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The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store

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The IKEA store has become one of the world's most recognized and reproduced archives of national culture in the global marketplace, necessitating a critical reading of its spatial narrative. This article engages in a historicized reading of the culturally encoded space of the IKEA store, of which there were 285 in nearly 40 countries by the end of 2008. It argues that the IKEA store helps construct, reproduce, and disseminate a narrative of Swedish exceptionalism worldwide. This narrative showcases Sweden's image as a peaceful, homogenous, and industrious little nation, exemplifying Enlightenment ideals of social and economic progress while avoiding implication in the Enlightenment's more violent aspects. This article engages Derrida's formulation of archival violence to demonstrate how these hidden histories disrupt this archive's dominant narrative. Recovering these histories is particularly important given recent renewed faith in an essential "Swedishness" that has emerged in response to non-Western immigration in Sweden.

Keywords: IKEA; nationalism; Sweden; colonialism; immigration

An article in *Maclean's* describing the festive grand opening of a new IKEA store in Canton, Michigan, in August 2006 ascribes the furniture giant's global success to its unequivocally positive national identity:

All around the store, there is evidence of the company's unrelenting "Swedephilia." Ikea relies on there being something inherently non-threatening—and wholesome and sensible—about the Swedes. Instead of trying to be all things to all people like so many other brands, Ikea is Swedish. To all people. Products are assigned Scandinavian proper names—kitchens are named for boys, bedrooms for girls, beds for Swedish cities, and bathrooms for Norwegian lakes. (Some products vary slightly from one country to the

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next. For instance, a children's desk originally named Fartful—Swedish for “speedy”—didn't hit the right note in the English-speaking world.) Ikea restaurants dish out more than 150 million Swedish meatballs a year. And in Småland, which they've named the kids' play area, kids can jump in “lingonberry balls” and hide behind giant clogs. One can imagine the warehouse staffed by woodland nymphs. (George, 2006, p. 34)

IKEA is, of course, selling far more than Swedish nostalgia. In its 285 stores worldwide,² the multinational corporation sells “democracy as furniture,” and the Swedish origin of this brand of exported democracy conveniently strips it of any perceived imperialistic ambitions (Cafferri, 2004). The IKEA store is a space of acculturation, a living archive in which values and traits identified as distinctively Swedish are communicated to consumers worldwide through its Nordic-identified product lines, organized walking routes, and nationalistic narrative. My use of *archive* here draws from Derrida's (1995) explication, which traces the origin of the word *archive* to the Greek *arkheion*: the house where the superior magistrates lived, where the official documents were kept, and where those with the nomological agency to interpret the contents of those documents lived. *Archive*, then, engenders the idea of a house, a space that is both public and private and that signifies both political power and cultural authority.

The house of IKEA is an archive of Swedish national culture that has been replicated globally en masse. Modern, cutting-edge products of Swedish design ingenuity are linked semantically with nostalgic items from Sweden's agrarian heritage, such as lingonberries, meatballs, and wooden clogs. The well-designed home products thus become the seemingly natural extension of Sweden's agrarian narrative of simple, honest, and wholesome living that begins, for IKEA, in Älmhult, the parish in the southern Swedish province of Småland, where Ingvar Kamprad founded the company in 1943, and for Sweden, the nationalistic appropriation of peasant folklore in the 19th century (Ehn, Frykman & Löfgren, 1993). The IKEA store space is both public, in the sense that it welcomes customers to shop and entertain themselves, and private, in that it insists on the particularity of its Swedishness vis-à-vis the cultures of the various societies into which it has inserted itself. The company broadcasts this particularity even from the parking lot, as the exterior of each IKEA store is painted in the garish blue and yellow colors of the Swedish flag. Even the name *IKEA*, in capitalized yellow letters against the blue building, signifies the particularity of the company's patriarch and his geography: Ingvar, Kamprad, Elmtaryd (the name of the farm where Kamprad was born), and Agunnaryd (the name of his village).

Because the IKEA store purports to perform Swedish-style democracy, it further signifies political power as well as cultural authority. IKEA markets its home furnishing products as well designed, simple, and unassuming—just like Swedes themselves. Individual pieces have their own Nordic names—often spelled with the special Swedish vowels å, ä, and ö—yet they do not function as showstoppers. Rather, each piece—from the RATIONELL kitchen drawers to the OPTIMAL wine glasses—serves a utilitarian and aesthetic function within the design idiom of a given model room. Swedish living, IKEA tells us, is essentially and unwaveringly democratic—just like Swedes themselves. This semantic link between a democratic home space and an essentially democratic national culture is cemented, at least in the Swedish mind, by the colloquial Swedish word for Sweden's own brand of social democracy, which has provided the ideological basis for its famous social welfare model since the early 20th century. This word, coined by the Social Democratic Party leader Per Albin Hansson, in 1928, is *folkhemmet*—“the people's home.” The idea embodied in this idiom is

benevolent and utopian indeed: that the State cares for all of its citizens equally, from the cradle to the grave, as a parent cares for his or her children. Conversely, Swedish citizens, like family members, have an obligation to develop their particular abilities as best serves the “national household”: the State, the economy, and the national culture (see Myrdal, 1940/1968). Accordingly, Swedish-style social democracy is deeply nationalist in orientation, yet its anchoring in the symbolic site of the home imbues it with a nurturing, nonaggressive nature. This idea of the proud, benevolent, and humble little nation, modeled on the functional household in which everyone contributes, is communicated throughout the house of IKEA, as well as in its ubiquitous catalog, of which 191 million free copies were distributed worldwide in 2008 in 27 languages, 56 editions, and 34 countries. The 2006 version distributed in the United States, for example, features a tranquil kitchen scene in which the apron-clad man of the house attends to pots on the kitchen stove, his wife sets the dining table in the background, a female guest holds a martini in one hand and ruffles the couple’s son’s hair with the other, and the family dog lies contentedly on the floor (*IKEA Catalog 2006*, 2005, pp. 142-143). The names of the various kitchen components that construct this scene of domestic tranquility are superimposed in thin black type.

