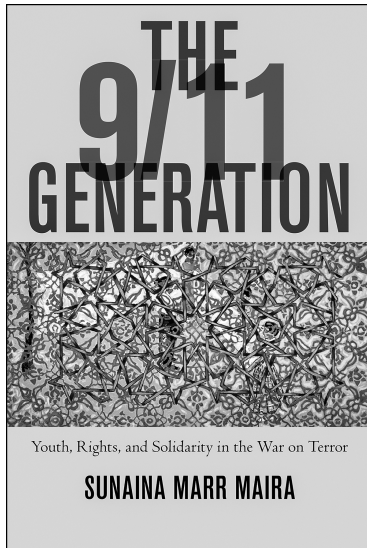


Recent Books

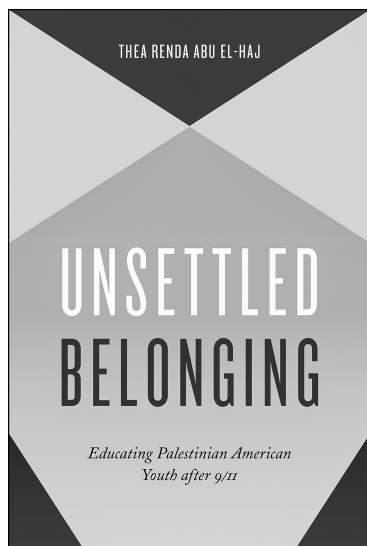


The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror, by Sunaina Marr Maira. New York: New York University Press, 2016. 320 pages. \$89.00 cloth, \$28.00 paper. E-book available.

Unsettled Belonging: Educating Palestinian American Youth after 9/11, by Thea Renda Abu El-Haj. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 262 pages. \$90.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper. E-book available.

REVIEWED BY LOUBNA QUTAMI

On 27 January 2017, one week after President Donald Trump took office, he signed an executive order titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” The executive order effectively suspended the Syrian refugee resettlement program for 120 days and blocked entry for citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days. Many of those affected hold current visas, dual citizenship with other visa-exempt countries, or even green cards. Nevertheless, the executive order went into effect, and many dual citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen returning to the United States were indefinitely detained at airports or deported. Soon after, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducted raids across U.S. cities. The blatant disregard for constitutional rights and the callous refusal to at least performatively uphold the ideals of liberal democracy contributed to the surge in public outcry and protest, particularly by youth from Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) communities who turned out in record numbers at the nation’s major airports in the aftermath of what many have called the “Muslim Ban.”



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The current shifts in the U.S. political landscape have posited new questions, challenges, and conundrums for organizers and academics who have spent the last eight years understanding the parameters of multicultural liberal democracy under the Obama administration. Sunaina Marr Maira's *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror* and Thea Renda Abu El-Haj's *Unsettled Belonging: Educating Palestinian American Youth after 9/11* are two critical works examining the policies, logics, and conditions that have long coalesced to cultivate this moment. Through sound ethnographic accounts, Maira and Abu El-Haj brilliantly illustrate the deeply historical and transnational processes that relegate Arab, Muslim, South Asian, and Afghan youth, as Maira notes, as "the objects of the War on Terror" and, as Abu El-Haj says, that produce Palestinian-American youth as inherently "impossible subjects." Both texts expose the haunting silence, anemic lexicon, and depleted intellectual tools regarding the War on Terror and the racialization of youth from SWANA backgrounds in the United States that have long limited the humanities and social sciences fields. They are a must-read for youth organizers, policy analysts and makers, activists, educators, affected communities, and academics.

In a tempered and nuanced fashion, Abu El-Haj utilizes an anthropological approach to link the rich plethora of scholarly works in the fields of youth studies, im/migrant studies, and citizenship education with the experiences of high-school-aged Palestinian-Americans in New York City after 9/11. Her work is based on over fifteen years of research investigating how schools develop the criteria for national in/exclusion by constructing an "everyday nationalism," which naturalizes belonging as citizenship along nation-state boundaries. This affiliation between belonging and citizenship becomes incommensurable with the transnational socialities Palestinian-American youth envision and practice every day. While most of the youth in her study live and go to school in the United States, many of them have lived for a period of time in Palestine and some carry dual citizenship. Others have family who still live in Palestine and visit frequently. Therefore, several of the youths describe feeling a sense of commitment to defend the merit of the Palestinian cause, believing that it is the least they can do while living in the diaspora away from the overt harm of the Israeli occupation. As a Palestinian, Abu El-Haj articulates how her own positionality plays a pivotal role in cultivating the experience, capacity, and commitment to produce such a rich tapestry of narratives across the boundaries of generations and nation-states. She offers a lucid reconfiguration of Palestinian transnational social fields that aligns with the experiences of previous generations of Palestinian exiles while also allowing the youth to determine their own experiences, anxieties, and struggles living in a post-9/11 United States.

