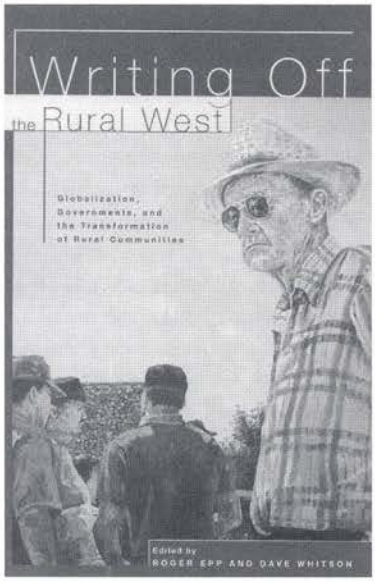


Writing Off the Rural West: Globalization, Governments, and the Transformation of Rural Communities

Roger Epp and Dave Whitson (eds)

University of Alberta Press and Parkland Institute, 2001

Reviewed by Cheryl Lousley

Globalization has been largely treated as an urban phenomenon, with "global cities" positioned as financial, communication, and technological centres driving trade and productivity, and protest movements filling the city streets of Seattle, Prague, Washington, Quebec City, and Genoa. Epp and Whitson's timely collection explores in depth the devastating impacts of trade liberalization on rural communities in Canada, particularly focussing on the western provinces. From industrial hog farms to sour-gas flaring, farm consolidation to recreational development, rural hospital closings to racial and immigration tensions, the picture is not pretty for either the people or the ecology of rural Canada.

One of the strongest papers in *Writing Off the Rural* is Darrin Qualman's "Corporate Hog Farming: The View from the Family Farm." Qualman gives a concise and detailed explanation of the policies and economies which are driving the development of industrial hog production facilities. Until the 1990s, hogs were raised in small numbers (from a few dozen to few hundred animals) on diversified farms across Canada. "These farms avoided problems such as manure leakage into groundwater," Qualman explains, "because hog numbers were small, production was dispersed, and manure was kept dry."

The development of mega hog barn complexes is a result of vertical integration where meat packers and distributors secure a cheap supply through consolidation. Small, independent producers are effectively cut out of the market and face artificially low commodity prices. And the promised benefits for rural communities who attract—often with government help—mega-barns never materialize. "A typical 2400-sow complex employs about 15 people," Qualman observes, and "each of these mega-barns will drive as many as 50 traditional small farmers out of the hog business." In effect, rural areas are becoming the dumping grounds for environmental contaminants, promoted as economic development.

Of particular interest—and perhaps discomfort—to environmentalists are the chapters on recreational development. In "Blind Spots in the Rearview Mirrors," Ian Urquhart picks up the long-standing 'jobs versus the environment' debate and suggests that "environmentalists might learn from the Wise Use movement's attention to livelihood: not merely work but the 'manner of life' lived by people."

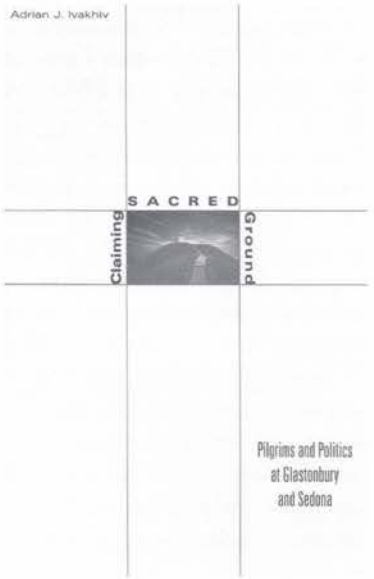
Urquhart analyzes the submissions of the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) to the joint federal-provincial environmental assessment review panel on the development of a open-pit coal mine in Cheviot, Alberta, and concludes that the environmentalists share with the project proponents a failure to imagine "more sustainable visions of livelihood." Ecotourism was the only alternative employment and economic option the AWA offered in place of the Cheviot mine, neglecting to consider the skills, histories, and desires of the communities which already inhabited this area of the Rockies. Urquhart concedes the AWA received no funding to do any socio-economic research, but forcefully argues that livelihood should take a more prominent place in environmental thinking.

All in all, the papers in this collection are consistently well-written and well-argued, grounded in extensive research and/or personal experience. The chapters frequently overlap in content—the impact of the loss of the Crow rates for shipping grain, for example, is noted in several chapters—but I found this contributed to providing a comprehensive picture of the current situation rather being repetitious. The diversity of disciplinary perspectives, ranging from sociology and political science to gerontology and theology, similarly fleshes out the regional, historical, and demographic specificities of a globalization all too often discussed in overwhelmingly general terms. This collection is well worth reading as a whole. And it should be necessary reading for anti-

corporate globalization and environmental activists in Canada, offering urban protestors a valuable grounding in the political economy of their own country.

But *Writing Off the Rural West* will be most valuable for the rural audience. In their introduction, Epp and Whitson declare their commitment to the survival of rural communities: "An underlying argument of this book is that rural communities should not be 'written off' in the language of bankers and economists."

Instead of giving up on the rural, Epp and Whitson have put together an analysis of "nomad capitalism" which rural communities can use to resist further exploitation and to develop policies and practices which support rural livelihoods. The book diligently exposes the contradictions between many of the conservative governments and policies rural voters support and the consequences of those policies on rural lands and people. My one disappointment was that the reasons for this contradiction were insufficiently addressed, discussed only in a final chapter, "The Political De-Skilling of Rural Communities" by Roger Epp, which presumes too much familiarity with Albertan political history and moves too quickly from the empirical to the theoretical. Epp does better at outlining a theoretical "democratic politics of place" than analyzing why such a vision is not currently popular in rural Alberta, or rural Canada generally.



Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona

Adrian J. Ivakhiv

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001

Reviewed by Rich Oddie

Combining extensive historical research with first-hand observations, *Claiming Sacred Ground* examines how the towns of Glastonbury, England, and Sedona, Arizona, have come to be regarded as "sacred sites" or "power places" by adherents of the New Age movement. The author situates his study within the larger context of cultural and economic globalization, in relation to which New Age spirituality can be seen as one of many competing narratives that attempt to define the purpose and direction of human existence in an age of unprecedented complexity and uncertainty. According to this New Age narrative, we are in the midst of an epochal shift that offers the possibility of a renewed spiritual connection between human and non-human beings; a re-enchantment of reality that will allow us to recover the sense of wonder, joy and reverence that has allegedly been destroyed by the secular, rationalist worldview. Drawing upon real or imagined traditions that predate those of the modern age, New Age spirituality aims to establish a deeper connection with nature and the non-human world, usually understood as spiritual, supernatural or extraterrestrial beings and forces that transcend our everyday experience. Often, this quest for personal transformation is linked to particular places and landscapes that are deemed to be sacred or powerful. *Claiming Sacred Ground* focuses on two of the most well-known of these sacred sites, exploring the ways in which meaning is recreated and renegotiated by the various actors, human and non-human, which inhabit them.

The beginning of the book provides an overview of the various conceptions of nature found within the New Age and "earth spirituality" movement and a brief history of various theoretical approaches to the study of sacred space. Ivakhiv describes his own approach as a form of "critical sympathy" that merges critical social science with direct observation and participation in the object of study; in this case, the New Age communities of Glastonbury and Sedona. This implicitly phenomenological approach emphasizes the cultural, social and historical context of others' beliefs and practices, attempting to under-