Shiʿism by Heinz Halm and Moojan Momen. While no one can challenge the erudition of their contributions to our understanding of Islamic history, I was surprised that McHugo did not cite or include references to a broader range of authors and works on medieval Islamic sectarianism. For example, he cites an article by Farhad Daftary in *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) but none of Daftary's other more in-depth work on Ismaʿilism. I was particularly surprised not to see any citations of Najam Haider's excellent recent work on Shiʿism.

However, while I would have liked McHugo to spend a few more pages on medieval sectarianism, I suspect that the purpose of his book lies with providing students with an overview to grapple with the issues of contemporary Islamic sectarianism. In this task, McHugo overwhelmingly succeeds. It is clearly written in accessible language and McHugo provides a thorough index and glossary of terms. I would not hesitate to recommend this book or assign it to an advanced class of undergraduates.

ROHAN DAVIS, *Western Imaginings: The Intellectual Contest to Define Wahhabism* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2018). Pp. 232. $55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9789774168642

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doi:10.1017/S0020743819000849

As part of his recent public relations drive, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman has sought to push an account of Wahhabism as a historically ecumenical and authentically "moderate" brand of religiosity which was only transfigured into its current form in reaction to the Iranian Revolution. In doing so, he has inserted himself into polemic debates about the nature of this subtradition within Islam which have been particularly to the fore in the Western media since the events of 2001. The project that Rohan Davis takes up in this book involves interrogating liberal and neoconservative perspectives on such matters; specifically, he sets about exploring how intellectuals situated within these traditions have gone about constructing a particular set of images of the Wahhabi other.

Beyond the introduction, the first chapter offers a "cursory review of some of the scholarly literature dedicated to Wahhabism" in order to draw out some select issues like the kinds of truth claims at stake (p. 23). It is indeed an extremely cursory review; the bulk of the most interesting and insightful scholarship on Wahhabism in recent years, including by scholars like Madawi Al-Rasheed and Stéphane Lacroix, does not feature in the book at all. While this might be defended on the grounds that the work focuses on liberal and neoconservative representations of Wahhabism rather than Wahhabism itself, it surely remains the case that such literature provides an indispensable foundation for opening up critical perspectives on these discourses, and it cannot simply be disregarded.

The next two chapters discuss theoretical and methodological issues, including the social positioning of intellectuals, the nature of critical discourse analysis, and conceptual tools like dialectical imagination and Weberian ideal types. The substantive analysis begins in Chapters 4 and 5, which consider how "liberal imaginings of Wahhabism" are structured around tropes, including an emphasis on the challenges presented by Wahhabism to liberal values like individual freedom and secularism. Chapter 6 reflects

on how neoconservative discourse has positioned Wahhabism as an emblem of premodern or even subhuman savagery; has invoked it to delegitimize critiques of Israeli policy; and has done so in ways informed by explicit or implicit reference to Judeo-Christian religious imaginaries. In these last three chapters, which mainly analyze articles published for popular consumption by pundits like Thomas Friedman and Frank Gaffney, Davis focuses on these authors' use of rhetorical devices including metaphors, similes, analogies, neologisms and accounts of violence. Thus the reader hears how references to Wahhabi scholars' desire to "turn back the clock" draws on liberal metaphors of teleological progress (p. 113), how discussion of the failure of the Wahhabi establishment to "change its spots" both reduces these clerics to bestial status and allegedly invokes the Biblical origins of this phrase, and so on.

A major disadvantage of this structure is that the first 100 pages of the book are essentially given over to preliminaries; and even after that point, there are very lengthy digressions on matters of theory and definition. Most of this material could have been condensed into an introductory chapter without taking much away from the argument; and doing so could have provided more space to develop the analysis itself, perhaps by expanding the empirical scope. Considering how Wahhabism was invoked in British colonial discourse, for example—including as an amorphous bogeyman, in ways directly comparable with those discussed here—might open up questions about how contemporary representations relate to historical political formations. Given the requisite language skills, it would also be invaluable for research on these themes to consider Saudi perspectives; how do Saudi intellectuals who have directly or indirectly addressed the relationship between Islam and the liberal tradition—like Abdullah al-Maliki or Muhammad Saʿid Tayyib, for example—deal with the particular kinds of tropes, assumptions and prejudices identified here as being central to liberal discourse? These or other such empirical moves could also provide for the possibility of making a parallel contribution to debates on religion and politics in Saudi Arabia, in ways that would enrich rather than distract from a project of interrogating liberal perspectives on Wahhabism.

