysis takes a look at the way meaning is achieved and communicated through the visual features (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 8). As a re-interpretation to a classic song, there is nothing new being said. Instead there is so much more implied based on how the song was reinterpreted. In this way, a multimodal critical analysis allows us to view the images as they tell us what could not be said through language (p. 9). It is through a multimodal critical discourse analysis that I will identify and reveal specific choices made throughout the music video advert that tell us the
why more than the lyrics. Drawing on semiotic tools for analysis, my concentration will be on the images themselves as the most important site of meaning, and social modality to explain the social effect of the meaning of each image (Rose, 2001). Semiology in particular, allows us to see the meaning behind these signs, specifically how their meaning construct social differences (Rose, 2001). Much of my semiotic interpretations will draw upon Eco’s framework that focuses on how metaphors arrange our knowledge of the world. In this case, the metaphors included organize our knowledge of Latinx identity. Guided by Umberto Eco’s approach to semiotics, I will conduct the work of an abductive and interpretive approach to the metaphors and marked signs within the advert as a way to uncover “truths” about Latinx identity and politics within the advert.

I approach this by first laying out the visual narrative of the advert to identify what is being said. I have chosen elements that draw upon the adverts use of political correctness and cultural capital branding that make this a woke advertisement; in this way answering the question, to what extent the advert utilizes woke capital? Then I approach how the pro Latinx identity messaging is achieved in a more semiotics approach by gathering the recurring visual metaphors that convey a celebration of blended identities and immigrant heritage; in this way answering: What kind of Latinx themes and motifs are represented? Similarly, the recurring visual metaphors also say much about belonging, and in analysing those I look to also answer how location and belonging are included in the advert. Together, each part of my analysis interconnects to confirm woke advertising as a product of our current culture wars that mobilizes political correctness.

Finally, in order to make critical conclusion about the various visual elements, I will call upon Spivak’s subaltern point of view. As media representation relates to power paradigms, these images also convey something beyond what is being said. A multimodal critical analysis requires that we view images as they play a part in communicating power relations (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 10). My conclusion will review the presentation of these images based on agency within the aesthetic of woke advertising.

5.3 Limitations

As established earlier, woke advertisements demonstrate the advertising industry’s decision to take a more left or politically correct approach as they look to include Latinx representation and reinterpret their role within content. I chose to take on a qualitative approach in order to execute an in depth semiotic analysis of one advertisement. This is also due to the limited advertisements available of this kind. I have chosen a very niche demographic that is still gaining strides in mainstream media. While there are plenty of advertisements directed at Latinx audiences, they are generally fun and void of any political messaging. In working with the Spanish media
industry, it seems that the same themes present themselves within advertisements - family, music, pride. This was the first ad that struck a political chord with me that I wanted to zoom into and contextualize.

Although I believe this approach to be justified, I am aware of the limitations to my approach. First and foremost, this methodology is reflective and limited to the piece of content being studied and constrained to my personal assumptions. In contrast, other methodologies such as content analysis or interviews would also fall short in reaching the goal I am seeking. An audience study, done through either a content analysis of the user-generated comments and/or surveying Latinx audiences, could provide access to the reception and impact the content has on young Latinx audiences, and determine in that way whether Johnnie Walker achieved woke capital with users. This could bring up new findings on how Latinx audiences perceive these new images compared to past stereotypical representations, or whether they notice any differences; as well as provide insight into how the messaging in the video could mend or create new anxieties about immigration with the Latinx community. However, in general, audiences view media for pleasure and may not be able to provide a critical perspective. The uses and gratifications model in audience research reminds us that audiences actively look to media for their own purposes (Hodkinson, 2017, p. 82). From this point of view, viewers of this advert could have sought out the latest content produced by their favorite band, Chicano Batman, and in that way stumbled onto this video. This was immediately obvious to me by the overwhelmingly positive user-generated comments I picked up within the comments section. Instead, I hope to gather relevant background and historical information to view this advert critically; and in this search I felt validated when there seemed to be a gap in media representation research. In the search for background information there was limited investigation on how representation and inclusivity within media is being capitalized on and is still problematic. I view this analysis as an opening discussion on the media’s growing inclusivity as it relates to and is motivated by the culture and politics of today.

