

Islamizing IKEA

By Bruce Bawer

In the weeks before this past Christmas, the Norwegian branch of IKEA unveiled a new [commercial](#) entitled “Sleep Well when You Can.” To the strains of “Bella Notte,” the lovely song from the old Disney film *Lady and the Tramp*, we saw people having trouble sleeping – a new father whose baby is crying, a pregnant woman with cravings, an older man who has to get up to urinate, a little girl who’s scared of the dark, a small child who’s starting nursery school.



It was a touching, low-key, family-friendly ad that took a soft-sell approach toward pushing an 11,000-kroner (\$1000) bed that was mentioned only very briefly at the very end. In fact the whole thing was so sweetly done that, to my embarrassment, the first time I saw it I actually found myself tearing up.

Alas, IKEA hasn't always been an estimable cultural player. In 2007, *Aftenposten* [reported](#) on the case of an Iranian refugee named Ibrahim Batmani who had worked at an IKEA in Norway for

ten years. One day at lunch, he met a new colleague, a Muslim woman in hijab. When he put out his hand, she refused to shake it, saying that she was refusing on religious grounds. In reply, Batmani explained to her that Norway was a free country and that she therefore didn't need to wear hijab; he also criticized Islam at some length. The result: he was officially upbraided by his superiors for having behaved in a "racist" fashion in his encounter with the woman.

Some time went by. One day Batmani brought up with his boss the subject of hijabs, which female IKEA employees were allowed to wear on the job. He disapproved of this policy, he said. Once again, he was accused of racism. This time he was fired.

Of course, the whole thing was ridiculous. Batmani himself was Iranian. And his statements about hijab and about Islam had nothing to do with race. When he took the case to court, IKEA was forced to acknowledge that nothing Batmani had said was racist. The judgment was in his favor, and he got his job back. But IKEA appealed the case.

Throughout the case, IKEA's conduct was reprehensible. Instead of being impressed by a hard-working long-term employee who had fled from a tyrannical Islamic regime and who stood up for Western liberal values and against the Islamic tyranny that hijab represents, IKEA, in effect, sided with tyranny. In order to pacify devout Muslims, it appeased a woman wearing a garment that symbolizes subordination and punished a man for believing in freedom of speech and the rights of the individual.

In 2019, Hege Storhaug [reported](#) that the IKEA Norway catalog that came out at the start of that year's Christmas season contained all of the usual Yuletide merchandise – only with new names. The catalog itself professed to be selling products connected not to Christmas but to something called *Vinterfest* ("Winter Party" or "Winter Celebration").

The items included a fake poinsettia, which in Norwegian is called *julestjerne* (“Christmas star”), but which in the catalog was advertised as a *kunstig potteplante*, or “artificial potted plant.” Mulled wine (*gløgg*) was marketed under the name *Vintersaga*, or “Winter Saga.” The term *julekrans* (“Christmas wreath”) was shortened to *krans* (“wreath”). And a fake Christmas tree (*juletre*) was sold as an “artificial plant” (*kunstig plante*).

Plainly, the objective here was to avoid offending Muslims. No, this didn’t make much sense, given that devout Muslims weren’t going to be in the market for a Christmas tree or wreath, whatever name you might give it. But obviously IKEA wasn’t taking any chances. Needless to say, this is cowardice of the first order – giving in to pressure even before any pressure is applied.

Fast forward to last summer, and cross the border from Norway into Sweden, where the managers of the IKEA branch in Karlstad decided to recruit only foreign-born people for summer jobs. The local government employment service not only didn’t complain – it helped out. “The idea is that they want diversity at Ikea,” municipal consultant Iréne Mattsson told *Samnytt*. “That’s why we’re helping out.”

Samnytt spoke to a young Karlstad woman named Anna who mistakenly received a summer job offer from IKEA. She was thrilled – she’d been looking for a job all over the country – but her joy evaporated when she responded to the offer and was told that she’d been born in the wrong nation: Sweden.

And now, believe it or not, Ramadan is approaching yet again. It’ll be rolling around at the end of this month. And to celebrate this holy period of abstinence and prayer, the IKEA in Malmö, Sweden, [posted](#) an item on Instagram account announcing its new Ramadan collection:

Add something new to Ramadan and Eid this year!

The GOKVÄLLÅ collection helps you create a warm and welcoming atmosphere during Ramadan and Eid, making celebrations with family and friends even more festive.

Welcome to IKEA Malmö!

At this writing, the post had received about 4500 likes.

At IKEA's English-language [website](#), you can read more about GOKVÄLLÅ: "Whether you're planning a festive meal with friends and family or just freshening up your home, the GOKVÄLLÅ collection can help you create the right atmosphere. It's inspired by tile patterns from the Middle East that are mixed with modern elements to make both you and your home shine." Further down the page you can read in detail about the items you can buy for that moment when it's "Time to break the fast."

It is interesting to note that while the word "Christmas" now seems to be *verboten* at IKEA, the words "Ramadan" and "Eid" are not.

[Reporting](#) on IKEA's new venture, a periodical called the *Bulletin* noted a comment made on X by Nils Liittorin, leader of a local political party called Malmö List: "How can anyone claim that there is no Islamization of Sweden, and especially in Malmö?"

The [story](#) at *Samnytt* pointed out that the GOKVÄLLÅ collection "has been developed exclusively for Muslims." It quoted one of the comments on the Instagram post: "It feels great to be seen and included. Muslims are a big market here, and it's really a smart move."

Is it? I'm reminded of the line from "Springtime for Hitler," that ultimate example of gallows humor, sung in the voice of Mel Brooks: "Don't be stupid, be a smarty / Come and join the Nazi Party."

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