



## Islam in Europe: tame or extreme?

**There are two caricatures of Muslims in Europe. The first portrays them as religious fundamentalists, potential terrorists, cultural imperialists, resistant to modernity, and intent on establishing a European Islamic superpower.**

A second portrays them as individuals that have left repressive regimes for the relative social and political comfort of the west. These Muslims are seen as instinctive democrats, multicultural, European in their identity, peaceable, religiously nominal, secularised, and adjusting to the pattern of the 'western' nuclear family. To insist that either represents the whole picture is misleading and doesn't address the subtleties of what lies between.

Estimates conservatively suggest that the Islamic population of 50 European countries was 38,112,000 in 2009 (5% of the total European population). This figure excludes Turkey which, with 73,619,000 Muslims, has the 8<sup>th</sup> largest Islamic population of any country in the world although it includes Russia's indigenous Muslim population of 16,482,000. Following Russia, the European country with the largest Islamic population is Germany, with an estimated total of just over 4 million.

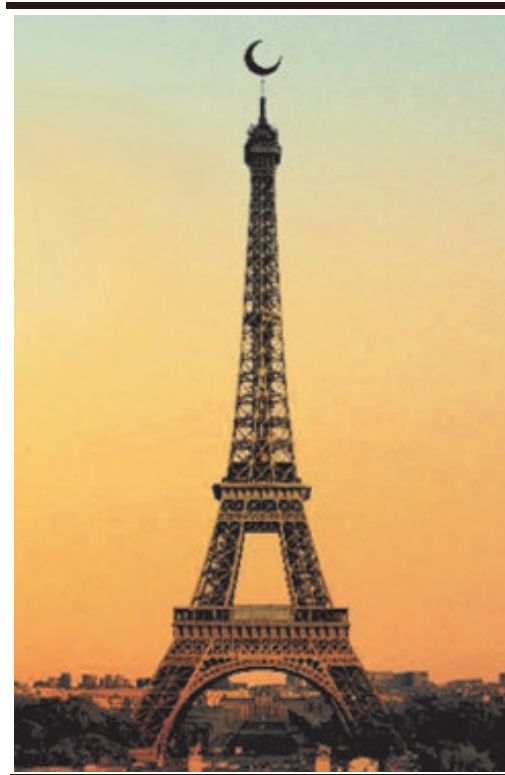
Counting Muslims in Europe is challenging. Defining 'Muslim' is tricky and suggests the need to reflect a lot more on the difference between 'cultural', or 'nominal', Muslims and those who are religiously observant.

The higher statistical estimates assume that citizens of countries with an Islamic majority who are now living in Europe are likely to be Muslims. This is problematic as, for example, it would include Coptic Christians from Iraq and Egypt who have emigrated to Europe. Secondly, even in countries with an Islamic majority (Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey) statistics indicate that 28.9% of the population of these countries never attend a mosque or attend less frequently than once a year. Thirdly, in European countries with Islamic minorities, this figure increases to 40% of the self-identified 'Muslim' population. It is hardly more reliable to use mosque attendance figures as this kind of data is not available in any consistent manner. That's the reason that the figures quoted will vary so widely (see Jim Memory's article for a discussion of the data available for Spain). We really have no foolproof way at the moment for counting Muslims.

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|                       | Estimated 2009 Muslim population | Percentage of population that is Muslim |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Russia                | 16,482,000                       | 11.7                                    |
| Germany               | 4,026,000                        | ~ 5                                     |
| France                | 3,554,000                        | ~ 6                                     |
| Albania               | 2,522,000                        | 79.9                                    |
| Kosovo                | 1,999,000                        | 89.6                                    |
| United Kingdom        | 1,647,000                        | 2.7                                     |
| Bosnia-Herzegovina    | 1,522,000                        | ~ 40                                    |
| Netherlands           | 946,000                          | 5.7                                     |
| Bulgaria              | 920,000                          | 12.2                                    |
| Republic of Macedonia | 680,000                          | 33.3                                    |
| Rest of Europe        | 3,814,000                        | 1.1                                     |
| European total        | 38,112,000                       | 5.2                                     |

Source: PEW Mapping the Global Muslim Population 2009, World Religions Database



### EDITORIAL

#### A truer view of Islam in Europe

We were delighted with the positive response to the first edition of Vista. This second issue deals with Islam in Europe and cuts through the rhetoric of both those who paint a dystopian vision that Europe will become Eurabia within a generation, and those who hope for an "alliance of civilizations" through the domestication of Islam.

