



**HAL**  
open science

## Cyclones and migration in the district of Port-Louis in the 1960s

Linganaden E. Murday, Sadasivam J. Reddi

► **To cite this version:**

Linganaden E. Murday, Sadasivam J. Reddi. Cyclones and migration in the district of Port-Louis in the 1960s. *Revue historique de l’océan Indien*, 2017, Migrations, migrants et exils Dans les pays de l’Indianocéanie XVIIe-XXe siècles, 14, pp.79-94. hal-03260644

**HAL Id: hal-03260644**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-03260644>**

Submitted on 15 Jun 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Cyclones and migration in the district of Port-Louis in the 1960s

Linganaden E. Murday (History and Political Science Department, University  
of Mauritius)

Sadasivam J. Reddi (Associate Professor retraité)

### Introduction

Immigration and emigration are well-established phenomena in all countries throughout history and these involve movement of the population from one country to another<sup>140</sup>. Internal migration is also a common phenomenon in all countries as people – individually or in groups – move from one place to another for a variety of reasons to look for safety, economic opportunities and better environment. Often the movement of population is also provoked by wars and natural calamities such as cyclones.

In the past, internal migration in Mauritius occurred mainly as people seeking better economic opportunities and greater freedom moved out of sugar estates to villages and towns. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people continued to move within their own districts and across districts for a number of reasons but mainly for employment especially from rural areas to towns where they also had access to better amenities. One major factor, cyclones, affected the migration pattern in Mauritius in the 1960s. This was especially the case when Mauritius was hit by cyclone Alix and much more directly and destructively by cyclone Carol in 1960. These natural calamities created an unprecedented refugee crisis that durably displaced a large number of people and modified their living space. The cyclone directly caused the displacement and subsequently landlords' reaction and government policies as a response to the crisis crystallised that displacement. However, it did not result in any significant change in the ethnic composition of the population in the district studied in this article.

A look at the existing literature shows that the impact of cyclones on settlement patterns in Mauritius has received only scant attention from historians and social scientists in general. Richon acknowledged the profound impact of cyclone Carol on the island in his photographic book but he did not capture the complexity of the problem<sup>141</sup>. Teelock briefly mentioned the impact of cyclone Carol in her book on the history of Mauritius but she did not provide a detailed analysis of that impact<sup>142</sup>. Similarly, Smith Simmons found that "Carol's scars still mark Mauritius" but she did not delve on the

---

<sup>140</sup> I. Goldin and G. Cameron, *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future*. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011.

<sup>141</sup> Emmanuel Richon, *Cyclones à Maurice*, MMXF Mauritian, p. 6 and 48.

<sup>142</sup> V. Teelock, *Mauritian History: From Its Beginnings to Modern Times*. Moka: MGI Press, 2001, p. 389.

impact of the cyclone<sup>143</sup>. In his autobiography, Raman dedicated several paragraphs to cyclone Carol and its aftermath<sup>144</sup>. Interestingly, although he was not a refugee himself, his account contains some details about life in the refugee shelters known as “longères” and the measures that had been taken to deal with the refugee crisis<sup>145</sup>. Moutou dedicated one chapter to cyclone Carol and provided interesting details about the way the Mauritians experienced the cyclone and acknowledged the refugee crisis that followed<sup>146</sup>. However, like other researchers mentioned above, he did not analyse the migration in the aftermath of cyclone Carol and only briefly explained the construction of the housing estates or “cité ouvrières” and the ghettoization of the working class, without specifying when the ghettoization occurred<sup>147</sup>.

This article will therefore try to make up for that gap by analysing the impact of the two abovementioned cyclones on the town of Port-Louis which was the most affected locality in Mauritius. We have chosen to limit ourselves to cyclones Alix and Carol and to the period 1952-1962 as this will allow us to look at the development of the town before the changes of 1968 caused by racial riots. To achieve our aim to better understand the cyclones-induced migration, we have analysed censuses, newspaper articles and maps.

Structurally, this article will thus discuss the migration that occurred in the wake of the cyclones in 1960 and how the migration and resettlement were shaped by economic, political and social factors at various levels. We will study the impact at two interrelated levels, namely the state and the city of Port Louis, and the suburban part of Port Louis.