5.4 Ethics

In looking critically at the images in the “This land is your land” music advert, it is important to state my own identification as a Latinx immigrant to the United States. Much of the motivation for the topic of my thesis stems from an awareness of my own identity through adverts that increasingly attempt to appeal to me as a consumer. As someone who regularly consumes mainstream media, it never occurred to me the necessity to market to me as a Latinx. I was more concerned with seeing Latinx in media and as individuals accepted as multifaceted citizens by the mainstream. Instead, I am becoming more aware of my otherness through advertisements that only show aspects of my Latinx heritage. I see myself as a blend of both American and Latino/a heritage and find it difficult to see in the adverts that attempt to sell the Latinx brand. At the
same time, the adverts that I have attempted to define as ‘woke’ add a different dimension that has a greater emotional appeal because the narrative attempts to empower my sense of otherness. For this reason, I wanted to uncover whether this appeal is a mythology mobilized by advertising professionals that serves as the “end all, be all” once the brand has cashed in on the individual.

Beyond the ethical implications there are also limitations to the study to consider. First and foremost, there is the lack of access to the agency to understand full insights into the campaign. It is unclear whether the “This land is your land” video was planned depending on the outcome of the elections. Was it truly a quick reaction to Trump’s election? Or was this planned long before the outcome of the elections came to light? Without transparency from the agency, that will remain unknown. Additionally, aside from the public award the advertisement received, there is no real answer as to whether this advertisement is considered to have been successful and whether chiming in with a woke message during the elections helped their image. There is also limited information on whether the campaign will continue or if it has come to a halt. All information and content remains live and accessible online, however no new piece of content has since been published, and no formal announcement of the campaign’s end has been made. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that public conversation around Latinx immigration has only continued to intensify, but Johnnie Walker has since remained silent without a retraction. This leaves open the question as to whether there are more “appropriate” moments to utilize and reap rewards from woke advertising and other times to stay silent.

Lastly, with regards to the cultural artifact that I have selected for analysis, it is important to make clarifications on how it was obtained. The Johnnie Walker commercial, “This land is your land” is publically available on public domain site, YouTube, from where I was able to attain it for this analysis.

5.4.1 Latinx, Latino/a, Hispanic

To make greater clarifications on the distinction between the terms Latinx, Latino/a, and Hispanic used within my analysis, I am including a brief cultural and political context for the use of each terminology. While the term Latinx is a personal preference and the most contemporary of the terms in both academic and popular discourse, I also use the terms Latino/a and Hispanic to refer to the same community in different context.

The debate around gender in using Latino and o/a, a/o, and at one point, ‘@’, began when Feminist baby boomers began to incorporate feminism, gender, and queer studies within Chicano Studies, Cuban American, and Puerto Rican Studies in the 1990s; ultimately, the academia world settled on Latino/a (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017, pp. 144-145). At the same time, Latina/o Studies
evolved to recognize the historic exclusion of Dominican, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, and Indigenous Mexican populations in the unintentional drive towards “whiteness with the three largest historic demographic groups (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans) dominating the field of meaning and intellectual production” (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017, p. 145). In this way, the use of the ‘x’ after Latin stems from early use in the Nahuatl language and ultimately used to reclaim Indigenous heritage, and later signify the inclusion of other Latino/a people outside of the dominating Latino/a studies (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017).

Ultimately, the term Latinx: “encompasses the unknown, the diverse, the queer as it defies Spanish language norms of gender in language and previous nationalist articulations of identity.”(Guidotti-Hernández, 2017, p. 147). And while the term has just officially become recognized by the Oxford American Dictionary in 2015, Latina/o millenials have incorporated the term into their vocabulary since the late 2000s (p. 147). Today, the most conservative Linguistic field experts do not accept the term Latinx and view it as grammatically incorrect (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017, p. 142). In my analysis, it is especially important to define the community through the use of Latinx as its use works in line with a postcolonial framework. It is only fitting that I use a term Latinx which has also come to signify liberation against a colonial past, and inclusion of what has normally been excluded from Latina/o studies.