We have tried to gather the most reliable statistics from across Europe to provide some factual basis for reflection. As well as the lead article on Muslim demographics, there is a feature article on Spain and another on the debate surrounding the burqa ban. We also want to provide our readers with tools for further reflection and engagement and a review article on the back page presents some key resources that are worth looking at. We hope you find this bumper 6-page edition of Vista to be both informative and useful.

JM

## How regular is mosque attendance and how observant are European Muslims?

A PEW 2008 study suggests that only 10% of Muslims in France consider religion very important in their lives whilst a further 60% say they never pray. In Belgium, a 2005 Free University of Brussels report estimated that only 10% of the Muslim population were 'practicing Muslims'. In France, a 2001 IFOP study found that 36% of Muslims self-described as 'observant believers', 20% claimed to regularly attend mosque, and 70% said they observed Ramadan.

A Swedish study of Islamic Imams in 2004 indicated that as few as 15% of second-generation Muslims in Sweden could be considered 'religiously active'. In Russia, an R&F Agency study estimated that out of 20 million officially self-identified Muslims only 35-45% practices regularly. Across this population, somewhere between two-third to three-quarters celebrates Ramadan. A 2007 report by Policy Exchange found that in the UK, 21% of Muslims had consumed alcohol, 65% were paying interest on a normal mortgage, 19% had gambled, whilst 9% admitted to having taken drugs.

Taken together, these statistics suggest that in European countries where Islam is a migrant and minority faith, one third of that Islamic population attends mosque at least once a week, a further third attends only once a year, and a final third never or rarely attends a mosque. We should take care however in drawing too close a link between mosque attendance and nominalism: it does not necessarily indicate a disassociation from Muslim identity.

## Multicultural Muslims?

A 2005 BBC poll showed that 87% of Muslims believed a multi-cultural Britain was a better place to live although 59% thought that they should be free to retain their language and customs. Most British Muslims wanted their Imams to be fluent English speakers but a 2005 study showed only 10% to be fluent in English and a 2007 University of Chester survey found that the majority of British mosque sermons were in Urdu.

There was strong agreement with the wider British population that multiculturalism should not be abandoned. There was little variance from the wider British commitment to the monarchy, flag, Britain, British society, British institutions, and learning English. 60% of Muslims in the UK agreed that British identity was principally 'Christian whilst 66% believe that Islam is compatible with British democracy. In a four nation PEW study in 2006, it was found that 62% of Muslims saw no contradiction between being Muslim and living in a modern society. In 2008, 400 Muslim organizations met under the banner of Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE) to sign a statement underlining their commitment to full and unconditional participation in the civil societies of Europe. In 2007 a Policy Exchange (PE) report found that among British Muslims, 59% preferred living under British law, compared to 28% who would prefer *sharia* law. From the same sample, 37% believed that 'one of the benefits of modern society is the freedom to criticise other people's religious or political views, even when it causes offence' whereas only 29% of the British population believes the same. Finally, 75% believe there is more diversity and disagreement within the Muslim population than other British people realize.

## Support for Islamist movements?

Many commentators have tried to define Muslim over against 'Islamist'. An Islamist is typically taken to be a Muslim who is working towards aspects of an Islamic State, irrespective of the means they might choose to achieve their ends, whether violent or not. The 2007 PEW research found only 7% of Muslims 'admire organisations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight the West'. Among 16-24 year olds this rose to 13%, compared to 3% of 55+ year olds. The greater majority of Muslims do not readily identify with a Muslim organisation. The same 2007 survey showed that only 6% of Muslims felt the Muslim Council of Britain represented their views. A majority (51%) felt that no Muslim organisation represented them.

