

empirical reach of some arguments. In conclusion, the book makes a timely correction to White-centric perspectives on American religion and offers a broad yet in-depth account of an intersectional problem that lies at the crux of American politics.

***The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West.* By Lorenzo Vidino. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. xii + 275 pp. \$90.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper, \$29.99 e-book**

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Lorenzo Vidino, in his latest volume, explores a topic that is more often the subject of speculation than of scholarly inquiry: the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West. In *The Closed Circle*, he focuses on the stories of six individuals who left the Brotherhood, each from different backgrounds and in different countries (the UK, Denmark, Sweden, and France), with an additional chapter focused on individuals who abandoned the movement in the United States. Vidino's interview-based methodology gives the book a personal feel, highlighting that the Muslim Brotherhood is, at its core, a personal commitment based on ideological affinity—something often overlooked when the movement is seen solely through a security lens. This approach is appropriate since Vidino finds that a disillusionment with the group's ideology is the primary reason that his interviewees left the movement.

Vidino importantly clarifies that, while the global Muslim Brotherhood is “hardly a monolithic block,” its ideology remains shared across borders: “their deep belief in the inherent political nature of Islam and their adoption of al-Banna's organization-focused methodology make them part of the informal transnational movement of the Muslim Brotherhood” (3). He therefore demonstrates the degree to which ideology matters and is effective at both mobilizing support and, in the case of this book, leading to disillusionment among members.

Vidino briefly traces the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West, which emerged first in the 1950s and 1960s, as Brotherhood members or sympathizers left Egypt under Nasser's crackdown, many to pursue higher education rather than as a concerted effort to spread the movement (4). They also, notably, reclassified the West not as *dar al harb* (land of war), since, while these Western countries are not ruled Islamically, they do allow for the free practice of Islam, and so can be considered *dar al dawa* (land of preaching), which intensified efforts at proselytization (5).

Vidino also specifies that there exist three categories of Muslim Brotherhood in the West: "pure Brotherhood," which are official branches of the movement (6); "Brotherhood spawns," which are "visible/public organizations established by individuals who belong to the 'pure Brotherhood'" (7); and the most difficult to trace category, "organizations influenced by the Brotherhood" which adopt an ideology linked to that of the Brotherhood but lack structural links to it (7). While Vidino is correct to point out that not all movements that sympathize with the Muslim Brotherhood are part of a transnational Brotherhood network, however informal that may be, it is also difficult to prove Brotherhood sympathies in organizations that deny their links to the group but may employ individuals with Islamist leanings.

Vidino identifies three goals of the Brotherhood in the West: "fostering a strong, resilient, and assertive Islamic identity among Western Muslims," something made more possible by the fact that there are fewer restrictions on such activities in the West than in many Muslim-majority states in the Middle East (9–10); to act as "official or de facto representatives of the Muslim community of their country," largely by engaging with local governments (10); and "influencing Western policy making on all Islamic-related issues, whether domestic or foreign policy related" (11). He then elucidates the structure of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ways in which people become members, a gradual process that over time brings them into contact with the more secret parts of the group. As Vidino points out, a great deal has been written about joining the Muslim Brotherhood, but far less, outside of personal memoirs, has been written about leaving the movement—especially in Western, Muslim-minority contexts.

After detailing the experiences of each of the individuals he interviews in depth about joining and leaving the Brotherhood, Vidino highlights themes across the interviews. Vidino documents that all interviewees only took the oath of loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood after having

been involved with the group often for years, many having been recruited through study circles (172–173); he points out, then, that the structures of the Muslim Brotherhood remain largely codified in the West as they are in the Arab world but exist on a smaller scale, with the *usra*, the smallest unit of Brotherhood organization, the center of most activities (174–175). Vidino's interviewees also stress that no orders came from a central organization, but that informal transnational connections were sometimes strengthened by business or family links (176).

In terms of reasons for leaving the Brotherhood, one common complaint was the lack of internal democracy and transparency, in particular the existence of a secret structure within it, which many of the members considered unnecessary in Western environments where they were free to pursue their aims of *dawa* (182). Others raised the issue of ethnic bias, charging that there was emphasis on the use of Arabic rather than local languages as well as claims that the Brotherhood looked down on African Americans, instead privileging outreach to potential white converts, in the US (187). Demonstrating again the power of ideology, Vidino concludes: "While perceived flaws in the organization have been cited by all as crucial in their decision to leave, in most cases deep concerns about the ideology of the Brotherhood had even more weight" (188).

Vidino's final chapter interrogates the future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West, particularly after the experiences of the Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia following the Arab Spring and the ensuing polarization over political Islam in the region, concluding that the movement faces new challenges today but that its future remains far from certain. The book is an excellent step toward addressing a major gap in the literature, but in places suspicion about the Brotherhood, whose members are in places called "militants," appears misplaced. Indeed, Vidino cites some concerns that the Brotherhood seeks the gradual creation of a caliphate, yet many of the complaints of those who left the Brotherhood was that it was too politically focused and pragmatic, which does not fit with the desire for a caliphate. Further, while one chapter focuses on a female's experience, the book is largely centered on the experiences of male members; it would be interesting for additional research to focus on the Sisterhood. Nevertheless, this volume represents an excellent start to understanding the challenges the Brotherhood faces in the West.