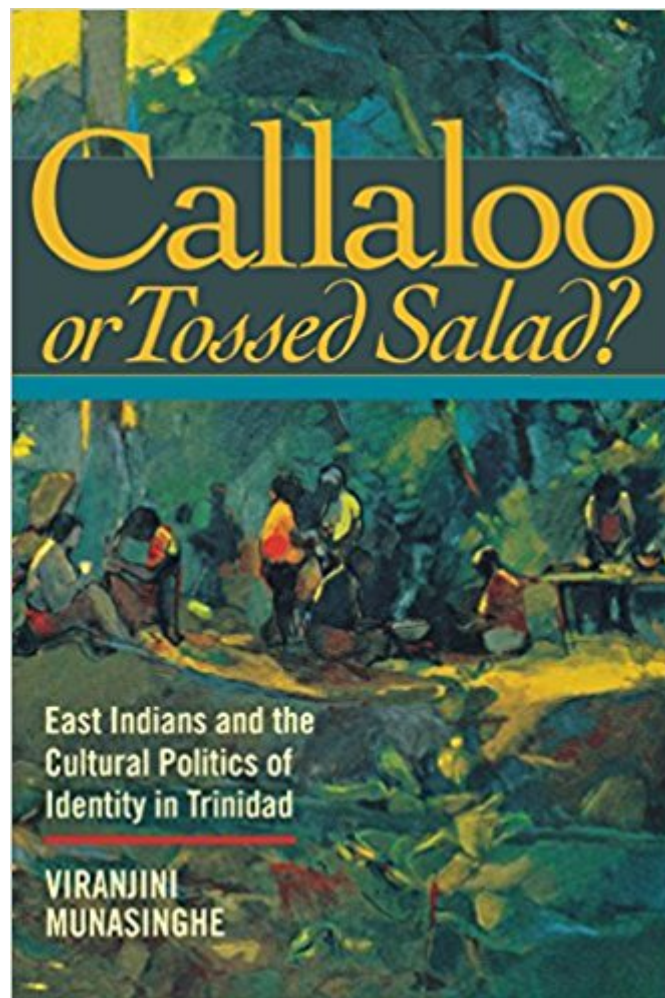




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Callaloo Or Tossed Salad? East Indians And The Cultural Politics Of Identity In Trinidad



Synopsis

Callaloo or Tossed Salad? is a historical and ethnographic case study of the politics of cultural struggle between two traditionally subordinate ancestral groups in Trinidad, those claiming African and Indian descent. Viranjini Munasinghe argues that East Indians in Trinidad seek to become a legitimate part of the nation by redefining what it means to be Trinidadian, not by changing what it means to be Indian. In her view, Indo-Trinidadians' recent and ongoing struggle for national and cultural identity builds from dissatisfaction with the place they were originally assigned within Trinidadian society. The author examines how Indo-Trinidadian leaders in Trinidad have come to challenge the implicit claim that their ethnic identity is antithetical to their national identity. Their political and cultural strategy seeks to change the national image of Trinidad by introducing Indian elements alongside those of the dominant Afro-Caribbean (Creole) culture. Munasinghe analyzes a number of broad theoretical issues: the moral, political, and cultural dimensions of identity; the relation between ethnicity and the nation; and the possible autonomy of New World nationalisms from European forms. She details how principles of exclusion continue to operate in nationalist projects that celebrate ancestral diversity and multiculturalism. Drawing on the insights of theorists who use creolization to understand the emergence of Afro-American cultures, Munasinghe argues that Indo-Trinidadians can be considered Creole because they, like Afro-Trinidadians, are creators and not just bearers of culture.

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Customer Reviews

"This innovative study of identity construction of Indo-Trinidadians is a valuable contribution to the growing body of scholarship on the East Indian diaspora in the Caribbean, as well as to comparative ethnic studies. . . . Munasinghe's book is grounded in solid ethnographic fieldwork in villages with colonial plantation origins, but is also attentive to history, and especially postcolonial politics up to the 1990s, when Indo-Trinidadians wrested political power from Afro-Trinidadians." •Choice, September 2002" Munasinghe here deftly probes the dynamics of ethnicity and nationalism by examining the strategies used by east Indians to gain a secure and acknowledged place in Trinidadian politics and culture." • Frank J. Korom "Religious Studies Review" Vol. 29. No 4, Oct '03" Although this book is about Trinidad, Munasinghe's argument bears, at least in principle, on all countries that see themselves as being made up of a variety of immigrant groups of distinct cultural identity. . . . Even so, Callaloo or tossed salad is sure to attract anthropologists interested in the Caribbean, both because of the importance of Trinidad within the region and because of the region-wide issues that it raises. It should attract anthropologists interested in identity and national politics more generally, for the descriptive material is complimented by a useful and interesting analytical framework of broader applicability. It is nice to see a tale this interesting told this well." •James G. Carrier, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, March 2003, vol. 9, no. 1

Munasinghe is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Asian-American Studies at Cornell University. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Excellent and insightful

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