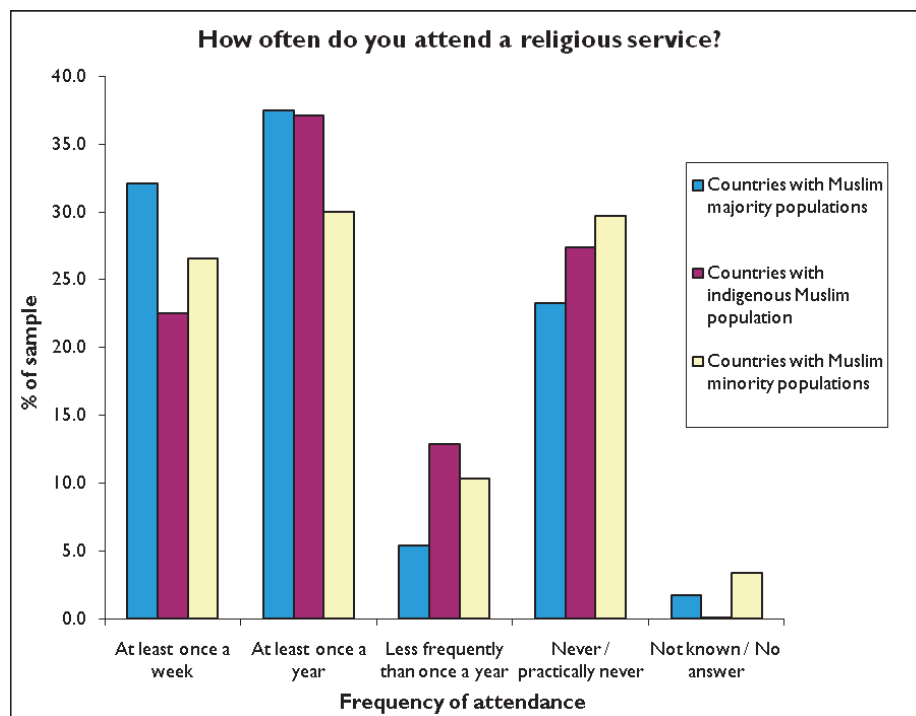
On the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2006, the leaders of 150 mosques in Birmingham jointly agreed a statement which contained the lines 'killing of innocent civilians is absolutely forbidden in Islam' and outlined steps they had taken to 'regulate the activities of every mosque to ensure that people are given the right message of calmness, civic responsibility, citizenship and Islamic behaviour in all situations.' The 2008 FIOE statement adds in similar vein that 'Islam rejects violence and terrorism [and] supports just causes.'

## A personal testimony

On the 21st February 2005 I met with Pastor Birgitta Aschan at Råslätt parish, Southern Sweden. Råslätt was built in the early 1970s and has become the centre for migrants in Småland. Father Thomas is the Syrian Orthodox Priest serving the Orthodox community there, drawn from the Iraqi refugees living in Småland. He and Pastor Birgitta celebrate eucharist in the same building and work closely together but their responses to Islam reflected their quite different experiences. Pastor Birgitta assumed the need for tolerance towards Muslims but it became clear as I listened carefully that she has much to learn from Father Thomas' experiences of persecution and oppression at the hands of Iraqi Muslims. Father Thomas assumes the need for extreme caution but it became equally clear that he has much to learn from Pastor Birgitta's experience of peaceful co-existence with Muslims in her parish.

As European Christians learn to live peaceably with their Muslim neighbours it seems necessary to avoid the dangers of either demonising Muslims or of elevating them to sainthood. The flawed nature of humanity is shared by us all and points to the common need for redemption, reconciliation, and restoration in Christ.

DJ



Source: Nova, 2009, extracted from European Values Survey data tables, 2001

## THE RECONQUEST OF SPAIN

### Radical Islamists dream of the reconquest of Al-Andalus

Wednesday of Holy Week 2010. The sound of shrill trumpets and thunderous drums fill the air as marching bands accompany the Easter processions around the streets of Cordoba. Rising above it all is the minaret turned belltower of the mosque-cathedral: a potent symbol of Spain's mixed religious heritage.