Yet Derrida (1995), reading Freud, warns us that an archive by its very nature contains internalized violences—agents of the death drive—that work to explode and destroy the archive that represses undesirable memories. An archive, Derrida reminds us, is always an unnatural space, a constructed and engineered space. An archive wields archontic power, which pairs “the functions of unification, of identification, of classification” with the power of consignment, which Derrida defines as “the act of *consigning* through gathering together signs” (p. 10). The aim of an archive’s archontic power, then, is to coordinate—forcibly and by omitting ill-fitting elements—“a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (p. 10). In the case of a national archive, such as the house of IKEA, this ideal configuration signifies the combined essence of a national culture, one that at first is engineered by those in power and then becomes legitimized through social and institutional practice (see Bourdieu, 1993). Derrida writes, “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (p. 11). At the same time, the existence of a homogenous national archive suggests the existence of a repressed and heterogeneous archive, whose contents threaten to undermine the legitimacy of those who wield political and cultural power in a given society. The influential Swedish sociologist Alva Myrdal (1940/1968), whose work helped shape the social policies of the social welfare state, first wrote in *Nation and Family* in 1940:

We should consider in a realistic and cautious manner the division of functions between the family household and the national household and induce such changes in this division as may best preserve the fundamental values of our cultural heritage in a period of structural economic and social changes. (p. 7)

IKEA, accordingly, gathers to itself signs of the national Swedish household and functions as an archive that welcomes visitors but only interpellates those who are members of the national family (see Althusser, 1968). The implications of this will become clearer shortly.

The aim of this article, then, is to mine Sweden’s repressed national archive via a historicized reading of the multinational IKEA store and the signs it gathers into

itself. Sweden's nationalist narrative constructs a model of a peaceful, homogenous, resourceful little nation committed to equality and human rights. This is a narrative of Swedish exceptionalism that has allowed Sweden to claim universal and beneficial contributions to European modernity, such as industrial innovation and democracy, while distancing itself from the European Enlightenment's paradoxical and simultaneous implication in colonialism and neocolonial exploitation.³ But as I will show, this distinctly Swedish narrative contains hidden histories and repressed heterogeneities, such as Sweden's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and its onetime embrace of racial biology and eugenics. Furthermore, the IKEA store's narrative of progress suppresses the fact that Sweden's heralded social welfare model is constructed on hierarchies of difference, including gender difference. IKEA has become the world's most recognized and reproduced archive of Swedish national culture, necessitating a critical reading of its spatial narrative that exemplifies the construction of a fixed national identity and the repression of incompatible histories and heterogeneities. Finally, I will consider what is at stake for Sweden's future national identity as well as for IKEA as a symbolic and material archive of Swedishness in recovering these hidden histories. This, I conclude, has become a particularly important question given the recent renewed faith in the possibility of an essential "Swedishness" (Ehn, Frykman & Löfgren, 1993) that has emerged in response to non-Western immigration in Sweden.

IT BEGINS IN THE "LITTLE COUNTRY"

One of the most striking things about the IKEA store is its highly engineered layout. Paper maps use arrows to direct customers on a clear path through the store, from entrance to exit. Arrows on the floor keep shopper traffic flowing in one direction. The map divides the store into three parts, starting with the Showrooms, where the model rooms of a home are located; continuing through the Marketplace, where household goods are spread out on tables and shelves; and concluding in the Self-Serve Warehouse, where customers can retrieve their flat packs of disassembled furniture according to the aisle and stock number indicated in the Showrooms. Along the way, customers are encouraged to participate in the model lived environments by stepping into the model rooms, lying down on beds, testing the buoyancy or sturdiness of chairs and sofas, and spreading out rugs and curtains in the marketplace to get a better look. The relegation of salespeople to the check out area at the exit, and their absence in the Showrooms and the Marketplace, is designed to encourage customers to touch and toy with the products. The one-way directional layout of the store, plus its interactive dimension, likens the IKEA store to a museum—a form of archive—rather than a furniture warehouse. As Bennett (1995) has documented, museums construct an evolutionary narrative of progress, not merely in the content of individual displays but especially in their arrangement, which compels visitors to engage in "organized walking." Bennett calls for viewing

the narrative history of the museum as providing a context for a performance that was simultaneously bodily and mental (and in ways which question the terms of such a duality) inasmuch as the evolutionary narratives it instantiated were realized spatially in the form of routes that the visitor was expected—and often obliged—to complete. (p. 179)

Thus, it is only fitting that Småland, the children's play area, is located at the store's entrance, right before the journey through the IKEA store—and the narrative of what has made Swedes Swedish—begins.



Note: Window stickers pair Sweden's national flag, a yellow cross on a blue background, with the name SMÅLAND, the province in southern Sweden where IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad and his famous company were born. Appearing on a minivan parked on a city street in Boulder, Colorado, USA, in February 2007, the stickers exemplify Småland's symbolic position as a cradle of Swedish national culture, particularly among people of Swedish descent living abroad.

On its company Web site, IKEA describes the origin of its business concept thus:

The IKEA Concept began when Ingvar Kamprad, an entrepreneur from the Småland province in southern Sweden, had an innovative idea. In Småland, although the soil is thin and poor, the people have a reputation for working hard, living frugally and making the most of limited resources. So when Ingvar started his furniture business in the late 1940s, he applied the lessons he learned in Småland to the home furnishings market. (<http://franchisor.ikea.com/showContent.asp?swfid=concept3>).

In this narrative recounting IKEA's origin, its founder and his grand idea seem to spring from the Småland soil as naturally as mushrooms or lingonberries, as the indigenous products of a hardworking and resourceful peasant culture. In the IKEA store, the placement of "Småland" (literally "little country"), the children's play area, near the entrance makes it simple for adults to delegate someone to watch their kids play before they begin shopping. It further communicates from the start that a trip to IKEA is a fun excursion rather than an obligatory errand. But Småland's placement near the entrance is also symbolic, because the IKEA narrative begins in a rural and allegedly magical province called Småland. This southern, and predominantly rural, province often functions as a metonym for Sweden in canonical works of Swedish culture. The rural setting of Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking tales, celebrating the independence and resourcefulness of a young girl, evokes the author's home village in

Småland, as do many of her other beloved tales. The Swedish American author Vilhelm Moberg's celebrated immigrant trilogy *Utvandrarna* (*The Emigrants*, 1949-1959) chronicles the heroic migration of Småland peasant farmers, beset by famine and religious and political persecution, to Minnesota in the mid-19th century to start a new and better life. (This trilogy, based on material Moberg found in Scandinavian American archives, was further popularized in Sweden and the United States through an epic film by Swedish director Jan Troell, *The Emigrants*, released in 1970.) Symbolically speaking, then, there is ample evidence to support the notion that the celebrated IKEA Concept emerged organically from the humble roots of Småland peasant life and specifically from the life experiences of a Smålander who hit upon a novel idea for a new company.