Similarly, Maira's *The 9/11 Generation* offers an ethical yet provocative contribution to the field of youth studies, and to the many works that have proliferated on Muslim-American youth since 9/11. The book focuses on how South Asian, Arab, and Afghan-American youth in Silicon Valley define politics amid an escalating state of repression and surveillance in the context of the global War on Terror, illustrating the varying challenges and complexities involved in the process. Maira acknowledges that some of these challenges, specifically as they pertain to political strategy in organizing work post-9/11, reflect tensions that resemble those of previous generations. One example has been the fraught process of choosing between a domestic civil rights approach versus a more global human rights strategy. Nonetheless, Maira highlights how these youth organizers work through these tensions in the process of forging and engaging in interfaith, cross-racial, and

transnational solidarities. Maira conveys how in the aftermath of 9/11, varying communities who were impacted by policies such as the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), the Patriot Act, and other state-crafted forms of surveillance and repression mobilized with one another to create a series of “know-your-rights” trainings. These community educational events relied on civil rights history and, specifically, organizing work often informed by a Black Power ethos and internationalist politic. However, SWANA youth organizers interwove new ethnic, religious, and racial groups into their events and spaces as part of a broader commitment to coalitional organizing and as a response to a particular political context.

Maira’s interdisciplinary theoretical approach, coupled with her deep knowledge and relationship with the youth she engages, allows her to capture the tensions that exist between a complex constellation of social identities, political projects, and multiplicities of domestic and transnational histories and geographies. In addition to creating an opening for these youths to assume a unique role in the research process, her work is a catalyst for her own reflexive critique. She states that the project “forced me to think deeply about how these youth, who were the object of so much scrutiny, debate, and data collection since 9/11, were perhaps interested in being on the *other* side of the researcher’s lens, and possibly in deciding how to use that lens themselves and to represent and translate their own narratives” (p. 29).

The role of multicultural liberal democracy weaves together the varying themes of both books. Abu El-Haj and Maira argue that it is deeply implicated in the racial designation of SWANA youth as enemy aliens and Others. They pay particular attention to how discourses of civil, human, and women’s rights are employed by the United States to justify imperialist interventionism. Maira connects this project to War on Terror policies, which have racialized youth from these backgrounds as objects vulnerable for political or religious radicalization and framed them as a threat to secular, liberal democracy—a threat which must inherently be contained and surveilled by the state. Abu El-Haj also argues that the U.S. national imaginary obliges all nations to pursue ideals of tolerance, diversity, equality, democracy, and liberty. The United States relies on this imaginary, which is built upon Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes, to simultaneously justify an imperial presence in the SWANA region and domestically to characterize national belonging.

In her book, Maira examines the place of SWANA youth organizers in the discourse on civil, human, and women’s rights, contextualizing “rights-talk” as deeply informed by the U.S. ideals of free market capitalism, racial violence, and the creation of new imperial cartographies through rewriting history and historical amnesia. Similarly, Abu El-Haj illuminates the immense focus on rights in the debates regarding belonging and citizenship in schools and how U.S. educational curricula and instructors alike use it to render Palestinian-American youth as outside the ideals of democratic rights. For example, Samira, one of the youths Abu El-Haj engages in the study, tells the story of a time she and her friends were involved in a confrontation with a substitute teacher at Regional High. After her friend and the substitute argued back and forth, the teacher proceeded to say: “I know how men in your country treat you. I’ve been to your country twice already. If you talked to your family member like that he would smack you across the face” (p. 103). Abu El-Haj illustrates how the everyday lived racial experiences of Palestinian-American youths reflect how they are excluded from ideas of democratic rights. At the same time, she complicates the

rights discourse by examining these same youths' experiences visiting Palestine, where people are suffering under Israel's military occupation and dispossession policies and where the youths from her study rely on ideas of rights as a given protected status which is rooted in the capital of their own U.S. citizenship.

Using the Palestinian-American case as an example, Abu El-Haj summons educators to recognize and accommodate a new understanding of citizenship as lived experience. Her work powerfully illustrates how Palestinian-American youths' experience in transnational social fields is part of a broader Palestinian collective affinity for their homeland and struggle, but how it also leaves them incapable of fully belonging to the U.S. nation. Abu El-Haj highlights how the logics of everyday nationalism, as cultivated and celebrated through multicultural liberal democracy, both define citizenship and belonging along nation-state boundaries and facilitate access to them through notions of rights. As Maira asks us, "What frameworks can young people use when 'democracy' is the language of U.S. statecraft and expansionism, 'women's rights' and 'gay rights' are the alibis of imperial interventions and occupation, and cultural and religious difference are promoted by the neoliberal, multicultural state, particularly under Obama?" (p. 255).

Both Abu El-Haj and Maira's critiques of "rights-talk" leave us with infinite possibilities for reimagining politics and solidarity. Abu El-Haj's call for educators to reimagine the values of citizen-education and to consider the Palestinian-American youth experience as highlighting the importance and value of citizenship as life practices should inspire all of us to see the silver lining in the dismal tale of what U.S. nationalism signifies for Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim youth. While the task of tackling these questions may seem insurmountable amid rampant culture wars, political despair, and catastrophic devastation caused by war and occupation in the SWANA region, the voices, aspirations, organizing efforts, and experiences of these youth communities should be a constant reminder that the task is not only achievable, but that its pursuit is mandated. Thank you to Thea Renda Abu El-Haj and Sunaina Marr Maira for reminding us of that.

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A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America, by Keith P. Feldman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 328 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SOPHIA AZEB

On the first day of the National Women's Studies Association conference at Humboldt State University on 16 June 1982, ten days into Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the Third World Women's Caucus proposed a resolution decrying the Israeli bombardment. According to ethnic studies scholar Keith P. Feldman, disagreements among white feminists over whether a measure against