At its height, Cordoba was the greatest Islamic city of the Mediterranean, capital of the caliphate of Al-Andalus which extended over most of the Iberian peninsula. The Great Mosque, built on the ruins of a visigothic church, was the "mecca of the West" until Cordoba fell to the advancing Christian forces in 1236. That same year the Mosque was rededicated as a Christian cathedral and so it has remained.

On that Wednesday morning, among the thousands of others visiting the cathedral were a group of 120 young people from an Austrian Muslim group. Suddenly several of them fell to their knees and began praying according to the Muslim rite. The security guards asked them to desist but a scuffle broke out leading to two arrests. Afterwards a spokesman said it was a spontaneous response to the spirituality of the place.

The number of Muslims in Spain has risen from under ten thousand at the end of the 1970s to over a million today. However, it is difficult to be precise as estimates of the number of "Muslims" almost always use nationality as a measure of religious adherence. Taking the number of migrants from Muslim-majority countries (see below) and adding in Moslem migrants from other countries together with converts to Islam (estimated at 2% of Spanish Moslems) gives us a total of around 1,200,000 "Moslems". The vast majority come from North Africa.

There have not been so many Muslims in Spain since the days of the last Muslim Kingdom of Granada in 1492. Though there are only a handful of purpose-built mosques, 641 Muslim associations were registered with the Ministry of Justice at the end of 2008. The graphic below shows the concentration of Muslims in certain regions but also their presence in every province of Spain.

This "invasion" has been largely peaceful and government studies argue that the vast majority of Muslim immigrants have successfully adapted to the life and customs of Spain showing themselves to be "tolerant, Westernized and liberal and whose opinions do not differ substantially from that of Spanish citizens". But that is not the only view.

Others see the current trends as a "re-Islamization" of Spain which, whether by accident or design, is a serious threat to Spanish culture and society. They point to the rhetoric of Islamist radicals who see the liberation of the "stolen Islamic land" of Al-Andalus as the first step in the re-establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.

In his first public declaration way back in 1994, Osama bin Laden stated clearly:

*"The banner of jihad is raised up high to restore to our umma (the Islamic community) the pride and honor, and in which the banner of God's unity is raised once again over every stolen Islamic land, from Palestine to Al-Andalus"*.

Seven years later in 2001, Osama bin Laden's deputy explicitly linked the destruction of the World Trade Centre with "the tragedy in al-Andalus". And one of the most sobering findings from the investigation into the Madrid bombings in 2004 was that the attack was planned in October 2000, one year prior to 9-11 and subsequent invasion of Iraq.

More moderate Muslim leaders such as Mansur Escudero, president of the Islamic Council of Spain, condemn the terrorist attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam.



Escudero recalls the literature, architectural splendour and scientific achievements of Al Andalus, and most of all the social harmony that existed between Jews, Muslims, and Christians — its much celebrated *convivencia*. At the same time he has been a prominent advocate of the shared use of the mosque-cathedral in Córdoba, which would see a space within the cathedral dedicated to the use of Muslims.

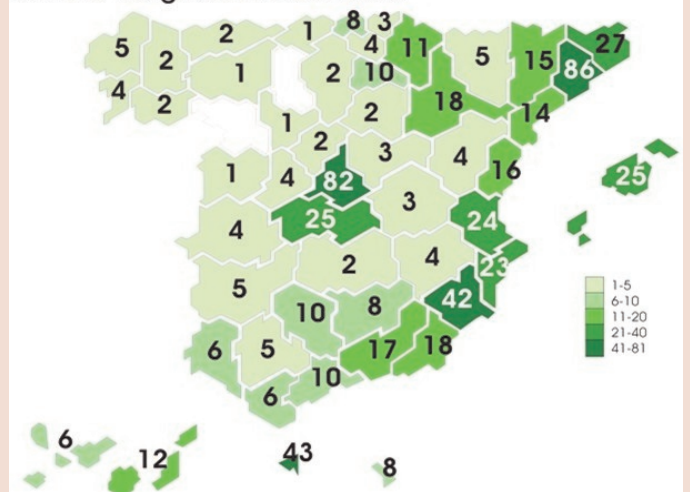
Meanwhile, others are raising money for the construction of a new great mosque, the second largest in the world on the outskirts of the city. And just a few hundred miles away across the straits of Gibraltar a new wave of persecution in Morocco has seen the expulsion of over 100 Christian foreigners, American, European and Spanish, for alleged acts of proselytism and breaking the Muslim faith.