6 Analysis

6.1 The Advert

The advert begins with the logo of the Johnnie Walker striding man and text presenting Johnnie Walker overlayed onto a daytime sky. The transitioning text then says, “This land is your land as performed by Chicano Batman” as the film zooms out to reveal a rooftop where the band mates sit around a table with Black Label Johnnie Walker neatly poured into each glass. These introductory elements disclose the video as an advert rather than another Chicano Batman music video. At the same time, the video feels fabricated in comparison to their usual style with the over the top details that point to and seem to only focus on the Latinidad of the band members. In contrast, their other music videos typically include Latinx protagonists, rather than materialized representations of Latinidad found throughout that I detail in later sections.
The video then follows the all Latinx band members, Eduardo Arenas (bass, guitar, vocals), Carlos Arévalo (guitars), Bardo Martinez (lead vocals, keyboards, guitar) and Gabriel Villa (drums), as they walk through the streets of Los Angeles through back entrances, between public and underground spaces. Taking a closer look at what Los Angeles represents, we are able to unveil truths about the Latinx experience in the United States. When we view Los Angeles as a metaphor for sanctuary cities, Johnnie Walker’s decision to choose Chicano Batman, a band who embody Los Angeles in their own work, their decision becomes an attempt at a localism strategy that makes the Latinx consumer feel nurtured and safe. The reality is that the majority of Latinos live in metropolitan cities, a fourth of Latinos alone live in California (Delgado, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2014), and as the issue of localism has become of growing political importance, these metropolitan cities create a sense of authenticity that connects with Latinx identity and cultural politics. Los Angeles, just as many other metropolitan cities, is known as a sanctuary city. In sanctuary cities, public officials have made many statements about their priority to safe guard the right of its population by not cooperate with federal authorities to locate and stop those who may be undocumented. It was important to have the advert take place in a familiar space that conjures feelings of safety for a population that has come under much political scrutiny. Situating the advert in Los Angeles creates a sense of authenticity through the use of localism.
Moving along through the advert, we quickly come to realize the four band members are the protagonists of the video. They are the central focus as they follow the camera, the lead singer speaking directly to the camera as if speaking to an audience of one. The band members all walk with their heads held high, with an upbeat step, taking up the entire sidewalk with ownership. They are familiar with the streets and are not trying to hide and show no fear. At many points in the video, the camera is filming the lead vocalist, Bardo Martinez, from below, which immediately gives him credibility and commands attention.