Beyond these questions of empirical scope, there are also ways in which the questions at stake in the book could be further elaborated from a theoretical perspective. Talal Asad, for example, has been engaged in subtle and profoundly influential reflections on the relationship between Islam and liberalism for a very long time. Likewise, Joseph Massad's book *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015) has stoked fresh debates since its publication in 2015 which would seem absolutely germane to the questions taken up here several years later. Engagement with such works could offer bases for developing potentially interesting questions, including in regard to how depictions of Wahhabism may have figured in the self-construction of liberalism in the early 21st century, and the relationship between power and knowledge that is at stake in such dynamics. However, these and other key authors writing on the relationship between Islam and liberalism are conspicuous by their absence.

The two-page conclusion affirms that the book has *inter alia* sought to "identify some of the major problems" with liberal and neoconservative representations of Wahhabism (p. 177). It is true that it makes some headway towards this goal. However, while there are a range of potentially interesting problems and questions at stake in research on these themes, this also seems to confirm the sense that by the end, various representatives of the liberal and neoconservative commentariat—with their by turns banal, spurious, and

flimsy pronouncements—have unfortunately come to be positioned not just as the book's objects of study but also as its primary interlocutors.

MATT BUEHLER, *Why Alliances Fail: Islamist and Leftist Coalitions in North Africa*, Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2018). Pp. 288. $39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780815636137

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doi:10.1017/S0020743819000850

Why are some political alliances stable, while others collapse? Matt Buehler takes this common political science question and explores it in rich detail using less common cases: Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania. In *Why Alliances Fail*, Buehler presents us with a seemingly unlikely duo of coalition partners: Islamists and Leftists.

As scholars such as Eva Wegner and Francesco Cavatorta have argued, the seeming deep ideological cleavage between left parties and Islamist parties obscures broad agreement on economics, antiauthoritarianism, and sometimes, as Buehler demonstrates, structural elements of their voting blocs. Buehler contributes to this literature by arguing that the real causes of alliance collapse are not ideological, but tied to the ability of regimes to control bases of support for parties.

Buehler's book demonstrates careful case selection. First, Buehler brings in Mauritania, an understudied country for scholars of North Africa (and one that the Middle East Studies Association currently only lists 8 members with expertise in). The comparison is productive, allowing Buehler to leverage differing contexts to tease out related dynamics. Second, the analysis spans levels of analysis, looking at national, labor, and urban alliances across the countries. Buehler describes the case selection as counterfactual analysis, but might instead better be described as constituting "hard cases" for alliance formation. Regardless of the nomenclature, Buehler carefully describes both the actual cases and the null cases for causal clues. Due to the national and subnational variation, the book is particularly useful for scholars of the Middle East who often focus on national level comparisons in a small set of countries.

As promised by the title, Buehler's argument is strongest on the explanation of mechanisms of alliance failure in Mauritania and Morocco. He argues persuasively that co-optation by the government is at the heart of many instances of alliance failure. The co-optation is achieved through shifts in the electoral base of the party. An increase in rural support, which comes with growing inclusion of traditional patronage networks, leaves parties open to co-optation by authoritarian elements.

In Buehler's argument, the rural social base of both the regime and the potential alliance partners (be they leftist or Islamist) is a vital precondition to later co-optation. He codes both Morocco and Mauritania as regimes that developed rural bases for their dominant parties and the postcolonial regime in general. Each of these countries also saw opposition parties develop a rural base, much to their detriment, during periods of contestation with the state. In each case, Buehler traces the process of decisions made by the emerging regimes to either incorporate or sideline traditional rural power structures at the time of regime emergence.