Whilst the Spanish government praises the integration of the Muslims into society, tension is building and some fear a new religious conflict in Al Andalus is only just around the corner. As Escudero himself says: "Al-Andalus will continue being Al-Andalus for Muslims of all ages. It is there. We have created it." JM

| Nationality | Number of immigrants of this nationality | % Moslem | Estimated number of "Moslems" in Spain | % of the total "Muslim" population in Spain |
|-------------|--|----------|--|---|
| Morocco     | 746,760                                  | 99.0     | 739,292                                | 73%   |
| Senegal     | 61,383                                   | 96.0     | 58,928                                 | 6%  |
| Algeria     | 58,129                                   | 98.0     | 56,966                                 | 6%  |
| Pakistan    | 56,402                                   | 96.3     | 54,315                                 | 5%  |
| Nigeria     | 43,623                                   | 50.4     | 21,986                                 | 2%  |
| Mali        | 22,860                                   | 92.5     | 21,146                                 | 2%  |
| Gambia      | 21,288                                   | 95.0     | 20,224                                 | 2%  |
| Mauritania  | 11,343                                   | 99.1     | 11,241                                 | 1%  |
| Bangladesh  | 9,396                                    | 89.6     | 8,419                                  | 1%  |
| Others      | 33,372                                   | 50.0     | 16,686                                 | 2%  |
| Total       | 1,064,556                                |          | 1,009,202                              |   |

Source: NOVA, Instituto Nacional Estadística 2010, Pew Research Centre 2009

Islamic Religious Entities. 2008



Source: <http://www.euro-islam.info/2010/03/08/islam-in-spain/>

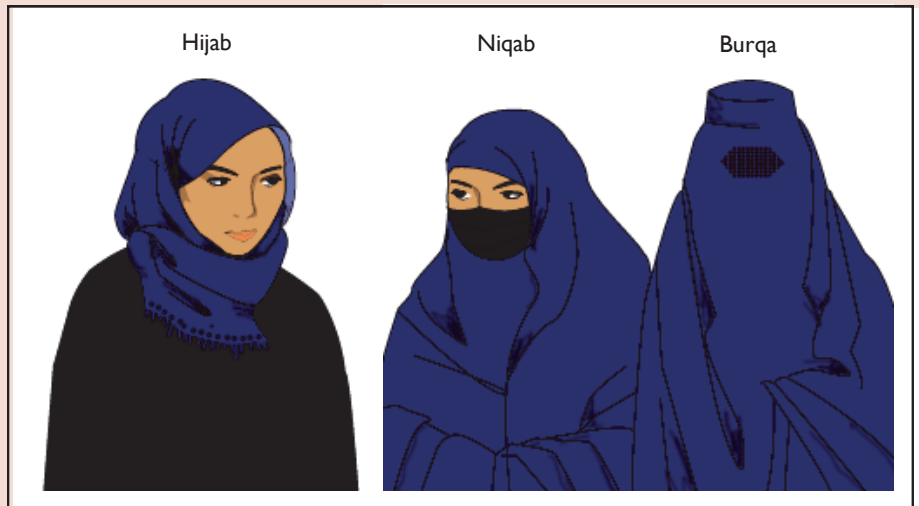
## TO BAN OR NOT TO BAN: THE BURQA DEBATE

The call for a Europe-wide ban on wearing the burqa, from the German leader of the European Parliament's Free Democrats, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, is the latest contribution to a growing debate about the rights of Muslim women to express their religious beliefs through what they wear.

The majority of Muslim women wear a headscarf or hijab in public, which leaves their faces fully visible. The niqab, or face veil, is worn with an accompanying headscarf and covers all of their faces apart from their eyes.

