

## Sarkozy - The naked truth

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley  
Tuesday, 30 June 2009

POLITICAL opportunist Nicolas Sarkozy forgot three fundamental lessons when he decided to denounce the burka. The first one is that men should stay well clear of becoming embroiled in expressing opinions on women's clothes, unless of course you happen to be called Lacroix, Gaultier, Lagerfeld or Ghesquiere.

POLITICAL opportunist Nicolas Sarkozy forgot three fundamental lessons when he decided to denounce the burka.

The first one is that men should stay well clear of becoming embroiled in expressing opinions on women's clothes, unless of course you happen to be called Lacroix, Gaultier, Lagerfeld or Ghesquiere.

This was a lesson learned the hard way by former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw who was pilloried when he questioned the nikab after asking a female constituent to lift her veil so he could see her face.

Could you imagine him making the same request of any female members of the Saudi royal household during one of his galloping missions to the Middle East?

Foolishly Scotsmen Gordon Brown and John Reid, hailing from a country where men wear pleated skirts and paint their faces blue, then waded in with the grace of a couple of dancing bears.

Even the Bishop of Rochester - a man who wears a pointy hat and a purple dress - chipped in his dislike of the nikab, full face veil or burka.

Of course they were all despatched very quickly by Muslim women in Britain who proved themselves to be anything but oppressed, subjugated creatures. And just to show their real solidarity across women of faith and no faith, quite a few western feminists expressed their disdain at Straw and co while standing shoulder to shoulder with their Muslim sisters.

The second lesson is try and be sincere if you are taking up a cause. Sarkozy feigned his utmost respect for women by saying he felt the burka represented the unacceptable symbol of women's enslavement - today I can unveil him to be a purveyor of weasel words.

If he really cared about the subjugation of women he would seriously tackle the appalling levels of domestic violence French women suffer at the hands of French men - two million are victims of bullying, violent partners ... a staggering 400 are murdered by their spouse.

So how many women in France actually wear the burka? The answer is a very tiny minority - so much so that when the BBC's Emma Jane Kirby went to interview a burka-wearing woman in Paris she couldn't find a single one!

The former BBC's Europe correspondent went to the Muslim quarter in the capital but all she could find were lots of women of North African origin wearing hijabs. She was given blank expressions and shrugs of the shoulder when she asked if any of them knew women who wore burkas - and the local Islamic dress shops didn't stock any.

So why would Sarkozy launch such an onslaught on the burka, describing Muslim women who wear it as 'prisoners behind a grille, cut off from social life, deprived of their identity'?

As pointed out by one Islamic observer: 'The irony is that many Muslim women would say the current headscarf ban in France has created exactly this situation for them'.

Well the real reason had nothing to do with the burka and everything to do with Sarkozy putting pressure on the Liberal Left, throwing a few cheap shots at the expense of Muslim women while trying to pick up a few votes at their expense as well.

Sarkozy, like many male politicians, is pretty gutless so in a pathetic attempt to disguise his real motivations in wanting to pick up votes, he invents a proposed ban of the burka as a defence of women's rights. This, he knows will go down well with the French electorate who see veiled women as a threat to their liberal self esteem.

Using women to win votes is a common political ploy - I remember when Tony Blair and George W Bush claimed their invasion in Afghanistan was in defence of women's rights and designed to liberate Afghan women.

Those two even used and pushed their own dotting wives to stand in front of the world's media to justify their husband's invasion of the country - on a recent visit I can tell you there are few career women emerging from the rubble of Kabul.

So next time a politician tries to drive through any form of controversial measure or make a spectacular announcement, please don't fall for the mealy-mouthed excuse that they're doing it for the liberation of women and/or ethnic minority groups.

Reading the weekend newspaper opinion pages and columnists, I was amazed at how many supposedly intelligent, feminists fell for the Sarkozy bull. But they did - hook, line and sinker exhibiting an astonishing shallowness in their writing.

I genuinely have a feeling Sarkozy is one of these weak-kneed, lily-livered men who trembles at the thought of empowered women. And I think the sight of a woman in a burka makes him feel inferior.

Could it be that because his wife - as beautiful as she is - has bared all for every man on the planet to ogle, that the very sight of a burka-clad female makes him feel insecure in his own relationship?

As any European schoolboy can testify from the pictures Blu-tacked to his ceiling, to the crumpled, sticky torn out, somewhat crusty pages of last year's GQ hidden under their bed, France's First Lady is the stuff of male fantasies.

I suppose there must be some men around who might get a kick out of the thought of pre-pubescent boys fumbling over pictures of their wife in the buff ... or even dirty old, syphilitic men playing with themselves, but I wonder if the pocket-sized French Leader (a mere 5ft 5ins tall) is secure and confident in his marriage to a much younger woman? Consider this, if a woman chooses to be veiled rather than show her face to a man, is she doing so to protect her husband's feelings, in which case she could be seen as being compliant and servile, or - more importantly - is she doing so to protect her own face from the violation of a man's eyes?

Could it be that some of these women, when peering out of their burkas at the French leader, feel so special that they do not want the likes of him staring at all of their features?

And this, I believe, is what disturbs Sarkozy because if burka-clad women don't want to be peered or leered at by men like him then this would be seen not as a show of subjugation but a sense of female superiority.

Could it be that because every bloke on the planet who wants to, can study in detail every curve and crevice of his naked young wife, that the very sight of a burka-clad female makes him feel uncomfortable in his own relationship?

After all Mrs Sarkozy can be viewed in all her naked glory by anyone who can access the internet or a copy of last year's GQ.

And then someone paid \$91,000 for a naked portrait at a Christie's auction in New York.

On top of that it appears someone stole hundreds of "highly intimate" images of France's First Lady and an ex-lover a couple of months ago.

A fascinating stuff, but let's not dwell too long on this subject, I've yet to raise the third lesson Sarkozy needs to learn and that is: People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

A quick scratch beneath the thin veneer of public office reveals the French leader to be a sauteur.\*

And the source of this information is non other than the long-suffering Cecilia Sarkozy, who had to put up with 18 years of being married to a man with behavioural problems including being mean, cold and a serial womaniser.

In the book Cecilia, published by Flammarion in January 2008, she said of her husband: "He has a ridiculous side. He is undignified. Nicolas doesn't come over like a president. He has a real behaviour problem ... He needs someone to point it out to him. I did it for 18 years and I can't do it any more. I am the last person who can do it."

These, and other, extracts incensed Sarkozy and his estranged wife's lawyers sought an injunction to prevent publication on the grounds that the book had invaded the former first lady's privacy - not that it was inaccurate. The former French first lady Cécilia Sarkozy, divorced in October 2007, is quoted as criticising her ex-husband's morals, his parenting skills and his fitness to be president.

That must have been extremely crushing and hurtful for France's little emperor. But no more hurtful than attacking and scapegoating harmless Muslim women. I wonder if he feels as though they are judging him from behind

their veils?

Well we're all judging France's 'Little Emperor' now and the verdict isn't a good one.

\*Sauteur: A vulgar term for a serial womaniser

\* Yvonne Ridley is a broadcast journalist and author who presents a weekly political show called The Agenda for Press TV. Her website is [www.yvonneridley.org](http://www.yvonneridley.org)