

# Boris Johnson's input on the burka should be welcomed by Muslims

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IS Boris Johnson an Islamophobe? That is the question some people are asking after his article about the burka ban in Denmark.



The deluge of criticism against Johnson is not so much about the fact that he is against a total ban but about his description of women dressed in burkas as ridiculous and going around looking like letterboxes.

Separately he said that if a female student turned up at school or at a university lecture looking like a bank robber then he would feel entitled to ask her to remove it.

People have called Boris Johnson's comments hate speech and have compared this to the crisis facing Jeremy Corbyn about anti-Semitism and say that these comments are not suitable for someone who may become the next leader of the Conservative Party.

While many may not agree with Boris's choice of words, he is right in implying that that the burka is not a great fashion statement and even less so a religious one. He has also rightly said that in the Quran there is no justification for this odd dress choice and therefore it cannot be Islamic.

But Johnson is not alone in his rejection of this unusual clothing, now increasingly asserted as part of a religious identity. In 1958 President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt laughed at the Muslim Brotherhood for wanting to introduce the veil into Egyptian law so that every woman would be obliged to wear it.

Even before Nasser, in the 1920s Mustafa Kemal Ataturk encouraged Turkish women to give up the veil.

If we accept the burka, should men also be allowed to walk about with their faces fully concealed if it was

part of their religion or culture? Would women feel comfortable about men approaching them and would this be acceptable in public buildings such as banks?

There is no consensus about the burka even in Muslim society. As seen in countries like Pakistan, this really depends on how religious or liberal your family is. Women dress according to their upbringing, wearing a head dress of sorts or none. The question that needs to be asked is if this is compatible with Quranic values, because this is what makes it Islamic or not. Otherwise it's just a cultural matter.

Imams too differ in opinion, depending on which country and to which congregation they are preaching. But the fact that the majority of Muslim women around the world don't wear the burka says it all. While many will agree that some sort of head covering is a sign of modesty, most women don't like the burka and only those who are unfamiliar with the Quran insist that it is proper Islamic dress. Sadly, it has wrongly become a symbol of Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The real reason has more to do with the fact that their men are insecure and harbour a deep distrust of their women. Imposing the veil suggests that men suspect their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of being potential traitors. Do they really think that their women are inherently corrupt or easily seduced?

How can such Muslim men meet other women who are not veiled and treat

them respectfully, and not accord the same respectful treatment to the women in their own families? The Quran forbids groundless suspicion of any description. Why should only women be presumed guilty without evidence?

There is no clothing that can be termed as "Islamic" or "unIslamic". The Quran does not promote any particular traditional or tribal clothing and allows freedom of dress in line with modesty for both for women and men.

In fact, there are many instances in the Quran that show how openly men and women mixed with each other, while maintaining their integrity and the values that the Quran bids all believers to apply.

Muslims, instead of being critical of Boris Johnson's comments, should welcome his input into the debate. His comments are not Islamophobic but bring to our attention that the burka is a strange dress for an open and progressive society such as ours.

In this instance Johnson is right, even if his choice of words may not appeal to everyone. But that's Boris, colourful and controversial.

Johnson said that the burka was never part of Islam, and I not only agree with him but would add that it should also not be a part of Britain.

**Paigham Mustafa** has been researching and studying the Quran since 1988 and spent over two years writing his book, *The Quran: God's message to Mankind*, published in 2016, and is available from Amazon. For more information please visit [www.signat.co.uk](http://www.signat.co.uk)