

# An Ad For Coca-Cola, and For Islam

by Hugh Fitzgerald

Above is the Coca-Cola ad for Ramadan 2018. It's a remarkable performance, and I've tried to give it the attention it deserves. It lasts for 2:14.

We open to a scene of an obnubilated sky (0:00-0:09); it's early morning in the outskirts of a city. At 0:10, a pretty young woman, veiled and covered from head to foot, appears. The sun is beating down, but nonetheless, she must stay covered. She is seen running to catch a bus (0:11-0:15), but just as she is about to reach the door, the bus pulls away at 0:16. A look of anguish passes over her. (0:20-0:21). Now she must walk into town, quite a distance, and we see her walking under that pitiless sun, clearly suffering. For her faith. (0:21-0:24) She is now in town, we see from the a crowd of pedestrians around her. As she walks, she has brief encounters with various Infidels, all of them disturbing. At 0:27 she passes people eating – a hard thing for a Ramadan observer to bear. *Couldn't these people eat indoors?* may be her fleeting thought. But she will remain strong. A girl who is coming from the the other direction gives her a nasty look as she passes (0:31) Headshot of determined Muslim girl: she will go on! (0:32). Then a young man brushes by her, knocking – it seems deliberately – against her shoulder (0:33-0:34). She keeps walking, persevering in her righteousness. At 0:36, a middle-aged besuited man walks past her and gives her a hostile look. Yet again! She is then seen walking down some steps, where two girls sitting on those steps. As soon as she passes them, one of the girls pulls her hood over her head (0:40), cruelly mocking the hijabbed Muslim girl, and she and the other girl laugh at their unfunny joke. (0:41-0:42).The Muslimah pays no

attention.

At this point (0:42) a pretty ponytailed Western jogger appears, in headband and running suit. She glances briefly, it seems, over at the Muslim girl (whom we do not see), and then goes up to the Coca-Cola stand, all bright and shining, where she orders one bottle of Coke from a bearded young man at 0:44. Then we see the Muslim girl, still with that look of anguish on her face (apparently Ramadan is quite an ordeal, to judge by the girl's expression of agony throughout until she can, at the end, break her fast with a Coke). At 0:45, the jogger looks back at the Muslim girl, a concerned expression on her face. At 0:46, a close-up of the Muslimah's anguished noble face. At 0:47-0:48 the jogger, clasping her bottle of Coke, looks over at the Muslim girl and, concerned, orders a second bottle of Coke for her. At 0:50, the Muslim girl, still with that anguished expression, moves toward the parapet. At 0:52, a close-up shows her eyes half-closed in anguish. At 0:53, the jogger looks over, while she is being handed a second bottle of Coke, at the Muslim girl. At 0:55, the jogger takes the second bottle; she is now smiling. At 0:56, she starts to walk, a smile on her face, holding the two bottles of Coke, over to the Muslim girl. The Muslim girl's face is shown, still reflecting psychic pain. (0:57-0:58) She moves to the parapet, where she unwraps from what looks like a napkin two dates (1:00-1:01), to be eaten later, at the end of the fast. We see her troubled silhouette at 1:02-1:04. The jogger comes over to the parapet. (1:05) At 1:06, we see two bottles of Coke. At 1:07, the Muslim girl looks over at the two bottles of Coke, and thinks. Can she? Should she?

At 1:10, each girl takes hold of one of the bottles. At 1:11, the Muslim girl is still thinking. At 1:13, the Muslim girl smiles gratefully, looks over at the jogger, but she cannot – the smile suggests – accept. At 1:14-1:15 is a shot of the hands of both girls, each holding a bottle of Coke. At 1:16, the jogger looks over at the Muslim girl and gives a quizzical

look – why aren't you drinking? At 1:17, both girls are seen in silhouette, both thinking. At 1:18, the jogger puts her bottle to her lips. She holds it there, but without drinking, until at 1:24 she puts the bottle back down. She seems to now have had her epiphany; it wouldn't be right to drink in front of an obviously parched Muslim. And that's a lesson for all of us. At 1:26 we have a shot of the two Coca-Cola bottles. At 1:28, both girls lean over the parapet, looking out over the city. At 1:29, the Muslim looks over at the jogger. From 1:30-1:34, the Muslim girl slowly develops a shy smile. At 1:35, a shot of both girls, looking over the parapet again. From 1:35 to 1:41, we see the real stars of this video, the two bottles of Coke. At 1:41-1:42, the jogger is seen in silhouette. At 1:50, the sky suddenly darkens – at last, sundown has come. It only takes a second, apparently, and the Muslim girl now raises the bottle. They both can enjoy their Cokes. A cooling wind is suddenly blowing, too. Clearly all nature is refreshed. The Muslim girl puts the bottle to her lips and keeps drinking until 1:57, when she puts the bottle down. At 1:59, there's a shot from the rear, as the jogger faces her new friend. A friendship has been formed, as only friendships can, when bottles of cold Coca-Cola are being consumed.

Shyly, the Muslim girl hands her new friend, who offered her hope not hate, one of the two dates she had been saving to eat when she finally could break her fast. At 2:02-2:03, they both eat their dates. At 2:07, we see the two girls, now fast friends, in silhouette, and above them, a bright circle appears in the sky; it's the Coca-Cola logo, promising heavenly bliss. A thin white Muslim crescent envelops two thirds of it. At 2:06 the Muslim is smiling, happy. At 2:12, four lamps in the Muslim mosque style drop down from the sky. Look closely at them, because the light in each one is in the discernible shape of a Coca-Cola bottle. The girls continue to lean over the parapet, drinking their cokes, eating their dates. It's a wonderful world. On the screen these words

appear: "What Unites Us Is Bigger Than What Divides Us." And then: "Taste the Feeling."

There are several themes here. One is of the brave, long-suffering Muslim girl, who has managed to withstand all temptations until after sunset, when at long last she drinks her Coke and eats her date. A second is of the sheer malignity she must endure from Infidels, from the young woman who gives her a nasty look, to the young man who knocks into her, to the older man who passes her with an expression of clear disapproval, to the two young girls who cruelly mock her hijab. It is not until she finds her friend, the jogger, that her calvary ends.

What should a good Infidel do during Ramadan? Do what the jogger did. Don't drink in front of those who are fasting. Show sympathy. Offer them something, but make sure you do so only after sundown. For What Unites Us – in this case, Coca-Cola, that wonder-working elixir – will overwhelm What Divides Us (those dirty looks, that deliberate shove, that completely uncalled-for mocking of the hijab). Muslims are always ready for friendship, like this noble girl suffering for her faith. It's we who need lessons in decency and true tolerance.

The clever mendacity of this advertisement deserves to be examined. It's having its effect. So far it has been seen by more than 3 million visitors at YouTube. So take a look; see, in slow motion, just how they convey their message, both for Coca-Cola and for Islam. You may even conclude from this ad, as I have, that Nothing Goes Better With Coke.

First published in