However, this archived fact about the indigenous Swedish origin of the IKEA Concept contains its own repressed histories. One is that Kamprad is descended, on his father's side, from a German aristocrat who faced intense discrimination from his Swedish peasant neighbors when he purchased 449 hectares in Agunnaryd parish, sight unseen, based on an advertisement in a German hunting magazine and moved to Sweden in 1896. According to Kamprad's authorized biography (Torekull, 1998/1999, pp. 4-5), the IKEA founder's immigrant grandfather struggled to get the family timber business going in a new country, was denied a loan from the local bank, suffered from neighbors' eager speculation that he might lose his land to them, and ended up shooting himself to death. It was his monied relatives in Germany that helped the family carry on (p. 6). Two generations later, young Ingvar, who had grown up in Småland and whose father had married the daughter of a respected local store owner, applied for a business loan to trade in fountain pens from Paris. A local bank loaned him 500 Swedish crowns "*på mina blåa ögon*," a fixed expression in Swedish that translates roughly as "on the strength of my blue eyes" and means that the banker considered him honest and trustworthy (p. 10). (This idiomatic expression associating blue eyes with honesty clearly has deeply problematic implications for current generations of Swedish children descended from non-blue-eyed parents, not to mention for certain minorities, such as the indigenous Sámi, who have long lived within the Swedish domain.)⁴

Young Ingvar's early determination to succeed in business seemed to stem at least in part from his family's misfortunes, which his openly anti-Semitic father blamed on a Jewish lawyer he believed had sold family property at too low a price: "I remember thinking: *If only I could help Father. Supposing I got some money so that I . . .* To carry something out, you clearly had to have the means" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 10). Missing from the dominant and published IKEA narrative of the resourceful Swedish peasant culture, then, is the violence of social and economic ostracism that outsiders, including the first-generation Kamprads, have faced in idyllic Småland. Missing also is the fact that young Ingvar's Swedish heritage (on his mother's side) and his outwardly Germanic features—such as the blue eyes that convinced a local banker of his honesty—have facilitated his acceptance as a spokesman for indigenous and sincere Swedish ingenuity.

Missing also is that during the years when young Kamprad was first establishing IKEA as a small family business in Småland following the Second World War, he developed a close association with Per Engdahl, leader of the Swedish nationalist movement *Nysvenska Rörelsen* ("The New Swedish Movement"), who "made me believe it was wrong for the races to mix" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 136).⁵ Earlier, as a teenager during the Second World War, he had read and distributed propaganda for the Lindholmers, a pro-German, Swedish Nazi group. Kamprad's involvements with

these racist organizations became public knowledge for the first time in 1994, when certain documents—artifacts of a repressed archive—in the National Archive of Sweden were made public for the first time. Kamprad's response was to own up to his involvements, describe them in detail in his authorized biography, and express deep regret, calling his youthful convictions a "sickness" from which he fortunately had healed. Yet even in clarifying his actions 56 years later, Kamprad makes distinctions between the "crude Nazism" of the Lindholmers, which his "German grandmother and German father" supported, and "Engdahl's 'more decent' fascism"—pointing out that Engdahl never expressed hatred for other races but simply believed that "the mixing of races always produced bad results" (Torekull, 1998/1999, pp. 135-138). Kamprad concludes by asking, "Is it a crime that I was brought up by a German grandmother and a German father? As I said: when is an old man to be forgiven for the aberration of his youth?" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 139) The implication here is that Kamprad's (decent) Swedishness saved him from his (crude) Germanness, thus recuperating for all Swedes their self-image as a peaceful and democratic nation compared to their historically aggressive and fascist neighbor. Kamprad's explanation and apology, which Torekull (1998/1999) has called an "almost perfect case for any mass media seminar at management level" (p. 146),⁶ semantically recuperated the basic goodness of Småland—and thus the basic goodness of IKEA—from the contamination of dangerous ideas brought in from the outside.

At issue here is not the extent to which Kamprad is truly Swedish—this, I argue, is a constructed identity—but rather the cultural signs that mark him as an insider in a community that makes clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders. For example, had Kamprad descended from non-Europeans, as do a growing number of offspring of immigrant parents today, would his birth and upbringing in Småland be enough to declare him a product of resourceful, hardworking, peasant Swedish stock? Would millions of workers and customers have accepted his apology and explanation for youthful racist activities "on the strength of his (non)blue eyes"? This question is important precisely because Småland continues to serve as a symbolic site for Swedish national culture. For example, as recently as June 2004, an IKEA designer made a clear distinction between the work ethic of Swedes versus non-Swedes to a reporter for the British newspaper *The Guardian*:

Over noodles at Ikea's staff restaurant, I ask one designer whether everyone at the company is really as energetic and hardworking as they seem. Isn't anyone lazy? "Of course there are lazy people," she says. "There are lazy people everywhere. But they're not. . . ." She pauses, as if seeking the correct word in English. In fact, she's wondering whether what she is about to say will cause offence. "They're not Swedish," she says at last. (Burkman, 2004)

IKEA's premise, then, in situating Småland symbolically at its entrance, is that everything you are about to experience as a customer is a direct result of indigenous Swedish ingenuity, imported from the mystical forests of Småland in southern Sweden. This premise is reinforced by the distinctly Nordic names of all of the products in the Showrooms and the Marketplace as customers follow the organized walkway through the store and by the Swedish ethnic restaurant and food shop at the store's center. At the same time, this linguistic exclusiveness establishes a clear ideational boundary between Swedes (and along with them, other Scandinavians, as Swedish is quite similar to Danish and Norwegian) and everyone else. The IKEA archive thus begins its instructional narrative with the idea that although people worldwide can benefit from

Swedish products that will make their lives more pleasant, this will never make them Swedish. The secret to indigenous Swedish ingenuity, the preface to this narrative states, is far away, in the soil and the mystical forests of Småland. This accounts for the company's policy that all new company executives attend a weeklong training in the "IKEA Way" in a remote conference center in Älmhult, the small town in Småland where IKEA opened its first store in 1958, even though Kamprad and his family have lived abroad since 1973. When Kamprad retired in 1985, the company executive appointed to replace him, Anders Moberg, also was the son of a farmer from just outside Älmhult, continuing the symbolic genealogy of Småland-sired resourcefulness, industriousness, and business genius. As Kamprad's biographer writes, "IKEA becomes something of a nationalistic project in which whatever is Smålandish is just the necessary starting point" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 122). But viewed in the context of Kamprad's historical ties to Swedish supremacist thinking, as well as the way in which Småland is co-opted as a symbolic site in the Swedish national imagination (and not just IKEA's), this claim of geographical-hereditary grounds for a distinctly Swedish genius becomes deeply problematic.

It is important to note here that Kamprad's exposure to, and involvement in, Swedish racist political organizations was not exceptional for his generation. These organizations drew support for their political ideas from racial biologists and anthropologists whose work was at the time considered sound science. In 1921, for example, Dr. Herman Lundborg, chairman of the Institute of Racial Biology at Uppsala University in Sweden, had published *The Swedish Nation in Word and Picture* with the cooperation of the Swedish Society for Race-Hygiene. Building on the work of the famous Swedish 18th-century botanist Carl Linnaeus, who classified races of people as well as plants,⁷ Lundborg's book promoted the identification and separation of "superior" Nordic races and "inferior" non-Nordic ones. He further advocated for the adoption of a national eugenics policy. Sweden's Social Democratic government did, in fact, pursue a eugenics policy from the 1930s through the 1970s, although primarily on sociological, rather than racial, grounds, because of the influence of the famous Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal and his wife, the sociologist (and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate) Alva Myrdal (see Broberg & Tydén, 2005). The point here, accordingly, is not to label Kamprad a racist or IKEA a racist company but rather to examine critically the Swedish nationalist discourses that have become imbedded in the symbolic spaces, and the symbolic narrative, of Sweden's most recognized archive of national culture.