### The two cyclones and the ensuing crisis

Two cyclones, namely Alix and Carol hit the island in 1960, in January and February respectively. Their effects were felt throughout the island. The highest gust recorded over the island for Alix was 200 km/h while that of Carol was 256 km/h<sup>148</sup>. Despite its intensity and proximity of the closest point of approach (30 kilometres from Mauritius), Alix did not cause much damage to the city of Port Louis<sup>149</sup>. This is confirmed by statistics on the number of houses destroyed by the cyclone. Of a national total of 4,600

---

<sup>143</sup> A. Smith Simmons, *Modern Mauritius: The Politics Of Decolonization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 145.

<sup>144</sup> A. Cader Raman, *Not a Paradise: I Love You Mauritius*. Mauritius: Editions de L'Océan Indien, 1991.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 175-182 and p. 195-196.

<sup>146</sup> B. Moutou, *Ile Maurice : Récits de son Histoire Contemporaine*. Tombeau Bay: Alfran Co. Ltd., 2000, p. 183-198.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196-197.

<sup>148</sup> Mauritius Meteorological Services, « List of Historical Cyclones », available at <http://metservice.intnet.mu/publications/list-of-historical-cyclones.php> (Last Accessed on 01/02/17)

<sup>149</sup> « Le Cyclone Alix », *Le Mauricien*, 21 January 1960. See also « Le Cyclone A Port Louis », *Le Mauricien*, 22 January 1960.

houses destroyed during the cyclone, there were only 500 houses destroyed in Port Louis<sup>150</sup>.

In contrast, Carol really shocked the population by its ferocity. The letter of the Mayor of Port Louis to the inhabitants of the city, in the wake of Carol, reflected this trauma: « *Vous avez pu constater vous-même l'étendue des dégâts – vous en êtes d'ailleurs les victimes directes et vous savez tous que jamais dans son histoire notre vieille capitale n'avait été aussi durement éprouvée* »<sup>151</sup>. Similarly, Iain Macleod, the Colonial Secretary, in a speech in the House of Commons pointed out that “[the] cyclone which struck Mauritius on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February was the most severe ever recorded in the island's history”<sup>152</sup>. Newspaper reports illustrate the extent of the damage caused by cyclone Carol. In the corner Desforges street and Pamplemousses street, the Saint Paul shop was badly damaged<sup>153</sup>. Another report of destruction of houses in Vallée Pitot depicted the sad plight of the poorest inhabitants<sup>154</sup>.

On 29 February, in the morning after cyclone Carol struck the country, people and the government were confronted with a serious refugee problem. Table 1 below shows that the registration of refugees three weeks after the cyclone and Port Louis emerges as the most affected district in Mauritius. Final estimates show that about 80,000 people (representing one eighth of the island's population) took shelter in schools, churches, village halls, welfare centres and other buildings<sup>155</sup>. However, it should be acknowledged that the effect of cyclone Carol was amplified by the pre-existing fragile house structures (further fragilised by Alix) which were considered as the norm at that time. “The traditional form of housing in Mauritius is a simple “straw hut” built around a timber frame. These huts are easily built and the cost of the timber and other materials is about Rs 250. They can stand up to normal weather but not to cyclones”<sup>156</sup>.

On a more positive note, the cyclone increased the political sense of urgency to deal with those problems. As one commentator observed in 1960: « *Le récent cyclone nous a été utile en plus d'une façon. Il a mis à jour le dénuement dans lequel vivotaient des milliers de famille* »<sup>157</sup>.

---

<sup>150</sup> « D'autres Dégâts Causés Par Le Cyclone Alix », *Le Mauricien*, 23 January 1960. See also « Le Nombre de Maisons Complètement Détruites », *Le Mauricien*, 22 January 1960.

<sup>151</sup> « Lettre du Maire Aux Résidents et Contribuables de Port Louis », *Le Mauricien*, 08 March 1960.

<sup>152</sup> « L'Aide de la Métropole à L'île Maurice : M. Macleod: 'A Second Token Payment Would at This Stage be Derisory' », *Le Mauricien*, 21 March 1960

<sup>153</sup> *Le Mauricien*, 08 March 1960

<sup>154</sup> *Le Mauricien*, 09 March 1960

<sup>155</sup> Richard Titmuss and Brian Abel-Smith, *Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius*. Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1968, p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>157</sup> C. Z., « Habitation et Contrôle Des Prix », *Le Mauricien*, 13 February 1960.

