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Stéphane Frioux, ed., *Une France en transition: urbanisation, risques environnementaux et horizon écologique dans le second XXe siècle*. Paris: Champ Vallon, 2021. viii + 392 pp. €27.00 (pb). ISBN 9791026709138.

Review by Caroline Ford, University of California, Los Angeles.

This interdisciplinary volume of essays on the environmental consequences of rapid urbanization in France following the Second World War is part of a series, “L’environnement a une histoire,” directed by Charles-François Mathis for the publisher Champs Vallon. Edited by Stéphane Frioux, an environmental historian of contemporary France at the Université de Lyon 2, the book focuses on the cities of Lyon and Grenoble and emerged from a research project funded by the Agence nationale de la recherche and undertaken between 2017 and 2019. The project brought together more than ten scholars in the fields of contemporary history, political science, and engineering for the purpose of exploring a variety of themes that range from the multiple environmental risks created by urbanization and technological development to the formation of myriad environmental and political associations that responded to those risks. This is a particularly important subject because France was a country that was far less urbanized than Germany or Britain before the Second World War, and French cities grew very rapidly during the Trente Glorieuses, the thirty year period of economic boom that followed.

This volume joins a growing number of recent studies on the urban environment in France, which have focused on pollution, nature in the city, and efforts to confront the environmental problems associated with urban expansion and industrialization. Among them are Charles-François Mathis’s and Emilie-Anne Pépy’s 2017 *La ville végétale: une histoire de la nature en milieu urbain (XVII-XXI siècle)*,<sup>[1]</sup> which was published in the same series as this volume, and Stéphane Frioux’s own 2013 monograph, *Les batailles de l’hygiène: villes et environnement de Pasteur aux Trente Glorieuses*.<sup>[2]</sup> The American historians Martin Melosi and Harold Platt long ago argued for an interdisciplinary approach to urban environmental history that would integrate the natural and social sciences.<sup>[3]</sup> The fifteen essays that comprise this volume adopt this approach, at the same time providing an important political context for understanding local responses to environmental risk.

The project’s director, Stéphane Frioux, never, however, fully explains why Grenoble and Lyon were chosen as foci, though the volume’s contributors are drawn from universities in both cities. Following a preface by the geographer Michel Lussault and an introduction by Frioux, in which he lays out terms that are key to the project (*pollution*, *risqué*, and *nuisance*), the book is divided into three parts. The first, consisting of five chapters, focuses on the environmental challenges

facing cities before and after the Second World War, the construction of new housing in the wake of an ongoing housing crisis, the creation of new urban areas at the periphery of Grenoble and Lyon, pollution, and the growing lack of green spaces. Part one also examines the beginnings of municipal attempts to address environmental risks. Indeed, chapters four and five consist of two interesting and very different case studies of environmental risks in Lyon in the postwar period. Chapter four, by Renaud Bécot, focuses on Lyon's longstanding battle with noxious mosquitos, which led to a heightened awareness of the environmental conditions that led to their propagation. It also examines the environmental risks associated with different strategies that were used to eradicate them. This battle culminated in a municipal operation in September 2019 to stamp out tiger mosquitos, which had infested other cities in northern Europe, including Paris, and whose increasing numbers are thought to be the result of climate change. Chapter five explores a very different kind of environmental problem that was posed by the creation of an oil refinery ten kilometers south of Lyon, in 1964. Its explosion, in 1966, which led to considerable injury and loss of life, has been seen as a turning point in terms of the subsequent regulation of industrial risks.

The volume's second part, six chapters that focus on the emergence of the French environmental movement and its actions from 1968 to the 1990s, is far more general in scope. Chapter six, by Stéphane Frioux, puts the French environmental movement in a global context, while chapter seven focuses on a working-class environmentalism that emerged from 1968 and which was a turning point in the movement. The remaining chapters explore various forms of political mobilization and the role of grass-roots environmental organizations. Chapter eleven, by Yann Brunet, returns more squarely to the local context of Lyon by examining the question of urban waste in the 1970s and 1980s.

Part three of the volume, four chapters, is really an extension of the second part in that it explores the reorientation of the environmental movement at the end of the 1970s and several events that led to increased militancy and popular participation. One of the first of these events was the opposition to the construction of a power plant at Creys-Malville. Groups opposing it were formed all over France, and one of the most militant was in Grenoble. The group protested the *électro-fascisme* that the power plant represented, leading to a massive anti-nuclear demonstration on 31 July 1977, in which 40,000 to 50,000 demonstrators participated. While the history of the demonstration is well known, Stéphane Frioux and Vincent Porhel show how it was linked to political mobilization in a local context and led to greater grass-roots militancy. A second event was the affaire de la Feyssine of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which involved a plan to develop an area on the left bank of the Rhône, close to Lyon. It sparked fierce opposition and became another political fight for militant ecologists. Chapter fourteen suggests ways in which local disputes and grass-roots movements shaped national politics with the creation of the Ministry of the Environment, the training of so-called environmental experts, and the emergence of environmental studies in the French academy, before returning to the local context. Chapter fifteen, by Anne-Marie Granet-Abisset, explores the creation of the PGRN, the Pôle grenoblois d'études et de recherche pour la prévention des risques naturels.

The essays in this volume examine in a broad sense the consequences of the rapid urbanization and technological transformation that occurred in France following the Second World War, with a specific focus on two cities. As Stéphane Frioux emphasizes in a concluding chapter, the goal of the project was to better understand the role that local actors played in the construction of the environment as a site of political action. The contributors have examined a wealth of local

archives and initiatives to achieve this goal. The impressive case studies of specific environmental risks and problems that are examined in some of the chapters might have been expanded, however, by replacing the more general essays that discuss developments at the national or global levels, which have already been explored in other contexts. Grenoble was also perhaps given less attention than it deserves, but the ten authors have provided much food for thought and have indicated future avenues of research in an important, timely, and stimulating area of historical inquiry.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

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Part Three, La pluralité des engagements. Entre l'expertise et le militantisme, les reconfigurations du mouvement écologique (fin années 1970-années 1990)

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Romain Mularczyk, “L’affaire de Feyssine’ (1988-1995)”

Stéphane Frioux, Vincent Porhel and Josselin Sibille, “Expertiser l’environnement”

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## NOTES

[1] Charles François Mathis and Émilie-Anne Pépy, *La ville végétale: une histoire de la nature en milieu urbain (France XVII-XXI siècle)* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2018).

[2] Stéphane Frioux, *Les batailles de l’hygiène: villes et environnement de Pasteur aux Trente Glorieuses* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2013).

[3] Martin V. Melosi, “The Place of the City in Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 1-23 and Harold Platt, “The Emergence of Urban Environmental History,” *Urban History* 26, no. 1 (1999): 89-95.

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