As Derrida (1995) writes, "there is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority" (p. 14). IKEA fulfills this role in every aspect. The home furnishings giant consigns, or delivers with the seal of authority, a brand allegory of essential Swedishness to the global marketplace. Industrialists and business schools consider its technique of repetition masterful. Every one of its 285 stores is painted in cheerful Swedish blue and yellow, making it easily visible and recognizable from nearby highways, and the plastic shopping bags inside the store are similarly colored. At any given IKEA store, people know what to expect. The layout, the products, and the shopping experience—from eating Swedish meatballs to hauling away flat packs of build-it-yourself furniture—is essentially the same, whether one shops in Krakow or in Carson, California.

It is likewise important to consider the common origins of the IKEA Concept, the functionalist style of architecture and design, and the Scandinavian social welfare model in the 1930s, a banner decade for racial biology worldwide (soon to be discredited when the atrocities of the Nazi-engineered Holocaust became fully

known). For example, the first time that Lundborg presented his work on Nordic racial types to the general Swedish public was at the historic Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, a world's fair that provided Sweden and the world with a temporary model city built according to the principles of functionalist design (see Habel, 2002; Pred, 1995; Rudberg, 1998). Functionalism (a.k.a., *funkis*), sometimes called "Swedish Modern," is a design ethos with the following principles:

- (a) high-quality merchandise for everyday use, available for all by the use of modern industrial resources;
- (b) natural form and honest treatment of material and pure and simple lines, rational forms, white buildings, open floor plans with lots of glass to let in natural light; and
- (c) aesthetically sound goods, resulting from the close cooperation of artist and manufacturer. (Myrdal, 1940/1968, p. 230)

This design ethos—particularly its emphasis on universal benefits, transparency, and a functional, healthy society—embodies the discourse of Swedish-style social democracy.⁸ It also provides a model for the famous IKEA Concept, developed two decades later and still today published on the company Web site: "Offering a wide range of well designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them" (IKEA Web site, n.d.).⁹ In 1930, the Stockholm Exhibition marketed Swedish design to the world as democracy in design, a Swedish solution to the Western world's struggles to design a functional modern society. This model society, a clear departure from previous Swedish building models, had to be sold to the Swedish public as well as to foreign visitors and architectural critics. However, it was in selling functionalism to Swedes, as a uniquely Swedish solution, that Professor Lundborg's research played a particular role. A visual explication of his work on racial types was displayed in the opening hallway of the exhibition's only monolingual Swedish-language exhibit, *Svea Rike* ("The Kingdom of Sweden"), a building that served as the exhibition's national heritage museum. Lundborg's display instructed Swedes in the racial superiority of the Nordic Teutonic types and linked Sweden's glorious political and cultural history to the essential racial constitution of its people. Large portraits of Swedish cultural icons, such as celebrated Romantic poets Esaias Tegnér and Carl Michael Bellman, appeared on the same wall as Lundborg's diagrams, cementing this link between national culture and race (see Habel, 2002).

Following the exhibition, the new Swedish social democratic regime began issuing home furnishing loans to newly married couples that required them to take courses on interior decorating in the new Swedish Modern style. Myrdal (1940/1968) wrote:

An advisory council has also been set up by the Arts and Crafts Society together with representatives from the organizations for employed women, youth, and housewives in a campaign to educate youth to a sense of beauty and honest cheapness. This feeling for style is extended not only to furniture, lamps, and rugs but also to every object surrounding the family from the pictures and the dinnerware to the kitchen utensils. (p. 231)

Starting in the 1930s, Swedish government and civic agencies were effectively educating an entire generation of citizens in a nascent version of the IKEA Concept long before Kamprad, born in 1926, ever articulated it as such.

The Geography of the IKEA Store

If we accept the premise that IKEA functions as an archival space, with a carefully orchestrated narrative of progress, it is important to continue our organized walking, away from Småland and toward the Design Center. We have now embarked on a journey among individual showrooms—living rooms, bedrooms, kids' rooms, home offices, dining rooms, and kitchens—that have been furnished and decorated according to IKEA's standards of well-designed, functional good taste. (On the IKEA Web site, customers can simulate this kind of organized walking in cyberspace by clicking on model room settings in which their target products appear.) The individual names for the furniture pieces and their accents sound exotic to non-Nordic customers and cozily familiar to Nordic shoppers. The variety of styles and settings within each type of room space reinforces the authority of Swedish design genius. IKEA plays up its exotic Nordic veneer in its marketing along with the notion that the company works miracles in managing to provide such creative and functional home products at such a low price. Fervent anticipation of the arrival of this Swedish "miracle" actually sparked stampedes in Saudi Arabia in 2004 and in North London in 2005 when new IKEA stores offered vouchers to the first wave of customers.¹⁰

Yet distinguishing between types of shoppers, and inspiring customer frenzy by promising miracles within, is not the only kind of archival violence at work in the Nordic naming idiom of the IKEA store. Highlighting Swedish and Nordic geographies through such monolingualism simultaneously represses other, non-Nordic geographies, in particular the names and languages of places in the 50 countries where IKEA's 1,350 suppliers are located and where the majority of IKEA's home furnishing products are manufactured (IKEA Group, 2007). Paul Carter (1987) describes the process of naming, particularly in the geographical imaginations of Europeans, as highly powered. The logic of naming, Carter argues, extends from the colonialist idea that a space has no history or identity prior to the moment of naming: "It was the names themselves that brought history into being, that invented the spatial and conceptual coordinates within which history could occur" (p. 46). The act of endowing IKEA's home furnishing products with Nordic names, accordingly, erases their non-Nordic history prior to the moment of naming—that is, erases the labor of thousands of people in non-Nordic countries. Although IKEA does not explicitly deny the work of its non-Nordic suppliers, subcontractors, and distributors (and in fact carries out much praised development programs in many of these countries),¹¹ these workers' labor is erased from the Showroom floor and from IKEA's organized and progressive archival narrative of ingenious Swedish labor, inscribed via Nordic names.