Table 1: Number of Refugees

District	Number of Refugees
Plaines Wilhems (Haut)	4,350
Plaines Wilhems (Bas)	3,760
Port Louis	8,325
Savanne	2,767
Grand Port	5,651
Moka	3,102
Rivière Noire	3,951
Flacq	4,376
Pamplemousses	3,348
Rivière du Rempart	4,548

Source: *Le Mauricien*, 17 March 1960

During and after the cyclones, people migrated to seek refuge elsewhere as their habitats were damaged or destroyed. Landlords were reluctant to rebuild those houses – an attitude that was castigated by the government as being “anti-social”<sup>158</sup>. The *Port Louis House Owners Association* provided several unconvincing arguments to defend the house owners. It argued that only a small minority of house owners really refused to repair the houses<sup>159</sup>, the majority of the house owners were poor and lacked resources to make the necessary repairs and also the responsibility to house the poor should rest on the government and the municipality<sup>160</sup>. Albeit unsuccessfully, the Ministry of Housing even threatened to refer the landlords to the local *Rent Restrictions Committees*<sup>161</sup>. In order to provide an incentive to house owners, tenants were made to contribute 10 % of the cost of post cyclonic reparations<sup>162</sup>. However, this policy was deeply unpopular among tenants<sup>163</sup>.

### Government's Response

It was thus clear that government and the colonial authorities alone had to find a way to respond to the crisis against which they were caught

<sup>158</sup> « Locataires et Propriétaires : Déclaration du Ministère Du Logement », *Le Mauricien*, 15 March 1960; « Propriétaires et Locataires », *Le Mauricien*, 18 March 1960; « Expliquez-vous M. Razack Mohamed », *Le Mauricien*, 04 April 1960; « Lettre du Ministère du Logement », *Le Mauricien*, 14 April 1960.

<sup>159</sup> « Le Problème Propriétaires-Locataires de Maisons : Une Lettre de la 'Port Louis House Owners Association' », *Le Mauricien*, 29 March 1960.

<sup>160</sup> Issac Sattan, « La Question Du Logement: Une Lettre De La 'Port Louis House Owners' Association », *Le Mauricien*, 03 February 1960; « Le Problème Propriétaires-Locataires de Maisons : Une Lettre de la 'Port Louis House Owners Association' », *Le Mauricien*, 29 March 1960.

<sup>161</sup> « Le Scandale du Ministère du Logement: Une Tentative D'Explication du Ministre Razack Mohamed », *Le Mauricien*, 14 April 1960.

<sup>162</sup> « Les Locataires Devront Rembourser Les Frais de Réparations Après un Cyclone », *Le Mauricien*, 01 June 1960; « La Bataille du Locataire : Battu Par la Majorité, au Conseil Législatif, Le Locataire Devra Payer au Propriétaire, Pour Des Réparations, 10 % du Prix de la Location », *Le Mauricien*, 08 June 1960.

<sup>163</sup> « Les Locataires Protestent », *Le Mauricien*, 03 June 1960.

unprepared – both institutionally and financially. Its initial response was to provide building materials like wood, iron sheets and nails to the refugees<sup>164</sup>. However, only those who owned a plot of land could benefit from this scheme<sup>165</sup>. It was observed that in urban areas like Port Louis, the majority of the refugees did not own a plot of land<sup>166</sup>. Thus the authorities had to find alternative policies. Subsequently, after Carol, a *Cyclone Committee* was set up to coordinate government's responses. As immediate measures, the Colonial Government responded by providing money to buy food<sup>167</sup> and planned temporary shelters or *longères* for them as sanitary conditions in the 282 refugee centres rapidly deteriorated<sup>168</sup>.

Right from the first meeting, the *Cyclone Committee* approved the building of “*longères*” to cater for the homeless refugees in several localities in Mauritius including Cassis, Bell Village and Route Nicolay<sup>169</sup>. Each set of temporary shelters would consist of 12 rooms and would be ready within a few weeks<sup>170</sup>. The number of refugees and lack of refugee centres in some areas were used as a guide for prioritizing actions<sup>171</sup>. Conditions were laid down for selecting sites that would host these shelters<sup>172</sup>. It should be close to an existing supply of water be it a water fountain or pipe. It should also be close to a road that would enable heavy lorries to deliver building materials. The soil should be suitable for construction of pit latrine facilities and finally, for social reasons, it should be more than 200 yards from a school, if there is one in the locality. By 18 March 1960, 600 families were already settled in the ‘*longère*’ situated at Bell Village<sup>173</sup>.