The burqa is the most concealing garment. A mesh screen allows the wearer to see, but they are otherwise fully covered. Koch-Mehrin has described it as a 'mobile prison' which attacks the rights of women, and represents 'values we in Europe do not share'.

This question of European values is at the heart of the discussion. Does the public wearing of the burqa or face veil represent an unacceptable oppression of Muslim women? Or would stopping them wearing it violate their right to religious freedom, guaranteed under the European Convention for Human Rights? The Belgian Lower House voted in April to ban the burqa, the decision is expected to be ratified by the



Source: BBC News

Senate after the election. France's Government may follow with a ban on wearing the burqa and face veil in public, despite the State Council rejecting the bill as 'unconstitutional'.

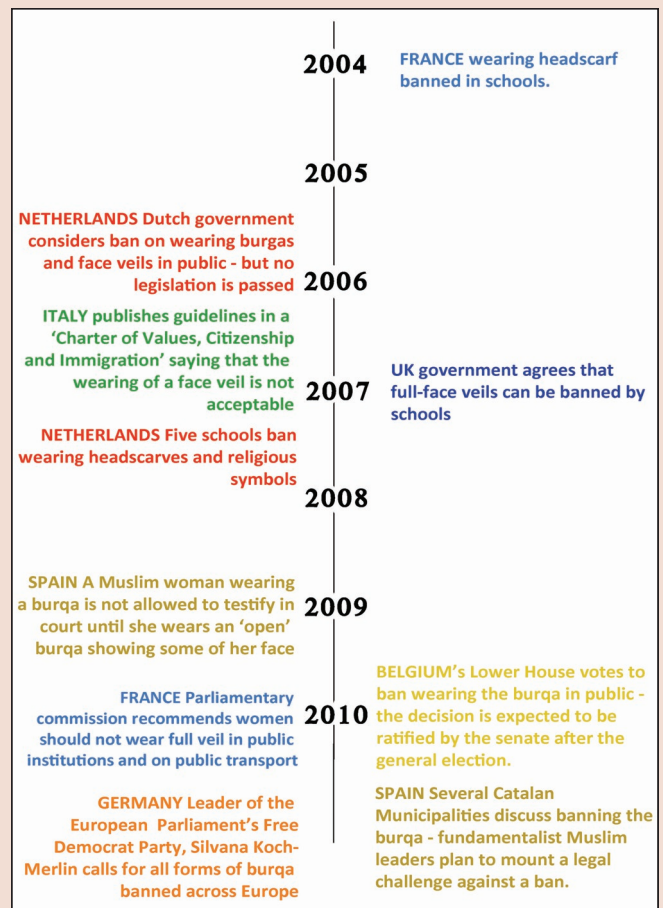
***"The burqa is a massive attack on the rights of women. It is a mobile prison."***  
**Silvana Koch-Mehrin,**  
**German MEP**

In Spain, fundamentalist Muslim leaders from Catalunya plan to take their municipal councils to court, saying the decision to implement a ban 'violates the freedom of our women to dress as they want.'

Security is another reason given by supporters of a ban, as the burqa completely covers the wearer. In 2009, a Spanish court refused to let a Muslim woman give evidence until she agreed to wear an 'open' burqa, which showed some of her face. Two years earlier in 2007, the Dutch government agreed to ban wearing the face veil and burqa in public because of security concerns, and some French advocates of a ban also cite this reason.

Public opinion in France appears to support their governments' initiative, with 70% in favour of banning the face-veil, according to a March 2010 poll by the UK-based Financial Times. Other countries surveyed

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also showed high levels of support of a ban, with 65% of respondents in Spain, 63% in Italy, 50% in Germany and 57% in the UK in favour.

While the burqa and face veil are worn by a small number of Muslim women across Europe, the headscarf or niqab is a more familiar sight. It too has come under fire as a religious symbol, and has been banned in schools in France, the Netherlands and at least four German states.