This moment of archival violence threatens the moral authority of the famous IKEA Concept, published on the company Web site: offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them. IKEA claims in its literature that it has chosen to side with "the many," that is, ordinary people who work hard for a living and deserve to have well-designed, low-cost furniture, rather than "the few" who make lots of money and can afford expensive furniture. In all of its company literature, Kamprad and IKEA executives stress that IKEA's primary goal is to make the world a better place by making individuals' home lives more enjoyable (Torekull, 1998/1999). Yet this commitment IKEA makes to "the many" customers (who are, according to IKEA corporate sales figures, primarily European, Asian, and North American) is only viable as long as it can maintain low labor costs, which it achieves through the inexpensive

labor in developing markets in Eastern Europe and Asia (Cafferri, 2004; Torekull, 1998/1999). On the company Web site, IKEA explains that it can fulfill its unique promise to customers by requiring its designers (represented pictorially by a blonde woman with a light bulb over her head) to start with setting a production cost for a new product and then find a way to design and produce the product that meets its cost projection. The indispensable contributions of laborers in developing countries are represented neither in word nor image in the Web site's explanation of the IKEA Concept.

Ngugi wa' Thiong'o (1993) identifies such moments of erasure as ideologically racist and materially neocolonialist acts that obscure Europe's role in creating third-world poverty and allow Europe to maintain its self-image as benevolent capitalists:

Racism obscures the fact that the wealth of Europe and America (and Japan) is partly made out of the labour of Asia, Africa, and South America. The wealth of the West is rooted in the poverty of the rest of us. This is true historically. Western Europe and North America accumulated capital through the slave trade, slave labour, and colonial labour . . . reality is turned upside down. Propagandists of Western capital make it seem as if it is their capital which creates wealth in the "Third" World. Such countries, bled daily into ever-mounting poverty, are nevertheless expected to show gratitude to that Western capital. (p. 118)¹²

Sweden, with its international image as a peaceful and just nation, would seem to be exempt from such colonial and neocolonial equations. Yet here too the Swedish national memory represses certain internalized violences. Although Sweden's role in the transatlantic slave trade was never as extensive as that of larger kingdoms, Sweden did operate slave forts on Africa's West Coast in the 17th century, and it furthermore commissioned the Swedish West Indies Company (1786-1805) to transport enslaved Africans to the Caribbean and open foreign markets—including colonial ones—to Swedish products. From 1785 to 1878, Sweden, having received the small island of St. Barthelémy from France in a trade for shipping rights, ran the colony as a free trade zone for the sale and purchase of enslaved Africans throughout the Caribbean. The island's capital city, still today named Gustavia after the Swedish king, was, under Swedish rule, home to the largest slave auctions in the Caribbean. Unlike Denmark's colonization of the Danish West Indies (today the U.S. Virgin Islands), Sweden never established a plantation economy on St. Barthelémy; however, Gustavia's free trade zone proved highly profitable. When the United States and Great Britain went to war in 1812, many of the enslaved from other island colonies took refuge on St. Barthelémy. The Swedish crown profited greatly from the subsequent sale of these would-be war refugees (Kent, 2000, p. 362). The fact that this aspect of Sweden's history is not commonly known—even among Swedes—has allowed Sweden to perpetuate its self-image as a nation that historically has demonstrated moral leadership in human rights as well as business acumen. Although Kamprad was forced to disclose and apologize for his youthful involvement with racist political organizations, Sweden has never participated in such a public accounting for its participation in the transatlantic slave trade.¹³ Yet this exploitative practice benefited Sweden economically and politically at a critical moment in its development as a modern nation-state (see Harrison, 2007; Kent, 2000). Sweden became a player in the inequitable global economic system that the transatlantic slave trade set up.

IKEA further has sought to maintain its reputation as a "Teflon multinational" (*Newsweek*, 2001), a global company that distinguishes itself from antiglobalization

targets such as Nike and Walmart by investing in programs that seek to end child labor in developing countries and promote a sustainable environment. IKEA's actions have garnered praise from United Nations Children's Fund and helped nurture its image as a company that takes social responsibility seriously (Cafferri, 2004, p. 53). Yet the outward benevolence of such corporate action obscures the fact that IKEA could not exist as a company if the standards of living in the developing countries were to reach Scandinavian levels.¹⁴ Furthermore, Kamprad makes clear in his biography who benefits most from the IKEA Concept: "In the long run [without suppliers in developing countries], we would not have achieved our international expansion, which today brings billions in income to Sweden and low prices for our Swedish customers" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 159). It is, therefore, in IKEA's interest to invest in specific projects that improve the lives of "the few" people in developing countries but do not seek to change fundamentally the economic inequities for "the many" in these countries. In the labor-producing developing countries, the IKEA Concept functions in reverse, for the benefit of consumers and capitalists in Sweden. In fact, IKEA's latest initiative, BoKlok (literally, "live sensibly"), which manufactures prefabricated homes at low cost, is currently available only to customers in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, which are among the wealthiest—and least densely populated—countries in the world.

The IKEA Family and the People's Home

A paradox central to the national archive of the IKEA store is that it embodies the home space, traditionally the domain of women, yet engenders patriarchal—Derrida (1995) calls it "archontic"—power. One reason for this is, again, its function as a carefully engineered museum space as well as a commercial space. A primary function of the modern Western museum has been to construct participatory evolutionary narratives of rational progress that position Europeans as more advanced than non-Europeans and simultaneously situate women, not as agents of evolutionary change but rather the bodies upon which narratives of male progress are inscribed (Bennett, 1995, p. 207). The progenitor of such evolutionary progress is historically represented as male. IKEA's domestic spaces, then, function as a feminine corpus that displays and showcases rational male design. The actual sex of individual designers is beside the point, as the designs are not clearly differentiated as products of individual genius but rather as products of corporate and national genius.¹⁵ IKEA's commercial dimension accentuates the powered gender dimension of the store because IKEA's designs start with setting a maximum price for the home furnishing product, then designing the product to meet that price. All other design considerations, accordingly, defer to capital, which in the IKEA organization—as in Sweden at large—still is controlled by male executives.¹⁶ "We were sitting in a product range meeting the other day, all day long," Kamprad states in his biography. "People came in to report, perhaps all in all twenty-five people, but not one single woman. I think that is strange" (Torekull, 1998/1999, p. 96)

Kamprad's statement implies that women in management positions should somehow occur naturally at a democratic and Swedish company such as IKEA. But a management discourse that remains deeply rooted in the familial metaphor—Kamprad addresses his annual Christmas speech to "my IKEA family"—constructs an unnatural and powered hierarchy, one that historically assumes the subordination of the female body to male economic power. In addition, the company's conscious appropriation of nationalist

discourse forges a semantic link between the institutional family of the domestic sphere and the metaphorical family of the political and economic spheres. McClintock (1995) reminds us that the idea of “nation” is a historically recent—and Western capitalist—phenomenon and further asserts that “all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalists’ ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*” (p. 353). Accordingly, women function as bearers of culture to distinguish different male nationalisms from one another. IKEA, then, functioning as a national archive, gathers to itself distinctly male and Swedish discourses of political, economic, and cultural authority and performs this authority in a space that is symbolically domestic and feminine but materially commercial and masculine. Female shoppers and children constitute the majority of IKEA’s visitors, who totaled 583 million in 2007. As they participate in the organized walking, sitting, playing, and other activities of simulated domestic life in an IKEA store, they are not exercising agency as consumers but rather have become actors in a gendered, nationalist narrative directed by patriarchal power. Female customers’ domestic labor, through the activities of shopping and looking after their children, results in enormous profits for IKEA.