While the first scene shows the band members in casual wear, a few scenes later, the band steps out of a tailor in formal wear for the remaining of the video. The formal get-up is made up of a blue suit with a frilled evening shirt and a bow-tie as accessories. Their movement illustrates pride and ownership of Los Angeles, while their outfits command respect. These visual signifiers are a far deviation from the usual Latinx representation that tends to illustrate Latinx people as the underclass. While the white ruffles has had many reappearances, in particular in the rock world, they were originally symbolic of wealth and status during the regency era (Cole & Deihl, 2015). At the same time, the outfit change seems to connote the band is getting dressed to go to work. Again, this deviates away from the criminal and economical drain perception news media, films, and other outlets have long depicted for audiences across the United States. This transition highlights these men are hard working, so much so, black label whiskey is within their economic reach.
Midway through the musical performance, Chicano Batman sing a verse in Spanish, making this truly their unique re-interpretation. This “code-switch” is an important inclusion of an element that symbolizes political activism within the Latinx media system. Bilingual bicultural media practices first came into use in the mid-1960s as Chicano activism began to rise, and so did the organization around Latinx issues (Gutierrez, 1980, p. 19). As Gutierrez (1980) puts it: “Such media [played] a useful role in providing needed information and interpretation on issues of importance to Chicanos” (p. 20). The use of bilingualism within this advert exemplify the commodification of the Spanish language for political significance, and serves to denote liberal politics and identity. The use of Spanish linguistics capitalizes on the necessary means to engage with Latinx identity in politically charged moments. Nevertheless, the incorporation of code-switching also signifies the labor put forth by the band and the audience members. This again evokes ideas of “hard working people”, relating back to the Obama administration’s classification of “good” immigrants as the hardworking ones.
Towards the end of the video, the band makes their one and only two-way encounter with other people within the video. While the rest of the video shows the band members walking through people and crowds, there is little to no acknowledgement from those individuals. However, the way in which this encounter happens denotes a greater symbolic significance. As they are walking through the streets, they make a connection with two elderly white women who playfully smile and encourage the lead singer and the rest of the band mates. This interaction depicts the band members as approachable and benevolent; far from the depiction of Latinx men as criminals propagated by Trump's camp and conservative right. Possibly the most vulnerable segment of society, two elderly women, attempts to capture the absence of fear America should have for Latinx and the possibility for a peaceful interaction between the two races.
As we reach the end, we encounter a few additional built-in cameos of the Johnnie Walker brand scattered throughout to remind us this is a top shelf alcohol brand, another signaling that helps to abandon any notion of underclass. In one of the final scenes, the brand shows up as the name of the bar the band walks into, called “JW”. In another the drink is poured into a glass during a bar scene, accompanies bar patrons in the next scene, and is used for a final cheer by the band members at the very end of the video. The advert comes to a close with the band members cheering on the rooftop, a night sky, and a closing statement: “Here’s to Moving Forward Together, Keep Walking America”. Then, just as it began, the striding man logo appears with its name in text form.
Together, these elements blend to denote a message that shows what a Latinx immigrant looks in the eyes of Johnnie Walker. The visuals in the music video place the Latinx band members as the protagonists rather than side characters, and follows them through a hard day’s work, which at the end of the day, deserves recognition. They are not depicted as criminals, nor treated as underclass people, but instead creatives who work hard and should not be feared. Together the elements in the advert work to show the antithesis of the anti-Latinx narrative created by the right, or conservactive side of the culture wars. Johnnie Walker aims to illustrate a “politically correct” version of Latinx people by staying away from past media tropes and instead creates visuals in line with the liberal or “woke” idea of the good immigrant.