In the long term the government planned the construction of permanent cyclone-resistant houses<sup>174</sup>. The *Cyclone Committee* instructed the Housing Controller to formulate plans for the construction of permanent houses but right from the beginning they were faced with a number of

---

<sup>164</sup> « L'Aide du Gouvernement Aux Sans-Abrich », *Le Mauricien*, 23 January 1960; « Important Notice », *Le Mauricien*, 13 February 1960.

<sup>165</sup> « La Reconstruction Des Logements », *Le Mauricien*, 16 February 1960.

<sup>166</sup> « Reprise Des Débats Sur le Plan de Reconstruction », *Le Mauricien*, 29 October 1960.

<sup>167</sup> « Le Remboursement Aux Boutiquiers Des Bons De Livraison », *Le Mauricien*, 04 March 1960.

<sup>168</sup> « Les Conditions Sanitaires Dans Les Centres de Refuge », *Le Mauricien*, 05 March 1960.

<sup>169</sup> « Les Organismes de Réparation et de Reconstruction Etablis Par le Gouvernement », *Le Mauricien*, 05 March 1960; « Travaux du Sous-Comité de Cyclone », *Le Mauricien*, 07 March 1960.

<sup>170</sup> « Les Organismes de Réparation et de Reconstruction Etablis Par le Gouvernement », *Le Mauricien*, 05 March 1960; Titmuss R. and Smith Brian Abel, *Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius, op. cit.*; « Des Sinistrés Ont Occupé Hier Des Abris Provisoires », *Le Mauricien*, 18 March 1960.

<sup>171</sup> « Lettre du Sous-Comité de Cyclone Aux Membres Du Conseil Législatif », *Le Mauricien*, 9 March 1960.

<sup>172</sup> « Lettre du Sous-Comité de Cyclone Aux Membres Du Conseil Législatif », *Le Mauricien*, 9 March 1960.

<sup>173</sup> « Le Sous- Comité de Cyclone Discute, L'Île Maurice Attend... », *Le Mauricien*, 19 March 1960.

<sup>174</sup> « Le Discours du Trône, Un Résumé de ce Qui a Paru Dans la Presse, Laisse L'Île Maurice Dans L'Obscurité », *Le Mauricien* 23 March 1960.

problems: “plans for permanent house construction is related very closely to the availability of finance from all sources, local and overseas”<sup>175</sup>. Moreover, apart from funds, the *Cyclone Committee* also noted that it had to deal with other problems like land acquisition, construction of roads to these new residential areas as well as access to water and electricity<sup>176</sup>.

A few days after Alix, a ministerial delegation went to Britain to seek metropolitan assistance for a national reconstruction programme<sup>177</sup>. They were still negotiating with the “Secrétaire D’Etat Aux Colonies” Iain Macleod, when cyclone Carol struck Mauritius<sup>178</sup>. Eventually, the colonial government donated Rs 46,030,000 and provided a loan amounting to Rs 38, 870,000<sup>179</sup>. However, the additional resources remained largely insufficient to provide a comfortable house to all refugees. Thus, the government faced the intractable dilemma of providing cyclone-resistant houses to the greatest number in the short period of time in a context of very limited funds<sup>180</sup>. Atkinson, advisor to the secretary of states, was sent to Mauritius to study the reconstruction issue. He recommended the construction of 25,000 houses (20,000 wooden houses and 5,000 concrete ones)<sup>181</sup>. Atkinson recommended only 5,000 concrete houses because the construction industry in Mauritius would not be able to handle the construction of more concrete houses and the authorities would not be able to manage constructions if there were too many construction sites spread around the island<sup>182</sup>. Furthermore, given the urgency of the situation, it was difficult to spread the construction projects over several years<sup>183</sup>. Even if there is a degree of truth in these justifications, they also provided convenient excuses for the metropolitan government to hide its unwillingness to provide financial resources to build concrete houses.

Therefore, the policy of the Ministry of Housing was to keep cost to the minimum because of limited resources and also to propose an affordable rent to the poorer classes which were the most affected by the cyclone. The rent was about Rs 17 per month for those without land and other houses for those with land at Rs 22. These houses had no or very little amenities, no bathroom or kitchen. According to M. Archibald (Commissaire at the CHA), « selon une coutume très répandue à Maurice, les ménagères préparent leurs repas sur un feu de bois à l’intérieur de leur logement. Cette pratique

---

<sup>175</sup> « Le Sous-Comité de Cyclone Discute, L’Ile Maurice Attend... », art. cité, *Le Mauricien*, 19 March 1960

<sup>176</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>177</sup> « Des Ministres Mauriciens Partent Pour Londres. But : Demander de L’Aide Pour Elever Des Maisons Préfabriquées », *Le Mauricien*, 12 February 1960.

