

themselves from slaves by covering their heads and bodies). The veil signifies its wearers' aspiration to piety and it signals an identity that is at odds with what are taken to be Western standards that are indecent and promiscuous. The authors emphasize that wearing the veil is a personal right, a *human* right of conscience and freedom of religion. One of the essays is sharply critical of the European Court of Human Rights' decisions supporting various states' (including Turkey's) outlawing of headscarves in schools and other public places (pp. 156-60). The contention of its author, as of many of the other authors in the volume, is that no threat is posed to the security or democracy of European nations by their pious Muslim populations. The articles based on interviews with *hijab* wearers show that their religious practice is consistent with their patriotism. They are at once French or British (or Canadian) *and* Muslim; the only conflict with these identities is the one imposed externally by state interference with their religious practice.

Since it is their aim to counter the political hysteria that often surrounds discus-

sions of headscarves and the other public aspects of Islamic religious practice, the book neglects some problems that need also to be discussed. These include the instrumentalization of Islam by political leaders whose aims differ from the majority described in these pages (I think of *Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, and What I Saw Inside and Why I left* by Ed Husain (2007)); questions about whether there ought to be limits to religious accommodation by secular states and what these might be; and finally, questions about the sources of Islamophobia and how to address it. This book assumes that "objective" information (p. 3) can help lay to rest the virulent attacks on Muslims that have focused on women wearing veils. But can it? I'm not sure it is enough. What books like this one can do is provide those of us hoping to counter Islamophobia with more and better information. *Islam and the Veil*, despite lots of repetition and the unevenness of its essays, is a welcome addition to that effort.

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## The Narrative of the Occident

**By Georg Schmid**

Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2009, 468 pages, ISBN 9783631575628.

Georg Schmid's *The Narrative of the Occident* was published by Peter Lang in 2009. The book consists of nine chapters; in the first four chapters the author discusses theories and methods with which a civilization, essentially the Occident, narrates and represents itself. The following chapters

deal with the ways through which social perceptions are made and remade with the aid of rival or friendly paradigms. There are two insertions among the chapters: "Excursus A" (pp. 235-264) discusses the visual mechanisms and films which aided and extended the narrative of the Western

civilization. “Excursus B” (pp. 353–378), entitled “Aviation Annotations,” deals with the aviation industry in the Western world as success stories. The details of several (Airbus and Boeing) aircraft models and their characteristics according to pilots, and the rivalry between the two companies are not spared! The load of unnecessary details and irrelevant issues for this insertion and in fact for the rest of the whole book makes the reading extremely painful.

Narratives, the author argues, as practiced by the Occident cannot be limited to mere narrations in the literal sense (p. 97), but rather they are “collective and unconscious self-portrayal.” While highlighting some of the issues in the narrative practices of the Occident, Schmid laments that Nazi ideology “assigned the position of the eternal culpable to the Jews” (p. 126). Schmid explains the reasons and sources of this “anti-Semitic lore” (p. 132) in the narratives and modern practices of the Occidental world throughout several chapters of the book.

Georg Schmid describes his perspective as multilayered as opposed to being leftist or rightist. But his position seems to be lost when regarding several challenges emerging in the modern world, especially those against the dominant narrative of the Occident. He tries justifying unsympathetic narratives and practical actions of the Occident against its opponents but fails to demonstrate a balanced view of the challenges to the Occident or its major paradigms within a multilayered framework, be it coming from within or in the form of another rising power, such as China. According to the author, the Occident, after fixing some of its shortcomings, can, if not should, continue to dominate the underprivileged and underdeveloped,

the women, the colonized, the communist and the Muslim. From this perspective, Schmid’s work can easily be considered a European echo of the earlier assertions of Bernard Lewis and to a certain degree Samuel Huntington.

As a firm believer in the Occident, Schmid tries to offer ways to overcome the challenges that the Occidental civilization is facing. Challenges from within as well as outside are discussed in detail. While overcoming deep rooted anti-Semitism will take care of the split “I” to re-constitute the spirit of the Occidental narrative. The issues revolving around the environment, which the modern Occident created, can also be fixed. For Schmid, even the ever increasing challenge presented by the rising powers, primarily China, can be overcome. The challenge of Islam however, the author feels, requires bigger attention and collective effort to defeat. Schmid seems to have internalized concerns of the inflamed post 9/11 approaches to the Islamic world, at times in a radical way.

Schmid’s dislike of Arabs and their tribalism urges him to call Westerners together for unified effort against Islamic fundamentalism and to defend human rights (p. 427). At times, he even resents the fact that the Occidental narratives have sometimes turned their attentions towards the Orient. He seems bewildered by this unnecessary interest; in a way Schmid argues for a pure and strong Orientalism without the knowledge of the Orient. This kind of promotion of an Occidental narrative, immune from every foreign effect and remote to all sorts of positive interactions, cannot even be found in the critiques of the late Edward Said towards Orientalism.

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