A 2005 Pew Global Attitudes survey found that support for banning the headscarf was usually linked to overall attitudes towards Muslims. For example, 55% of respondents in Great Britain who viewed Muslims unfavourably supported a ban, compared with only 23% of those who had positive attitudes towards Muslims. In France there was less

difference between those with positive or negative attitudes – 74% and 86% respectively.

The same survey showed that many Muslim women do not cover their heads at all – 47% in Great Britain, and 87% in France. But for those who do, and for the younger generation in particular, there is a growing trend to blend their Muslim and European identities. They still adhere to the Islamic dress code and cover all but hands, feet and face – but they do it in style, as Emma Tarlo, author of *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics and Faith* comments: “In a sense they are using fashion to try to contradict the idea of the hijab being just about politics, traditionalism or piety even. They are modern and they want to be seen as modern.”

The debate, for Christians, is about more than Muslim headdress. Large crosses and Jewish skull caps were banned alongside the hijab in French schools in 2004. Do we take this as a sign of growing European secularism, and allow ourselves to feel under threat in the same way as some do in the Muslim community? And should we protest about not being able to wear our religious symbols, but prevent Muslim women expressing their faith through what they wear? Are the hijab, face veil and burqa all equally unacceptable, or where should the line be drawn? The issues are complex but we need to engage with them if we are to understand our own position as people of faith – as well as that of Muslims.

JA

Sources: [euobserver.com](http://euobserver.com); Ecumenical News International; Pew Global Attitudes Project; [ekkleisia.co.uk](http://ekkleisia.co.uk); FT.com/Europe; Reuters; El País

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## KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH NOVA

Vista is only one way in which you can keep up-to-date with the work of NOVA and developments in mission in Europe. Our blog [europeanmission](http://europeanmission.wordpress.com) is updated regularly with news and statistics from around Europe and has already proved very popular. Check it out here: [europeanmission.wordpress.com](http://europeanmission.wordpress.com)

The NOVA Research Centre is also on Facebook and many find this an even more convenient way to follow the issues we raise and to engage in conversation with us.

Whilst continuing our research into issues which we believe to be of crucial importance we continue to be open to approaches to conduct research on behalf of mission agencies and churches on a commissioned basis.

european mission  
the blog for the Nova Research Centre

Basque Evangelicals apologize for not supporting ETA victims  
Posted June 9, 2010 by europeandmission  
Categories: Evangelical, Spain, reconciliation

Basque Protestants have produced a manifesto calling for peace and reconciliation, and exhorting the Basque separatist organisation, ETA, to lay down its weapons. It tells ETA that there can be no forgiveness without repentance. At the same time the Evangelical Council of the Basque Country sought forgiveness from the victims of ETA terror campaign for 'not having known how to help those who have been the object of rejection, public shame, abandonment and the cowardly violence of those who use arms to try to impose their will'. At the same time it affirmed that 'silence' from the universal Christian Church on any type of violence 'should cause us profound pain'

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We also want to remind you that our research into migration in Europe means we can provide up-to-date and reliable research reports focussed on single migrant populations, including historical patterns of migration for that population, migration statistics for host countries, migrant

population size and distribution, current trends and future prospects.

UK-based, single migrant population reports cost £150 with each additional migrant population featured costing a further £100. For large scale projects and for other EU countries we will quote on a project basis according to your specifications.

You can download a FREE Copy of our 2008 report 'Mapping Migration: Mapping Churches Responses-Europe Study' from the resources section of our website at [www.novaresearch.eu](http://www.novaresearch.eu)

## RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING WITH MUSLIMS IN EUROPE TODAY

NOVA is not only about researching mission in Europe but also innovating mission in Europe. So how can we respond practically to the challenge of Islam in Europe? What resources are available?

It is one thing to read about the issues – quite another to cross the street to build a friendship with our Muslim neighbours.

### Sharing your faith

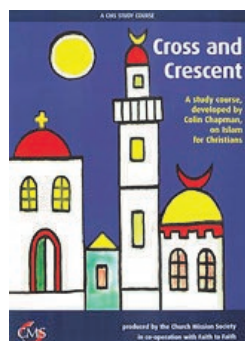
There are many resources available to give Christians a greater understanding of Islam. Three courses aiming to equip us to share their faith with Muslims are *Friendship First*, the *Cross and Crescent* coursebook and *Sharing Lives*.