<sup>178</sup> « L’Aide de La Métropole », *Le Mauricien*, 04 March 1960.

<sup>179</sup> « Notre Economie: Le Prêt-Don de la Métropole », *Le Mauricien*, 18 July 1960.

<sup>180</sup> Bureau Central de l’Information, « Le ‘Cyclone Housing Scheme’ 1960 », *Le Mauricien*, 08 December 1960.

<sup>181</sup> « Le Projet de Reconstruction Nationale », *Le Mauricien*, 18 August 1960 ; « Le Plan de Reconstruction », *Le Mauricien*, 20 October 1960.

<sup>182</sup> « Le Projet de Reconstruction Nationale », *Le Mauricien*, 18 August 1960.

<sup>183</sup> *Idem*.

diminuera de dix ans la durée du toit de tôle galvanisée. Il a été établi que la tôle galvanisée se détériore en deux ou trois ans par l'action de la fumée »<sup>184</sup>.

Not only cost was a major consideration, these houses were built according to what the government considered prevailing attitudes of the time – namely lack of privacy, use of outdoor communal toilets and cooking in the yard outside the house. However, the problem of housing for the unemployed remain unsolved. Despite the low rent, many people could not secure a house. The wooden houses would cost Rs 3,333 each, and Rs 1,333 would be given as part of government contribution to the construction of houses and Rs 2,000 was provided in terms of loans that should be reimbursed at the rate of Rs 17.50 over a period of 25 years<sup>185</sup>. The cost of concrete houses would be Rs 6,000 with Rs 2,000 considered as a donation from the government and Rs 4,000 as a loan that the beneficiaries would have to pay over a period of 25 years<sup>186</sup>.

The Central Housing Company was set up on 5 December 1960 to execute the construction of the housing estates projects<sup>187</sup>. In 1961, the Central Housing Authority embarked on a scheme for the construction of 20,000 houses to replace those destroyed by cyclones<sup>188</sup>. An international tender for the construction of houses was launched and companies from 14 countries expressed interest in undertaking the construction project (6 from Canada, 7 from East African states, 1 from France, 1 from Italy, 4 from Malaysia, 1 from Norway, 1 from Rhodesia, 4 from Singapore, 1 from Sweden, 19 from the UK, 13 from South Africa and 1 from the US)<sup>189</sup>. According to one observer, the “*cités*” and the *Longtill* houses were built “without consideration for the people who were going to live in them”<sup>190</sup>. However evidence from the newspapers in the 1960s leads to a more nuanced view. The public was invited to visit the prototypes of houses built and make suggestions<sup>191</sup>. It is not clear whether they received suggestions and whether those were taken into consideration in finalisation of the various housing estates around the island. Above all, given the context explained above, it is doubtful whether the government could afford to respond to suggestions that involved substantial additional costs.

Another major consideration in responding to the crisis was land. Given the surface area of the island, land was expensive and not much Crown

---

<sup>184</sup> « Le Programme National de Reconstruction : Première Etape : 3000 Maisons A Abercrombie D'Ici le Début de 1962 », *Le Mauricien*, 12 May 1961.

<sup>185</sup> « Au Conseil Législatif: Ouverture Des Débats Sur le Plan National de Reconstruction », *Le Mauricien*, 26 October 1960.

<sup>186</sup> Bureau Central de l'Information, « Le ‘Cyclone Housing Scheme’ 1960 », *Le Mauricien*, 08 December 1960.

<sup>187</sup> « Le Plan de Reconstruction », *Le Mauricien*, 20 October 1960; « The Central Housing Authority Ordinance, 1960 », *Le Mauricien*, 07 December 1960.

<sup>188</sup> Mauritius Legislative Council. *Reconstruction and Development Programme*. Sessional Paper n° 2 of 1961. 1960-1965, p. 81.

<sup>189</sup> « Le Programme National de Reconstruction : Première Etape : 3000 Maisons A Abercrombie D'Ici le Début de 1962 », *Le Mauricien*, 12 May 1961.

<sup>190</sup> A. Cader Raman, *Not a Paradise: I Love You Mauritius*, op. cit., p.195.