IKEA is hardly exceptional in not having a substantial representation of women in their corporate management. Women hold only 11.2% of corporate board seats in the largest 200 companies in the world, according to a report the Corporate Women Directors International presented at a Berlin summit in June 2007. But in the Nordic countries, and particularly in Sweden, the bar for gender parity historically has been set higher, largely because of the much-touted successes of the Scandinavian model of social welfare in improving the lives of women and children. For example, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland ranked in the top four globally in the World Economic Forum’s annual Global Gender Gap Report for 2007, which measures an individual country’s successes in closing the gap in women’s access to resources and opportunities relative to men in the same country.¹⁷ In addition, women have made up nearly half the members of the Swedish Parliament since the 1970s, and throughout Scandinavia, women are highly active in party politics. But Sweden, unlike Norway, Finland, and Iceland, has never had a female prime minister or president. And most tellingly, only 13% of Swedish corporate boards currently consist of women (up from 10% just a few years ago). In 2002, in an attempt to fill this gender gap, Norway took the controversial step of introducing legislation that would mandate that women occupy 40% of corporate board seats within 3 years or face penalties ranging from fines to termination of the company. Norway actually met this quota by 2008, becoming the first country in the world to do so. Without such quotas, “if organic growth is 3 percent every 10 years, it would have taken 100 years to get to 40 percent,” Elin Hurvenes, the Norwegian entrepreneur who founded the Professional Board Forum, was quoted as saying in the *International Herald Tribune* (Reier, 2008). Sweden introduced similar legislation in 2006, and other European countries are considering it, even while debate continues about the usefulness of such legislation (see Terjesen & Singh, 2008). Thus, although Sweden and the Nordic countries generally rank high globally in achieving some measure of gender equality, these gains have been primarily in women’s participation in politics and the work force and not in facilitating their rise to positions of corporate and political executive leadership. Political reforms in Sweden, and in Scandinavia generally, have meant that women can combine professional careers with motherhood and increase their households’ disposable incomes (making them highly desirable IKEA customers). Yet when it comes to controlling capital, rather than the

household purse strings, the glass ceiling remains firmly in place for women at IKEA, in Sweden, and worldwide (see Hobson, 2006).

What do we make, then, of Sweden's reputation as a model society for women's rights? This is a particularly salient question given that the treatment of women is a marker many Swedes use to differentiate "civilized" Swedish culture from "less advanced" cultures brought into Sweden by new waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In the past decade, certain high-profile "honor killings" of young women by their immigrant fathers in Sweden have caused some Swedes to implicate seemingly barbaric and foreign cultures rather than patriarchal violence or the individual killers themselves. The most well-known case is that of Fadime Şahindal, who was killed by her Kurdish immigrant father in 2002 following her relationship with a Swedish man. Şahindal had won a lawsuit against her father and brother after they threatened and stalked her, but her father still succeeded in shooting her to death in front of her mother and sisters. In a scholarly study published 4 years earlier, Åsa Elden (1998) describes a less well-known Swedish court case in which a Christian Arab father living in Sweden was tried for killing his daughter over her relationship with a Muslim man. Although the killing was premeditated, because the father testified that he was forced to kill his daughter to preserve his honor, the Swedish court ruled that the father's "Arab" culture presented an extenuating circumstance and convicted him of manslaughter rather than murder. Elden writes, "In this case the court adopts norms which are considered to be characteristic of Arab culture. This adoption makes the description of Arab and Swedish gender norms as opposites only ostensible" (p. 94). Perceptions of gender norms as culture based, Elden argues, not only erroneously present multiple cultures within a given society as essential, fixed, and differentiated, these perceived gender norms also allow those affiliating with a dominant, national culture—in this case, Swedish—to understand their own culture as civilized and humane in comparison to barbaric "Arab" culture. But Elden argues that this court ruling showcases Swedish institutional misogyny and racism rather than a generic Arab culture. She writes, "When the court explicitly used (the father's) interpretation of the necessity of the crime as a point of departure for its own argumentation and judgment, the life of 'the Arab woman' (Hanan) was as worthless to the court as it was to (the father)" (p. 94).

Here is where McClintock's (1995) distinction between "family as metaphor" and "family as institution" is particularly apt. In a Swedish context, "family as metaphor" is *folkhemmet*, the people's home, the national household to which Swedes contribute equally and get an equal share of services in return. But as McClintock correctly points out, the historical and metaphorical uses of the "family" for nationalist purposes have been anything but benevolent. In fact, the idea of "family" has been applied to many powered relational structures, usually to establish social differences that the family model can then arrange hierarchically. Depicting social differences in familial terms, McClintock argues,

guarantee[s] social difference as a category of nature. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial—the "national family," the global "family of nations," the colony as a "family of black children ruled over by a white father"—depended this way on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere. (p. 358)

Thus, in calling the Swedish social welfare state "the people's home," "a national household," and "the national family," its engineers paradoxically built difference and unequal power relations into its symbolic structures.

This accounts at least in part for ongoing national debates about whether Sweden's new, non-Western immigrants and their descendants, who now compose about 16% of Sweden's total population, are draining the socioeconomic resources of the State. (The most commonly cited evidence for this notion is the fact that as many as 60% of immigrants are unemployed—although statistically speaking, they represent only about 20% of the total number of unemployed nationwide.) But such debates have not centered on whether to raze the people's home, as there would be little mass support for such a measure. Rather, debates have centered on who should have access to it and under what conditions.¹⁸ Such debates extend the logic of the perceived differences in attitudes to women's rights; what they really amount to is whether people from cultures considered significantly different from Sweden's are worthy to be considered members of the national household. A poll the Swedish Department of the Interior conducted in 1998 revealed that "41.5 percent of teachers nationwide agreed in part or wholly with the statement that certain cultures are so different from the Swedish that people from those cultures can hardly adapt to Swedish society" (Pred, 2000, pp. 64-65). A Eurobarometer Opinion Poll published in the leading Swedish daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, that same year showed that 40% of Swedes believe that "minority groups are so different that they will never be accepted" (Pred, 2000, p. 65). Gender, race, and class become closely linked markers of difference in this nationalist narrative.