6.2 Latinx Representation

As previously established, Johnnie Walker utilizes woke capital to create an advert that is relevant to the Latinx community. How this is conveyed relies on the recurring visual themes and motifs used to represent a reality of Latinx identity in the United States. These symbols serve to tell a truth that attempts to capture the experience of a whole community. These truths are told through metaphors that represent ideas of blended identity and belonging. The idea of blended identity is achieved through the use of various Mexican and American cultural representations that conjure feelings of celebration.
The most poignant and recurring motif that point to Mexican heritage include the “Charro” suit, the Mexican folk art, and the sugar skulls. These Mexican motifs not only point to Mexican heritage, but specifically point to the festive aspect of Mexican heritage as each item is used during significant holidays and celebrations. The Charro suit is an elegant suit now worn by Mexican Mariachi band members for performances. These outfits are displayed on the walls of the tailor as the lead singer walks through the shop (Still Image 3). The Charro suit was originally the attire of Mexican horseman who belonged to wealthy rancher families (Martynuska, 2015, p. 35). The suit is now said to symbolize manhood, nationhood and power within Mexican identity (Martynuska, 2015, p. 36). The folk art, or “papel picado”, and sugar skulls seen in Still image 6, stem from the Mexican celebration “Day of the Dead”. This celebration acknowledges past relatives and venerates Mexican lineage (Brandes, 1998). These important symbolic signifiers tie the video narrative together to bring a sense of pride to Mexican heritage of all generations, creating a sense of interconnectivity between the second and third generations of immigrant descendants. While these motifs are used to mobilize a sense of cultural pride, they also unravel greater insight into the media’s source of knowledge for Latinx culture and the agency the subaltern, or Latinx individuals have to tell their own story. When looking at each one of these traditional artifacts, it is clear that Latinx identity in the mind of the media is dominated by Mexico’s cultural exports rather than authentic local artifacts that mark generations of migration, assimilation, and acculturation. Additionally, only representing a Mexican-American identity ignores other sub-groups of the Latinx community even when the band members themselves represent various Latinx identities. The guitarist is half Salvadoran, the keyboardist half Colombian, and the drummer full of Colombian heritage (NPR, 2017). The appearance of only Mexican motifs is just one of many other ways the advert chooses to homogenise the Latinx community.
The American motifs within the video serve as metaphors that tie in Latinx identity to American rewards and optimism. Two of the most prominent American motifs picked out from the scenes are the retro diner in Still image 7 and the guitar in Still image 8. American diners are a constant in American culture and often instantly recognizable symbols of American culture. In this case, the diner represents an America that is open to infusion from other cultures and rewarding of hard work in the hopes of passed down ownership. This is deduced from the sign on the diner that reads from bottom to top, in descending order: “Burgers”, “Pastrami”, “Tacos” (Still image 7). Each of these dishes alludes to different generations of ownership that has added their own touch to the menu. Ultimately, the diner works as a symbol for the American rewards in the American dream, attainable by immigrants. The guitar, considered one of the “most popular instruments in the world”, has long held ranking place in dominating the music scene in American culture (Everette, 2003, p. 331). The guitar in this instance is the interconnectivity between musicians of all backgrounds beyond cultural identity.
The final grouping of motifs show the unique contributions of the Latinx community. These motifs are unique to the local lived experience of the Latinx community and include the lowrider car and food trucks. Both of these motifs mobilize the idea of a blended identity and the cultural infusion that Latinx immigrants have contributed to the creation of new art forms (the low riders) and economic progress for the country (food trucks). The meshing of Mexican and American motifs serve as symbolism that praises the blending of the two cultures for the creation of the Latinx experience. This is fundamentally necessary in order for Johnnie Walker to convey their positive view on Latinx migration. However, in terms of the representation of a group as a whole it is important to remember the Latinx community is comprised of many sub-groups that not only relate to the country of origin, but also generationally.

6.3 Belonging

When analysing the advert for symbols of belonging, much of that can be done by looking at band member’s movements through the various physical spaces paired with the linguistic elements of the song lyrics. In the case of their movement, there are no constraints to the spaces they walk through. Whether it’s a casual space or a public space, there is fluidity in where they are allowed to enter. Fluidity in this instance symbolizes immigration. The video specifically takes us through informal and insider locations in the city. These locations serve as the anchorage for symbolism of the fluid movement of Mexican-Americans in the United States, where they are allowed, where they belong, and how they move through these spaces. In this
way, Johnnie Walker is utilizing the advert as a way to formulate a politically correct message about immigration in order to gain woke capital: it doesn’t matter how you got here, you are here and you belong.

In the second scene, we begin to see the band walk through back entrances into what seems to be an informal radio station or recording studio and then into a tailor shop. These spaces serve to reveal the way in which Latinx individuals can move through spaces, how they can carry themselves, and where they belong. On one end, the music room and the tailor shop create grassroots feelings; the outdated equipment in the music room and the bare wooden panel walls of the tailor shop are just a few signs that show the informality of these physical spaces. The connotation behind the use of informal spaces invoke informal economies and community grassroots movements. In many ways, these images attempt to tell the politically correct narrative of the “hero” immigrant who, again, is hardworking within his community. Yet, the media has a much longer history of cultivating images of immigrants as an economic threat for the informality of their economical resources (i.e. cash payments) and for not paying taxes. This image is then left to the eye of the beholder. Depending on which side of the culture wars you are on, these spaces can just the same reaffirm criminality. Additionally, these images are problematic from a postcolonial point of view that depict the subaltern in ways historically linked to economic hierarchies. These images of homegrown business establish and maintain previously held economic systems of power by choosing to depict Latinx businesses as less than and not mainstream. Similarly, the band is also shown walking through back entrances, unconsciously designating how Latinx men enter spaces. As a metaphor, these informal entrances conjure ideas of migration at the border, and again speaking to the criminality of Latinx people. With the absence of Latinx women in full focus, the message is more about the way in which men migrate. Leaving out women from the message of immigration further silences a vulnerable group within the subaltern and their experience with immigration and as immigrants to this country. Nevertheless, the similarity in the fluidity within closed and public spaces keeps it ambiguous as to how they actually entered.

