

in “post-colonial African studies” with its broad understanding of that project may be bit more controversial.

Royden Loewen
University of Winnipeg

S. Roy Kaufman, *The Drama of a Rural Community's Life Cycle: Its Prehistory, Birth, Growth, Maturity, Decline, and Rebirth*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020. Pp. xii + 277. Softcover, \$34 US.

Freeman, South Dakota, the centre of distinct German-Russian Anabaptist agrarian cultures, is the source for S. Roy Kaufman's rural drama. This insightful and sometimes idiosyncratic “biblical critique of current agricultural systems” (202) that occasionally cites Bible passages resists easy categorization, but Kaufman's experiences, as a fourth-generation settler colonial and a career rural pastor, drive the narrative. Kaufman argues the community lost its connection to the agrarian communal cultures its founders hoped to preserve by immigrating to America from Russia, starting in 1874. He acknowledges German-Russians served as the US's “agents of imperial control and colonization” of Yankton Sioux land, even as he views these immigrants as “exploited” by the same system (22). By the 1950s, Freeman had “a viable and sustainable agricultural life” (130) marked by small-scale machinery, manual labour, and small-acreage diversified farms. Industrial farming based on science and technology after the Second World War caused a decline and the separation of “communal and agrarian values” from religious faith and mission (179–180). Soil became “inert dirt to be exploited as a medium for the production of commodities” (156). Kaufman holds special derision for corporations and the “technocracy” (167) of land-grant universities and federal agricultural bureaucracies. Religious debate among modernists and fundamentalists in the 1920s and 1930s, in which some aspects of fundamentalism “undermined the communitarian aspects of their agrarian culture” (143), however, helped prepare the way for competitive individualist industrial agriculture.

Core chapters of accessible prose describe the immigrant and settlement history of the Swiss Volhynian Amish, Low German Mennonites, and Hutterian Prairieleut German-Russians, from the rise of Anabaptism in Europe to their development in South Dakota's Turner and Hutchinson counties. The immigrant generation saw

opportunity in the Homestead Act to become landowners *with* religious freedom, but Kaufman—a “skeptic” (132) of private property—sees this as a first step to the individualist culture most farmers adopted. Kaufman calls for today’s well-“positioned” communities to revitalize and re-form by drawing in part on Mennonite “creation care” theology (215) and a strong ethnic “cultural capital” (186). Recent developments in organic farming, local food systems, land tenure, and generational transmission, and the market potential of nearby urban food constituencies, suggest to Kaufman a repopulation of the countryside to the 1950s agrarian golden age might be possible.

Kaufman is best when describing Anabaptist history and Freeman’s German-Russian agrarian cultures. Descriptions of the community’s growth and decline read as well-informed local history. His appealing discussions of later generations largely through his family’s history (broadened with census, land, and church records) do not substitute for the richer primary sources Kaufman uses to portray immigrant generations. Attempts to relate Freeman to larger historiographies, relying on too few and sometimes dated studies, succeed only partially. The effects of the location of Freeman on the western edge of the corn belt and at the eastern reaches of the Great Plains are not fully explored as important factors for farmers’ decisions. Despite his goal of reviving communal culture, a robust discussion of Hutterites who chose to form still-thriving agricultural colonies on the James and Missouri Rivers is curiously missing. He included study of only Prairieleut Hutterites who chose individual homesteads. Kaufman’s call to repopulate the countryside borders on utopian, if he does discuss important small-scale programs that represent new rural thinking.

Molly P. Rozum
University of South Dakota

Lindsay Ems, *Virtually Amish: Preserving Community at the Internet’s Margins*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022. Pp. 200. Softcover, \$35 US and open access.

When you upload a selfie on Facebook, you are unconsciously swept up into a system of implicit values. Egocentrism, for one: “Hey, look at me!” you are saying. And consumption: “Look at what I’m eating!” And status seeking: “Look how many ‘likes’ I got!”