<sup>191</sup> *Le Mauricien*, 20 January 1961; *Le Mauricien*, 24 January 1961.



Land available particularly in the capital city where some 6,000 houses of *Longtill* type were planned<sup>192</sup>. This lack of space certainly influenced the structure of those houses. Willy Bourdet, the President of the CHA, remarked that « [dans] les agglomérations, on observe une pénurie de terrains pour la construction. Dans les villes, notamment dans la région port-louisienne, des maisons jumelées seront construites pour économiser les terres disponibles, mais chaque occupant sera assuré de son espace vital »<sup>193</sup>.

Besides financial and land issues, there were also political considerations which shaped the housing policy. Incidentally, given the political context at the very beginning of the 1960s, the response to the crisis was politicised. According to Raman, the factor dictating the choice of the site for the construction of the “*cités*” was primarily political<sup>194</sup>. However, he did not specify these so called political considerations. The calamities struck after the elections of 1959 when the MLP-CAM had just won an overwhelming victory. The cyclones provided material for the opposition and the opposition press to criticize the housing policy in order to undermine the popularity of the government and increase their own. They criticised the housing policy from many angles: the refusal of the government to recruit local architects for the housing projects, the type of housing, the lack of amenities and the fact that, according to the opposition, the new houses were not cyclone proof. The arguments of the opposition were substantiated when cyclones Béryl and Jenny piled on the woes of those living in temporary shelters and further demonstrated the imperfections of the “*cités*” houses built before 1960<sup>195</sup>. Already during cyclone Alix, even though they demonstrated their resistance to strong cyclonic gusts of wind, concrete houses in Cité Gabriel Martial (built in 1956), for example, were found to be defective because rain could easily infiltrate those houses<sup>196</sup>. The *Naco* windows allowed rain water to infiltrate and flood houses<sup>197</sup>.

One major political factor which might have influenced government policy was to retain the cyclone refugees and build the housing estates within the same constituency so as not to provoke any major displacement which could affect the results of future elections. It seems that this was always a factor at the back of the mind of policy makers as shown by the debates on the extension of the limit of the city to include suburbs like Vallée Pitot and

<sup>192</sup> « Le Programme National de Reconstruction : Première Etape : 3000 Maisons... », art. cité.

<sup>193</sup> « Le Programme National de Reconstruction : Première Etape : 3000 Maisons... », art. cité ; « A La Cité Gabriel Martial », *Le Mauricien*, 16 March 1962 ; « Le Gouvernement Fait Reconstruire Les Longères », *Le Mauricien*, 16 March 1962

<sup>194</sup> A. Cader Raman (1991), *Not a Paradise: I Love You Mauritius*, op. cit., p.195-196.

<sup>195</sup> « Le Cyclone ‘Béryl’ a (sic) Passé Sur le Littoral Ouest de Maurice », *Le Mauricien*, 27 December 1961 ; « Deux Ans, Jour Pour Jour, Apres Carol, le Cyclone Jenny Fait 17 Morts et 125 Blesses : Les Endroits Les Plus Affectés Sont port Louis et les Districts Du Nord », *Le Mauricien*, 03 March 1962.

<sup>196</sup> « La Cité Gabriel Martial », *Le Mauricien* 27 January 1960 ; « La Cité Gabriel Martial », *Le Mauricien* 12 February 1960.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibidem*.

Roche Bois<sup>198</sup>. The relief efforts, itself, were mired by political distrusts right from the beginning<sup>199</sup>. There were also fears that if the boundaries of Port Louis were extended, the municipality would not have enough resources to service additional localities<sup>200</sup>. Furthermore, there were allegations that the Mauritian Labour Party wanted to extend the limits of Port Louis in order to make it easier to win elections in urban areas: « *L'extension des limites de la ville de Port Louis a pour but de comprendre dans le registre électoral municipal des éléments qui viendront modifier l'incidence du vote des Port Louisiens proprement dits et faire disparaître cette force de la population générale* »<sup>201</sup>.

The government had thus no choice but to ensure that the construction of housing estates did not affect the ethnic balance in the various constituencies. As we will later show in this article, this may also explain why there was an insignificant change in the ethnic distribution of the population in Port Louis after the cyclone-induced migration. It was also true that refugees were unlikely to move too far from the region where they inhabited prior to the cyclone. Thus, there was convergence between the wishes of the cyclone refugees and the political calculations of the government and opposition.