In later scenes the band members are seen in open and public, however this is after they are in their formal attire. Now that they are well dressed, the band is seen walking through the streets of Los Angeles where they briefly interact with three elderly White women (Still Image 5). The places the band is able to occupy and the people the band is able to interact with seems interconnected with the way they are dressed. While their outfits point to a deviation from representing Latinx as underclass, as I mentioned in the previous section, their interaction in their change of outfit with the elderly women point to problems of assimilation the media has historically represented about Latinx immigrants. The unexpected reaction by the women make the band members appear more as outsiders for the way in which they are dressed.
7 Conclusion

When considering the Johnnie Walker “This land is your land” advert as a case study for woke advertisements, it becomes clear that woke capital is consistently achieved through representations of political correctness. A background description of the rise in woke advertisements reveals woke capital as the currency with a much higher value in the ongoing culture wars. In their attempt at a new market share, Johnnie Walker hoped to capture the Latinx community by engaging in cultural politics when making a statement about immigration. What I found through this case study are consistent visual representations that stem from previous Latinx tropes, confirming that these identity configurations are deeply rooted in our media systems even when the pendulum swings in the other direction. I found metaphors and symbols that relate back to the long held belief that Latinx immigrants are unable or unwilling to assimilate, as well as the constant grouping of all Latinx into one homogenous group. The most prominent cultural representations, the Mariachi, Mexican folk art, and sugar skulls, all allude to a Mexican heritage. While gratifying, this censors the inclusion of symbols that capture a Latinx experience that encompass other Latinx heritage and new cultural artifacts of an assimilated generation. Additionally, the grouping of all immigrants into one homogenous group, Mexican men, silences the immigrant experience of other groups such as women, the queer, or those of Carribean backgrounds who also migrate. Most importantly, I have come to the conclusion on the urgent need for new representations of Latinx identity that are not rooted in set configurations. Many of the metaphors that attempt to reframe Latinx in a positive light only work because they are a response to the politically incorrect. As the politically incorrect rhetoric has taken the spotlight, these overused depictions of Latinx identity are vulnerable to polarization within the Latinx community.

Finally, it is interesting to see that while the brand has not necessarily ended the campaign, they have not kept up the momentum for the creation of new content. Looking at how everything has quickly escalated in recent immigration events (i.e. the caravan transporting Central American asylum seekers to the United States), it is only natural to ask whether this is a message that would be launched in the present day. A long term monitoring of how companies continue to post and share woke advertisements is necessary to make conclusions on a larger level. In this vein, the following could be of interest within further investigation on woke advertisements. There is a missing gap on the discussion of advertising for more discussion of advertising’s new role in configuring social identities the way traditional media has done so. As branded content continues to converge with traditional forms of content, it won’t be long before all content is brought to us by one company or another. This brings up interest in taking a wider look at the campaigns executed by agency Anomaly. It would be interesting to continue to look at the trend in the messaging in the campaigns of their various partners. Lastly, further knowledge could be
valuable on the influence the culture wars have on the value of symbolic capital within the advertising industry. My presentation brings up one example of a new form of currency that sprouted out of the culture wars. It would be curious to find out if the politically correct would ever fluctuate in value or if new forms of symbolic capital will arise.
References


Sage.


