

The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology (Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning)

By Nadia Abu El-Haj

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The Genealogical Science analyzes the scientific work and social implications of the flourishing field of genetic history. A biological discipline that relies on genetic data in order to reconstruct the geographic origins of contemporary populations—their histories of migration and genealogical connections to other present-day groups—this historical science is garnering ever more credibility and social reach, in large part due to a growing industry in ancestry testing.

In this book, Nadia Abu El-Haj examines genetic history's working assumptions about culture and nature, identity and biology, and the individual and the collective. Through the example of the study of Jewish origins, she explores novel cultural and political practices that are emerging as genetic history's claims and "facts" circulate in the public domain and illustrates how this historical science is intrinsically entangled with cultural imaginations and political commitments. Chronicling late-nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century understandings of race, nature, and culture, she identifies continuities and shifts in scientific claims, institutional contexts, and political worlds in order to show how the meanings of biological difference have changed over time. In so doing she gives an account of how and why it is that genetic history is so socially felicitous today and elucidates the range of understandings of the self, individual and collective, this scientific field is making possible. More specifically, through her focus on the history of projects of Jewish self-fashioning that have taken place on the terrain of the biological sciences, *The Genealogical Science* analyzes genetic history as the latest iteration of a cultural and political practice now over a century old.

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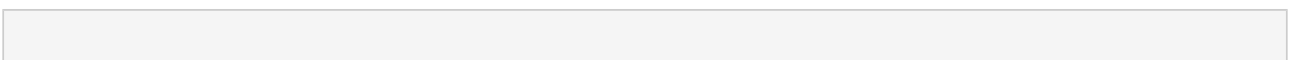
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Editorial Review

Review

“An illuminating analysis of the social and political realities with which this scientific question has been entwined. . . . This is a timely, insightful, and exceptionally well-researched book.”

(Sociology)

“*The Genealogical Science* is a great achievement. It introduces a general readership to the scholarly debates around genetic history as they have played out in scientific journals in recent years.”

(Isis)

“Situating her work at the intersection of history of science, philosophy of science, sociology, and anthropology, Abu El-Haj offers specific, precise, and well-grounded arguments about how the meanings of biological difference have changed over time.”

(Metascience)

“Abu El-Haj’s book is highly recommended to anyone wishing to delve into the political, cultural, and historical entanglements of ‘Jewish genetic history,’ but also, as a perceptive and rich case study, it is recommended to anyone interested in human population genetics and its relationship to politics and identity politics more generally.”

(Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences)

“*The Genealogical Science* is an important book, deeply informed about contemporary genetics and the cultures of genealogical analysis that have emerged from the wealth of scientific work. It is commendably careful in its analysis but also terrifically insightful about the implications of the work and its cultural and political effects as well as richly perceptive about the epistemological, political, and cultural presuppositions of the scientific work itself. Nadia Abu El-Haj accordingly offers the most sustained analysis to date of both the scientific and socio-cultural grounds of genetic and genealogical science. In doing so, she significantly advances and nuances recent claims in anthropology and science studies about the entanglements of nature and culture, science and politics.”--David Theo Goldberg, University of California, Irvine

(David Theo Goldberg 2011-10-17)

“*The Genealogical Science* is a wonderful account of how old-fashioned race science has come to be re-defined by resort to the most recent developments in genetics. But this book is not simply another story of the ideological uses to which science may be put. Nadia Abu El-Haj has provided the reader with a very

detailed analysis of the historical entanglement between science and politics. Her study should be required reading for anyone interested in the sociology of science—and also for those dealing with Middle Eastern nationalisms. This is a work of outstanding value for scholarship.”

(Talal Asad, City University of New York 2012-01-03)

About the Author

Nadia Abu El-Haj is professor of anthropology at Barnard College of Columbia University. She is the author of *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.

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