



Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad (Latin America Otherwise)

Aisha Khan

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Mixing—whether referred to as mestizaje, callaloo, hybridity, creolization, or multiculturalism—is a foundational cultural trope in Caribbean and Latin American societies. Historically entwined with colonial, anticolonial, and democratic ideologies, ideas about mixing are powerful forces in the ways identities are interpreted and evaluated. As Aisha Khan shows in this ethnography, they reveal the tension that exists between identity as a source of equality and identity as an instrument through which social and cultural hierarchies are reinforced. Focusing on the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean, Khan examines this paradox as it is expressed in key dimensions of Hindu and Muslim cultural history and social relationships in southern Trinidad. In vivid detail, she describes how disempowered communities create livable conditions for themselves while participating in a broader culture that both celebrates and denies difference.

Khan combines ethnographic research she conducted in Trinidad over the course of a decade with extensive archival research to explore how Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians interpret authority, generational tensions, and the transformations of Indian culture in the Caribbean through metaphors of mixing. She demonstrates how ambivalence about the desirability of a callaloo nation—a multicultural society—is manifest around practices and issues, including rituals, labor, intermarriage, and class mobility. Khan maintains that metaphors of mixing are pervasive and worth paying attention to: the assumptions and concerns they communicate are key to unraveling who Indo-Trinidadians imagine themselves to be and how identities such as race and religion shape and are shaped by the politics of multiculturalism.

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