### **Spatial reorganisation of Port-Louis: From town to suburbs**

For a better understanding of changes brought by the cyclones, it is necessary to look at the demography of Port-Louis and its spatial organisation. In this section, we provide a snapshot of the situation in the district of Port Louis prior to the cyclones. In the 1950s, the district of Port Louis had a core town surrounded by several suburban localities. The central part of Port-Louis housed the administrative centres of the capital, the major business houses and shops as well as the market and also residential areas. These allowed intense interactions between the people of the town because of its relatively small population.

The population census 1952, for example, upheld this spatial distinction by dividing the district of Port Louis into "Town of Port Louis" and the suburbs which were listed as "Village"<sup>202</sup>. Suburbs comprised the poorer regions of Port-Louis as the majority of the inhabitants were from the lower and working classes. As shown in Table 2 above, the population was unequally distributed in the suburbs with Pailles recording a population of 72 while Roche-Bois had a population of 3,655. In 1952, the population of Port-

<sup>198</sup> « Conseil Municipal », *Le Mauricien*, 08 April 1960.

<sup>199</sup> « Protestations et Réclamations Des Députés », *Le Mauricien*, 9 March 1960 ; G. Duval, « Le Triste Cas Des Sinistres de Midlands », *Le Mauricien*, 9 March 1960 ; « Des Sinistres Sont Oubliés », *Le Mauricien*, 12 March 1960 ; « Les Abris Provisoires et la Politique », *Le Mauricien*, 12 March 1960.

<sup>200</sup> E. Millien, « Incompétence et Malhonnêteté Politique », *Le Mauricien*, 25 April 1960 ; « Extension Des Limites de Port Louis », *Le Mauricien*, 19 Mai 1960.

<sup>201</sup> E. Millien, « Incompétence et Malhonnêteté Politique », *Le Mauricien*, 25 April 1960.

<sup>202</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1952, Part 1, p. 17.

Louis was 84,539 distributed as follows – 69,693 lived in town of Port Louis, that is 82.4 % of the total population and in the suburbs of Port-Louis, there were 14,846 inhabitants, accounting for about 17.6 % of the population.

**Table 2: Suburbs in the district of Port Louis  
And its population in 1952**

Suburbs in district of Port Louis	Population
Roche Bois	3,655
Cassis	2,340
Tranquebar	2,112
Sainte Croix	1,753
Vallée des Prêtres	1,542
GRNW	1,213
Vallée Pitot	1,139
Bell Village	672
Montagne des Signaux	179
Vallée du Pouce	166
Pailles	72
Dauguet	3
<b>Total for the suburbs</b>	<b>14,846</b>
<b>Total for the district of Port Louis</b>	<b>84,539</b>

Source: *Census 1952*, p. 17

As shown in Table 3, out of every 10 persons living in the town of Port Louis, 7,3 were tenants. For the suburban areas, the figures were 5,1 for every 10 persons. Furthermore, the majority of houses in the district of Port Louis was in poor conditions. The 1952 housing census indicates that the town area, where the vast majority of people lived, had 3,658 residential buildings defined either as hovels or huts and also 2,713 houses classified as country houses, cottages, bungalows or mixed tenements<sup>203</sup>. Hovels have always existed in the town centre since the early days. They were cheaply built and needed repair<sup>204</sup>. Huts were small and cheap houses “made of flimsy materials such as bamboo, ravenal, straw, with thatched roof”<sup>205</sup>. Most of the time, these places were not proper for living.

<sup>203</sup>Central Statistical Office, *Census 1952 of Mauritius and of Its Dependencies*, part III, p. 2.

<sup>204</sup>Central Statistical Office, *Census 1952 of Mauritius and of Its Dependencies*, part III, p. 1.

<sup>205</sup>Central Statistical Office, *Census 1952 of Mauritius and of Its Dependencies*, part III, p. 1.

**Table 3: Tenure of Dwellings in the district of Port Louis  
(Frequency distribution per 10,000)**

Status of Occupier	Port Louis (Town)	Port Louis (Suburb)
Owner	1,478	3,473
Tenant	7,366	5,116
Free Tenant	998	1,225
Unascertained	158	186

Central Statistical Office, *Census 1952 of Mauritius and of Its Dependencies*, part III, p. 3

Although certain ethnic communities predominated in certain regions of Port-Louis, for example, Muslims in Plaine Verte, Sino-Mauritians in China Town or Creoles in other parts of Port-Louis, these regions remained multicultural with the various communities living together in varying proportions.

