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This Spot Of Ground: Spiritual Baptists In Toronto



Synopsis

This *Spot of Ground: Spiritual Baptists in Toronto* represents the first detailed exploration of an African-Caribbean religion in the context of contemporary migration to Canada. Toronto is home to Canada's largest black population, a significant portion of which comprises Caribbean migrants and their descendants. This book shows how the development of the Spiritual Baptist religion in Canada has been shaped by the immigration experiences of church members, the large majority of whom are women, and it examines the ways in which religious experiences have mediated the members' experiences of migration and everyday life in Canada. This *Spot of Ground* is based on a critical ethnography, with in-depth interviews and participant observations of church services and other ritual activities, including baptism and pilgrimage and field research in Trinidad that explores the transnational linkages with Spiritual Baptists there. The book addresses theoretical and methodological issues also, including the development of perspectives suitable for examining diasporic African religious and cultural expressions characterized by transnational migration, an emphasis on oral tradition as the repository of cultural history, and linguistic and cultural hybridity. This *Spot of Ground* contributes new information to the study of Caribbean religion and culture in the diaspora, providing a detailed examination of the significance of religion in the immigration process and identity and community formations of Caribbean people in Canada.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Carol Duncan's...stated goal was to produce a 'speakerly' book (15), and she

does an outstanding job of capturing the subtleties of West Indian speech patterns.... Duncan explores ways in which church members experience racism in their daily lives and provides an insightful overview of multiculturalism in Canada. Judiciously selected quotations give a feel for Spiritual Baptist perceptions of race and racism in Canada (which seems to take milder forms than in the United States). Duncan's book is exceptionally well-organized and as such as befits its title. It covers a great deal of ground.... This Spot of Ground contributes new and useful information on the study of Caribbean religions and cultures, provides a much needed, detailed examination of the significance of migrant religions, and deftly charts the formation of identity and community among Caribbean people abroad. Highly recommended." (Stephen D. Glazier *Nova Religio*)

"This excellent, thorough, and very accessible study of Toronto's Spiritual Baptists examines the religious and secular lives of Caribbean primarily female immigrants to Toronto, who came to Canada mostly as domestic workers after 1975.... This Spot of Ground adds immeasurably to the feminist study of religion, an area that has been in the past often ignored.... This fascinating and sensitive book provides the missing material to illuminate how these women not only survived, but managed to surmount immigration experiences that were hard, discriminatory, and potentially soul destroying." (Johanna Stuckey *Canadian Woman Studies*)

The book's critical ethnography includes participant-observation of regular activities of two Toronto churches, including worship, social events, and pilgrimages, as well as in-depth interviews with leaders and lay members in Toronto and leaders in Trinidad. This approach highlights continuities and differences between the religion as practised in Canada and in the Caribbean. Duncan also incorporates her own experiences: of immigrating as a child, first to Britain and then to Canada; of growing up in Caribbean-Canadian communities in Toronto; and of correspondence with relatives, such as her grandmother, who continued to live in the Caribbean. These varied methods allow the author to convey Spiritual Baptists' life-worlds in detailed and textured ways.... In exploring different meanings and articulations of mothering within Spiritual Baptist communities, Duncan also demonstrates strong links between federal domestic worker schemes and stereotypes with which her participants continue to struggle.... Duncan argues that Spiritual Baptist women continue a historical tradition of valuing multiple types of mothering practices. This reclaiming of maternal identities broadly devalued within broader Canadian culture extends to rehabilitating the raced and gendered Mammy stereotype of Aunt Jemima. Duncan's thoughtful exploration of her own resistance to recognizing the importance of the figure within the spiritual lives of some of her participants is poignant and provocative. Aunt Jemima's seemingly unlikely presence demonstrates powerfully that the Spiritual Baptist faith is inherently dynamic, grounded in the life experiences of its members, who readily

adapt it to meet their needs.” (Laurel Zwissler University of Toronto Quarterly, Volume 79, Number 1, Winter 2010)“This Spot of Ground is a groundbreaking study.... [In it] Duncan has employed a range of methodological approaches in order to provide a compelling religio-cultural account of the Spiritual Baptists in Toronto. Of particular import is the presence of the narrative voice of the research subjects at the heart of the book.... [It] deserves to become an essential resource, in the first instance, for all religious scholars who profess some interest in Diasporan African religions, particularly those that are Caribbean in origin.” (Anthony G. Reddie Black Theology: An International Journal, Vol. 7, #3, 2009)“This is a compelling and interesting new ethnography that will be useful in courses on urban religion, sociology and anthropology of religion, and migration studies. Recommended.” (A.F. Galvez CHOICE, February 2009)

Carol B. Duncan is Chair of the Department of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Her areas of research interest include Caribbean religion and culture in diasporic and transnational contexts. She has published on the Spiritual Baptists, the Black Church, black women and motherhood, and race, gender, and representation in film. Duncan is a co-author of the textbook Black Church Studies: An Introduction (Abingdon Press, 2007). In 2006-2007 she was a research associate in the Womens Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School and a visiting associate professor of Women’s Studies and Religion and Society.

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