Ironically, Sweden's new suburban immigrant underclass represents a promising local market for IKEA home furnishing products, as well-designed furniture at very low prices fills a real material need for low-income families living in a country with a high cost of living. The mass housing units on the outskirts of urban areas where many of Sweden's current-day immigrants now live were built by the State in the 1960s and 1970s to provide affordable housing for Sweden's working class, including an earlier wave of immigrants moving to Sweden's urban areas to meet a labor market shortage (Af Klintberg, 1989). IKEA, which had not yet gone global, was quite successful at the time in marketing its low-cost, high-design furniture to such customers. According to a Swedish saying, "Per Albin (Hansson, former prime minister and national father figure) built the 'home of the people' and Ingvar Kamprad furnished it," which is declared on a Swedish-government sponsored Web site, in English, on Swedish culture.¹⁹ Women are invisible in this domestic allegory that attributes Sweden's modern civil society to the actions of two national patriarchs, despite the fact that women's greatly increased presence in the labor market since the 1930s has played an enormous role in Sweden's economic success.

IKEA has been quick to recognize the market potential of Sweden's new immigrant families as well as the rhetorical power of advertising Sweden as an open and enlightened society amid European integration debates. The ad campaign that IKEA rolled out in late August 2008 in Sweden, timed to coincide with the arrival of the new 2009 catalog to Swedish households, continues the pedagogical function of reinforcing Sweden's enlightened image. "*Länge leve mångfalden*" (long live diversity), the campaign's theme, appears on all advertising as well as the 2009 catalog cover. IKEA billboards in open marketplaces and subway stations feature portraits of a variety of smiling faces of varying ages, genders, and ethnicities—portraits that on closer inspection turn out to be composed of montages of tiny color photographs of IKEA products, complete with price tags. The ads semantically suggest that IKEA's product line actually constructs the social diversity that has come to mark 21st-century Sweden. In one such portrait, for example, a deep red DIOD glass, priced at a mere 15 crowns, is the center point of a dark-skinned woman's throat. A full-page IKEA ad that

ran in *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest daily, in August 2008 has the headline "There Is Not a Single Normal Person in This Country." The ad text begins:

We are all different. Our skin tones come in thousands of shades. We believe in different things (or in nothing at all). Some guys are attracted to guys, some gals to gals. And there are nearly as many kinds of families as there are families. Isn't it glorious?

The ad concludes:

That is why you find 9,537 totally different products at this year's IKEA, a bunch of new ideas and a number of lower prices (to lower the threshold in to your dream home even more). Welcome to IKEA. Whoever you are.²⁰

Although the ad purports to sell a diversity of ideas and lifestyles, it is actually a cleverly repackaged version of the IKEA Concept that assumes a distinctly Swedish set of progressive values. The IKEA-constructed faces of varying genders, ages, races, and ethnicities are presented as proof of these values. Missing from IKEA's advertising, of course, is a multiplicity of voices to go with the multiplicity of faces, in particular dissenting voices.²¹

In reality, although Sweden's immigration and integration policies are considered progressive, many immigrants remain marginalized on the periphery of Swedish society. The mass housing units that house many in Sweden's new immigrant underclass have become symbolic sites in the Swedish national narrative, demonstrating again the archontic power that accompanies the household metaphor. This power, as Derrida (1995) explains, controls social and symbolic processes of unification (the national household), identification (conditions for membership), and classification (mandating difference). In Sweden, this has manifested itself in urban legends that have circulated about immigrants since this mass housing was built in the 1960s. "These rumors are not, as one might think, limited to immigrants from remote countries such as Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. They are told just as frequently about Finns," whose culture, as Af Klintberg (1989, p. 73), points out, is not dramatically different from that of Swedes. What made them outsiders was their identification with the immigrant labor class in the 1960s. Many of the urban legends Swedish folklorists have collected depict immigrants using their apartment interiors in bizarre ways, such as pickling salt pork in the bathtub and cutting holes in the hardwood floor for a Christmas tree.

By talking about the transgression of norms on the part of the immigrants—for instance, their abusing an accepted status symbol such as hardwood floors—people express what they themselves find normal. The notion that immigrants are primitive and find it difficult to adjust to the Swedish lifestyle expresses the self-identification of most Swedes with a modern, urban culture. (Af Klintberg, 1989, p. 75)

The Swedish hip hop group The Latin Kings (1994) evoke this urban legend in their pioneering hit "Snubben" ("Snoop," in the sense of a street punk), first released on their debut album *Välkommen till Förorten* (Welcome to the Suburbs): "Do you really think I grow onions in the living room / or bathe once a year?"²² A sophisticated, modern, urban identity (which excludes ethnic minority groups, who mostly are relegated to the urban periphery) is the one with which IKEA most clearly embodies. It does so in its modernist and functional designs and in its streamlined distribution

method, having customers find their own flat packs of ready-made furniture on warehouse shelves and transport it home in their own vehicles.

Habel (2002) documents how Swedish commercial films and popular culture helped construct the ideological paradigm of Swedish exceptionalism to facilitate acceptance of many new social programs, which have unquestionably improved the standard of living for Swedes. In the 21st century, as I have shown here, the ubiquitous archive of the IKEA store exemplifies and reproduces this ideological paradigm as fixed national culture. As Pred (2000) has documented, Swedes often do not recognize prevailing ideas about cultural identity as ideological constructs but rather internalize these discourses as essential and fixed facts. Integrating new immigrants into Swedish society has dominated the political agenda for two decades, and yet this apparent political will is rendered impossible by a rigid ideological paradigm defining who is essentially Swedish and who is not. As the cultural anthropologists Ehn, Frykman, and Löfgren (1993) document, a collective commitment to multiculturalism since the 1970s, as well as a corresponding spike in immigration, has paradoxically caused Swedes to seek to identify and articulate what makes them uniquely Swedish. Ehn et al. (1993) write, "Immigrants renew Swedes' idea of their native Swedishness, both by providing the Swedes with contrastive examples ('we are not such people') and by inciting cultural competition ('we certainly have *our* culture and traditions as well')" (p. 265). The powered logic that facilitates such classification makes social equality and harmonious integration impossible. IKEA plays a pivotal role in the construction, reproduction, and distribution of this idea of native, essential, and fixed Swedishness. The 285 IKEA stores worldwide reproduce daily, through the store's symbolic narrative, the conditions of the Swedish national household, which naturalize social and economic hierarchies within a symbolic domestic space. The fact that IKEA makes this process fun, magical, enjoyable, and affordable for 583 million people a year, while perpetuating Sweden's international image as a model democracy, makes IKEA arguably the most effective archive of national culture in today's global marketplace.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Nandini Dhar and Patrick Greaney, who provided feedback on early drafts; the late Allan Pred, whose work on the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 inspired this project; Mark Sandberg, who organized the panel at the 2004 Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies conference, where I presented these ideas in their earliest stages; and the editorial readers for this journal.

