

***Creole Ecologies : environmental injustice and colonial and post-colonial tropical societies  
(the case of Indian Ocean World 1940-1970)***

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Over the time, different aspects of the human/natural Indian Ocean relationship have shaped a wide range of landscapes. On Reunion Island, environmental historiography has focused on deforestation since the colonization of the island. Another issue was the cultivation and profitability associated with these exogenous species introduced since the seventeenth century. The industrialization and environmental transformation that these plantations implied meant a total change of the tropical environment. Bondage and the labour system, based first on slavery and then on indentured labour, created conditions of environmental colonial culture settled by the long run modern-colonial rules<sup>2</sup>. This environmental culture was based on dependence on a huge mass of workers from the plantation to their owners at least until the 1920s, following the colonial rule: in all terms, of land-tenure, of the cultivation of gardens (called *jardin d'esclave*), of sanitary conditions and of hunger and food conditions.

Reunion Island was considered in 1954, in the records, as “a country of mono-cultivation with an almost exclusively industrial character”. In the 1950s, these reports of the Prefecture stated that Reunion Island could “be proud of the modern facilities of its sugar factories”. But the island was also “completely dependent on its imports for almost all its supplies”. Worse, in terms of food culture, the texts stated that “the Reunionese people make rice that they do not cultivate and do not know how to cultivate, the basis of their diet”. According to the French government services, “the demographic problem” was the most serious obstacle to the island's prosperity. To avoid hunger, since 1955 “expatriation [was] the only future open to Reunion Islanders”. In terms of environmental health, hygiene services also denounced the poor implementation of waste management measures in the sugar industries. The propagation of bagasse, skimmings and molasses from sugar production in the water sources generated enormous situations of incubation of larvae of mosquitoes transmitting malaria, yellow fever and dengue. From 1946, the French state and a referendum had established the island as an administrative department, thus emerging from colonial status. The contradiction between a flourishing industry and hunger cannot be more evident than a situation of environmental injustice unexampled in the environmental history of tropical societies.

In this paper we will analyze what environmental justice existed on the Reunion Island in the post-colonial period. Did a colonial environmental culture endure after the departmentalization? Did the scientific heritage of this colonial environmental culture continue to place a hierarchy between the profitability of the plantation system over food sovereignty of the island population? What environmental hygiene and food measures were implemented to establish a balance between making economic profit and feed the people? For

this we will define the preceding environmental culture, with the support of the environmental tropical historiography.