

refugees, even though such topics continue, obviously, to preoccupy Europeans. Oddly, links between Europeans and the rest of the world is also ignored. The result is not a “people’s history,” but an elitist history with a populist message.

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**Jessica van Horssen, *A Town Called Asbestos: Environment, Contamination, Health and Resilience in a Resource Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016). 256 pp. Hardback \$95.00.**

Mention “asbestos” to any Canadian historian, and they are sure to think of the 1949 strike in Asbestos, Quebec. Mention “asbestos” to almost any other scholar, and they are sure to think of health risks and hazards. In *A Town Called Asbestos*, Jessica van Horssen brings these two meanings of asbestos together. She traces the development of the Jeffrey Mine, focusing on the hazards and health risks it posed for the community of Asbestos, while placing the 1949 strike at the core of her narrative.

The book explores the impact of a global industry on a local community through three conceptual lenses, what van Horssen terms bodies of land, the body politic, and human bodies. She shows how the local community repeatedly accommodated the expansion and organization of the physical mine, literally moving out of the way of the mine when necessary. She outlines the history of relations between the local political and business community and the company and its workforce, and the relations between the company and its workers. The most powerful early chapter in the book addresses the issue of human bodies, and tells a compelling if depressingly familiar story of a company, aided and abetted by the company doctor and medical researchers, shaping and reshaping the evidence of serious health risks facing Jeffrey Mine workers. As part of their work, researchers helped invent an idea that would sustain the industry and compliant governments throughout the twentieth century: that the physical structure of Canadian asbestos made it safe.

The pivotal event in van Horssen’s work is the 1949 strike. She contends that historians have been interested in the significance of the strike for the wider body politic in Quebec, and in doing so paid less attention to its impact on the history of the local community. Her account of the strike relies on the reporting of Gerard Pelletier, in part because he took seriously the community’s experience of the strike, and earned their trust. Not surprisingly, van Horssen makes a point of showing how the issue of asbestos worker health appeared and disappeared during the course of the strike. As a result of the events of 1949, she contends that the community “had undergone radical changes in land management, health awareness, and community power” (115).

Those “radical changes” are outlined in three chapters that parallel those

that preceded the account of the strike. After 1949, members of the community grumbled a little more about Johns Manville's land acquisitions, but they nevertheless accommodated the radical expansion of an open pit mine, literally reshaping their community to suit the company. Relations with the local business community and the workforce might be a little strained, but the company took full advantage of the fear of repeating the 1949 debacle and of the community's dependence on the industry. As still further evidence of the health risks associated with asbestos emerged, workers and the wider Asbestos community chose to believe and support the company's denials, or, as van Horssen contends, chose job security and community prosperity over the health effects they could feel in their bodies.

Van Horssen offers a subtle exploration of a resource-dependent community. At times, the analysis is almost too subtle, and one has to read carefully to capture the nuance of the arguments. For the most part, however, this seems deliberate. Van Horssen refuses to offer a morality play, or to reduce the story to one of deceit and denial, even if the most interesting chapters offer plenty of evidence of both on the part of the company's managers, medical researchers, and government officials. In giving local community leaders and workers agency—and in setting their response to health risks in the context of their response to other community issues—she helps us understand that they were willing accomplices in that deceit and denial. Indeed, she warns that without understanding how a resource comes to define a people's sense of place and relation to the land we risk misunderstanding such communities.

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**Samson A. Bezabeh, *Subjects of Empires/Citizens of States: Yemenis in Djibouti and Ethiopia* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2016). 272pp. Hardcover \$49.50.**

The Yemeni, usually the Hadhrami, diaspora has been examined by scholars in the context of an Indian Ocean that is seen as linking networks over time and distance in an early example of globalisation. Dr. Samson Bezabeh questions the status accorded to diasporic groups in Indian Ocean studies, as well as the concepts that this ocean is ecologically united and that the diasporas, through their networks, are major unifiers that act as free and unhindered agents of change. He argues that it was empires and states that were the main actors in shaping the flows of migration and the lives and livelihoods of the diasporic communities. He takes a thematic approach in examining the shifting dynamics of the political, economic, religious, and ethnic groups within empires and states to show how these affected Yemenis migrating from the late nineteenth-century to Djibouti and from there to Ethiopia.

Yemenis had been moving throughout the Indian Ocean for centuries, but