2. According to IKEA Group figures for FY 2008 published on its corporate site, the Group operated 253 IKEA stores in 24 countries as of August 2008, and there were an additional 32 IKEA stores owned and run by franchises outside the IKEA Group. IKEA Group operates 41 trading service offices in 30 countries.

3. For an excellent examination of this paradox, see Buck-Morss (2001).

4. This expression has such an established usage in Swedish that few Swedes would consider its racial implications. Yet this is exactly my point. (This is a statement Kamprad made in the 1990s in an interview with his biographer, describing events that had occurred 60 years earlier.)

5. For a detailed account of Kamprad's involvement with pro-German Swedish Nazi groups and Engdahl's New Swedish Movement, see Torekull (1998/1999, pp. 128-148).

6. Torekull, Kamprad's biographer, is the founder of *Dagens Industri*, the leading economic daily newspaper in Sweden.

7. For a summary of Linneaus's ideas on racial difference in English, see Pred (2000), who cites various scholars pointing out that Linneaus's celebrated *Systema Naturae* describes the

“‘temperament,’ ‘personality’ and physical attributes supposedly distinguishing each race” (p. 59). For example, an official government report from 1984, cited by Pred, quotes Linneaus as describing the

“white” race [*Homo Europeaus*] as “inventive, perceptive, meticulous, and law abiding,” while Africans [*Homo Afer*] were imag(in)ed [sic] as burdened by “negative qualities” which rendered them a drag on the superior race: they were seen as lazy, dishonest, incapable of ruling themselves. (p. 59)

8. It is important to note here that while *funkis* was heralded as a particularly Swedish solution to the problems of modernity, its architects and designers—Gunnar Asplund and Sven Markelius, the most prominent among the Swedish group—were deeply influenced by contemporary European developments in design, notably constructivism in Russia, the German Bauhaus School, and Le Corbusier’s purism (see Rudberg, 1998).

9. According to the history published on IKEA’s Web site, the company sold only small items such as pens, wallets, and picture frames when Kamprad founded it at age 17 in 1943. Furniture was added to the product line in 1948, the first IKEA catalog appeared in 1951, and the first Showroom opened in Älmhult, Sweden, in 1953. The IKEA Group today is based in the Netherlands.

10. In the aftermath of the 2005 stampede, IKEA has said it will no longer offer voucher promotions that could spark violence. Still, a humorous television advertisement aired in North America in early 2008 plays on the idea that IKEA’s prices are so extraordinarily low, they will turn ordinary people into crazed criminals. The ad features a woman staring in disbelief at her receipt at the IKEA register, looking around furtively to check if anyone is going to stop her, then screaming to her husband to “start the car!” as she runs into the parking lot to make her getaway with IKEA loot presumably too cheap to be legal.

11. For details about IKEA’s specific development projects and partnerships with nongovernmental organizations, see (IKEA Group Corporate Site, n.d.). Cafferri (2004) also discusses these initiatives in some detail.

12. Cafferri (2004) writes:

According to the company’s supplier figures, 18% of the production originates in China and 12% in Poland. True, a substantial percentage (9%) comes from Ikea’s country of origin, Sweden, and a large part is also made in Italy (7%), but major growth in the last few years has occurred primarily in the countries of the former Soviet bloc and Asia: Romania, Hungary, Pakistan, China and India. (p. 52)

13. The publication in autumn 2007 of Swedish historian Dick Harrison’s controversial second installment in his ambitious three-volume world history of slavery, written for a popular audience, has recently raised public awareness of Sweden’s role in the transatlantic slave trade. But his book has been met with strong criticism from Africanists and activists of African descent living in Sweden who argue that the book blames the proliferation of this trade on African leaders in a way that downplays the role of European traders. In effect, their critique is that Harrison is simultaneously revealing to a general Swedish audience that Sweden was involved in the transatlantic slave trade and mitigating this traumatizing fact by insisting that Africans were at least as responsible for this development in slavery’s history as Swedes (and Europeans generally).

14. Sweden ranked sixth in the world among “most livable countries” in the United Nations’ Human Development Report for 2007. The Nordic countries historically have scored highly in this annual report, with Norway ranking first or second several years in a row. Iceland was first in 2007.

15. Although IKEA includes portraits and biographies of individual IKEA designers in its literature, it is the IKEA Concept that is emphasized in the catalogs and on the Showroom floor, and the designers are lauded for their ingenuity in implementing the IKEA Concept (see *IKEA Catalog 2008* (2007), p. 70).

16. Although about 40% of the *Riksdag* (Swedish parliament) are women, this representation drops dramatically, to 10% women, on corporate boards.

17. Denmark ranked 8th, the United Kingdom 11th, Australia 17th, Canada 18th, and the United States 31st (see World Economic Forum, 2008). The Global Gender Gap Report for 2008 was to be released in November 2008, after the press deadline for this article.

18. This was the most compelling issue in the September 2006 Swedish national elections, in which the conservative party, *Moderaterna*, succeeded in taking over the leadership from *Social Demokraterna* (the Social Democrats).

19. This axiom is well known among Swedes. In Swedish, this expression is “Per Albin Byggde Folkhemmet, Ingvar Kamprad Möblerade Det.”

20. The Swedish original reads “*Det Finns Inte en Enda Normal Människa i det Här Landet. Vi Är Alla Olika. Våra Hudtoner Går i Tusentals Nyanser. Vi Tror På Olika Saker (Eller Ingenting Alls). En del Killar Dras Till Killar, en del Tjejer Till Tjejer. Och det Finns Nästan Lika Många Familjkonstellationer som det Finns Familjer. Visst Är Det Härligt! . . . Därför Hittar du 9 537 Helt Olika Produkter På Årets IKEA, en Mängd Nya Idéer Och Ett Antal Lägre Priser (För Att Sänka Tröskeln in Till Ditt Drömhem Ännu Mer). Välkommen Till IKEA. Vem Du Än Är.*”

21. This is not surprising given the nature of advertising. IKEA, like many successful multinational corporations, guards its brand image very closely. For example, this journal made a written request to Inter IKEA Systems B.V. for permission to reproduce IKEA’s catalogue cover and in-store map with this article. The company’s managing director for legal affairs, Gabrielle Olsson Skalin, wrote in a letter dated July 3, 2008 (personal communication), that such permission would be extended only “to use IKEA Retail Systems images related in a favorable context for your article” and “under the condition that Inter IKEA Systems B.V. shall have the right to pre-read the draft book upon specific request before publication and have the right to leave comments.” The journal opted not to publish IKEA-copyrighted images under those conditions.

22. Translation is mine. The original lyrics are “Tror du verkligen ja odlar lök i vardagsrummet/ eller badar en gang om året?”

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