*Friendship First* is by Steve Bell, director of Interserve England and Wales and author of *Grace for Muslims*. The manual is described as a groundbreaking attempt at helping ‘ordinary’ Christians to relate positively to “ordinary” Muslims, and it can be used by individuals or groups. It also links in with the *Friendship First* seminar series, facilitated by Interserve staff in England and Wales.



Bell, S (2003) *Friendship First: The Manual* available from [www.eden.co.uk](http://www.eden.co.uk)

Groups could also use a 5 session course developed by Colin Chapman, author of *Cross and Crescent, Responding to the Challenges of Islam*. It is available from CMS, and according to the website, “hundreds of Christians have attended courses all over the UK and found their faith challenged and their commitment to their Muslim neighbours increased.”



Chapman, C (2003) *Cross and Crescent Course* available from [www.cms-shop.org.uk](http://www.cms-shop.org.uk)

*Sharing Lives* aims to “help people change their attitude towards Islam and Muslims from one of fear to one of grace and to encourage them to develop meaningful relationships with Muslims in their neighbourhood in order to share their lives and the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.” The sessions cover issues such as our view of Islam, understanding

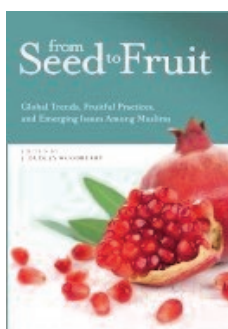
muslims and building relationships that last. Developed by Operation Mobilisation, the 5 session course is held in venues around Europe – see [www.sharinglives.eu](http://www.sharinglives.eu) for more details.



### Planting churches

Readers already involved in cross-cultural outreach to Muslims will be interested in research from USA-based Knowledge Stewardship. Missionaries from 37 nationalities representing over 30 organisations were interviewed about their work. Approximately a third of them had planted a church amongst Muslims, another third had planted multiple churches and a similar number had not planted any.

The resulting book *from Seed to Fruit* is a comprehensive look at the most ‘fruitful practices’ which ‘promote the emergence, vitality and multiplication of fellowships of Jesus followers in a Muslim context’. The eight categories of practices include how cross-cultural workers relate to society, believers, God, seekers, and leaders; fruitful teams, communication methods and characteristics of fruitful faith communities. For example, a ‘fruitful practice’ in relating to seekers is that they begin to disciple seekers as part of the process of coming to faith, and they also pray for the needs of their friends in their presence. Additional chapters cover issues such as the empowering indigenous leaders, funding and factors affecting the identity Jesus followers choose.

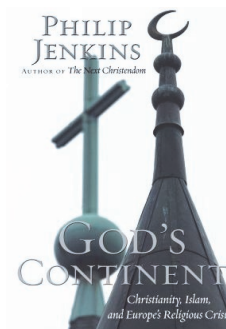


Woodberry, D (2008) *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues Among Muslims* Pasadena: William Carey Library

As far as I could see, most of the interviewees came from Western contexts (there is a chapter about partnering with ‘labourers from the global south’) and they were working amongst Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. However as the practices themselves related more to working with individuals or small groups, there is much that could be applied to those working with Muslims in Europe.

Interestingly for me, as someone involved in more “organic” style church planting, many of the fruitful practices described could apply to reaching out to secular Europeans. So, as is stated in the descriptive list, the practices may be more about finding out what “God is currently using to grow his Kingdom” than providing a formula for working among people from a particular religious tradition. JA

Those who wish to read further on the issues raised by this edition of *Vista* would do well to start with Philip Jenkins’ 2007 book *God’s Continent*. Whilst Jenkins is perhaps overly optimistic with regards to the domesticating effect of European secularism on Islam it does set out the statistics and arguments honestly and recognizes that many of Europe’s migrants are also Christians from the global south with a vibrant Christianity which will change the face of the European church in the years to come. JM



Jenkins, P (2007) *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* Oxford: University Press

# Vista

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