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Book Review: Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta's Image by Geo Takach

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Takach, Geo. *Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta's Image*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2017. xii + 244 pages. Hardcover, \$34.95.

A country's environment is challenged by the demands of economic development and prosperity. How do we reconcile economic development while protecting the environment for future generations—an important sustainable development's principle. Geo Takach's book addresses such a dilemma. As the author states, this "book addresses links among land, natural resources and people in a world shaped increasingly by global economic forces and pervaded by the power of pictures" (p. 11). The dichotomy offered by such a debate is either we pursue economic development against environmental protection or vice-versa. The Trump administration's recently released White House report on climate offers such a grim view of the environment vs. economic debate. According to the Report, "... by 2050, the country could see as much as 2.3 additional degrees of warming in the continental United States. By that same year, in a high-end global-warming scenario, coral reefs in Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific territories could be bleaching every single year—conditions in which their survival would be in severe doubt. A record-warm year like 2016 would become routine."

Takach takes an interdisciplinary approach, relying on critical theory, narrative research, visual framing analysis, and discourse analysis to study conflicting images of Alberta, trumpeted by its government as "Canada's Energy Province" (p. 11). The book also examines how documentary and video producers used visual media to "propagate and contest representations of place-identity in a resource based economy" (p. 13). In the final analysis, Takach's main contribution to the environmental literature is his bold approach of combining critical theory, narrative research, visual framing analysis and discourse analysis. Such a combination of theoretical approaches allows Takach to "show how the identity of people in a place is

constructed and contested through moving visual images amidst tensions between a resource-based society's need for economic development and the unsustainable environmental costs" (p. 15). In chapter 2, he elaborates on his four methods of inquiry: the practical role and significance of environmental communication, popular media, visual media, and place branding in contemporary Western society (p. 14). As Takach points out in regard to each methodological approach,

"How we communicate about nature and our other environments not only reveals our core values but also affects how we treat those environments and, consequently, the health and welfare of the planet and life on it; how we communicate about the environments through media both reflects and shapes our view of ourselves as communities and as a society; vision and visual media have become a primary way to exercise power in society; and notably on the environment; and place branding is a pressing economic priority for government and industry in the global marketplace" (p. 21, 23, 26 & 28).

In Chapter 3, Takach investigates the context of fossil-fuel extraction and related environmental concerns in Alberta through historical visualizations and framings in the popular media (p. 14). According to Takach, there are fifteen frames through which Alberta's negotiates its environmental issues. The fifteen frames are: pride; green; ethical oil; money; progress; status quo; bridging; compromise; sellout; rogue; greed; eco-justice; health; present-minded; and ecocide (p. 41). Those fifteen frames could fall under the following alignment: instrumentalist, conservationist/preservationist, moralist, or transformational.

Alberta's environmental concerns and representation will not suddenly disappear in the near future. As Takach points out, "the province is the largest supplier of oil to the U.S.—while two-thirds of foreign investment in Alberta and 60 percent of its foreign tourists are American in origin" (p. 9). Furthermore, as Takach argues, "constructing a place as an apparently cohesive whole in accord with dominant images of that place opens that constructed totality to

contestation and disruption by counterpublics” (p. 150). Takach also makes an important contribution to the environmental literature by showing that the framing of an issue or message, whether it is an environmental issue or political issue, can be as important as its content (p. 154). In the final analysis, I recommend this book to anyone interested in global environmental politics and international relations. *Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta’s Image* “adds small steps to the bigger literature in four overlapping avenues of inquiry: environmental communication, critical research, place studies and media studies” (p. 158).

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