**Table 4: Ethnic distribution of the population  
In the district of Port Louis**

Region	General Population	Indo-Mauritian	Chinese
Town of Port Louis	25,290	35,761	8,642
Suburbs	7,044	7,352	450

Compiled from: Central Statistical Office, *Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1952, Part 1, p. 17

In the 1950s, a typical house of Port Louis could have the landlord as the occupier of the main house but within the same courtyard, there were families of different communities as tenants. Moreover, the landlord's family interacted with people of different communities: tenants, maids, bread sellers, milkmen, shoemakers or the local shopkeepers. Interaction among people of different ethnic and religious groups brought about a certain open mindedness, liberal values, a relative homogeneity in languages and even in dress. If one were to look at a picture of the Muslim celebration of the Ghoon, the Tamil Cavadee festival, a Catholic procession or even Labour Day, a large number of men wore the western style of suit, hats and shoes, though women generally retained their community dresses. A multi-cultural outlook was ubiquitous in the capital with schools and leisure activities providing common cultural norms in terms of dress and behaviour.

In 1960, the impact of cyclone Carol resulted in the redistribution of the population in the district of Port Louis. While all kinds of houses were badly damaged, the smaller tenant houses (usually huts or hovels) were completely destroyed. The landlords could afford to repair partially their own houses immediately and thus avoided the refugee centres and the "longères". Tenants were in a more vulnerable position. They belonged to different classes or status groups like teachers, nurses, civil servants, clerks, shoemakers, hairdressers, seamstresses, office workers, supervisors and manual workers working in the docks, in business houses, among others. During the

cyclones, many tenants took shelter in the houses of relatives and friends who could accommodate them on a temporary basis<sup>206</sup>. Others sought refuge in government shelters. Ultimately, they were compelled to live in “longères” built of wood and corrugated iron sheets and cohabit with even poorer classes in the shelters.

Most of the cyclone refugees were transferred to the makeshift shelters in the suburbs (where land was available) nearest to the place where they used to live before, thus leading to an increase in population in the suburbs. If, on one hand, the cyclone had separated landlords from tenants, it had also a levelling effect on the lower and working classes bringing them together at least temporarily. Living conditions in the temporary terraces were dismal and shaped the landscape for many years after the cyclones<sup>207</sup>. According to Raman “there were many problems in the “longères”: poor sanitation, increase in tuberculosis, and the people were short of the basic things like cooking utensils, blankets, etc.”<sup>208</sup>. It was also too hot inside the dwellings<sup>209</sup>. In the same vein, the Titmuss Report pointed out that the housing conditions in parts of Port Louis were worse than in villages. Hundreds of people were crowded into tin shacks hardly fit for animals<sup>210</sup>.

Although there was a shortage of land in the town of Port-Louis, consideration was given to people who had lived in the region and did not wish to settle very far from the capital city as this would bring further disruptions in their lives. Moreover, moving people far from their habitual place of residence would have sparked political tensions because it might modify the ethnic composition of the electorate and influence future elections’ results. Therefore, everything was done so that the inhabitants of the surroundings remained in the precincts of the capital. After Alix and Carol, the 1962 population census reflected the redistribution of the population as those who had their houses destroyed were resettled in the suburbs of Port Louis.

Between 1952 and 1962, the population in the district of Port Louis increased by 41.89 %. However, the increase was much more substantial in the suburbs than in the town. Population increased by 27.84 % in the town while in the suburbs population increased by 107.82 %. This increase in population between 1952 and 1962 can be partly attributed to natural growth. However, given the size of that increase, natural growth alone is not a

---

<sup>206</sup> « L’Inscription Des Sinistrés Dans Les Centres de Refuges », *Le Mauricien*, 09 March 1960 ; « L’Aide de la Métropole à L’Île Maurice : M. Macleod : ‘A Second Token Payment Would at This Stage be Derisory’ », *Le Mauricien*, 21 March 1960.

<sup>207</sup>J. G. Prosper, « Pour un Album : Les Longères », *Le Mauricien*, 09 August 1961 ; « Le Drame Des Sans-logis Après ‘Carol’ », *Le Mauricien*, 27 September 1961. « Les Fortes Pluies Du Week-end Ont Causé Des Inondations Dans Diverses Régions de L’Île », *Le Mauricien*, 04 December 1961.

<sup>208</sup>A. Cader Raman (1991), *Not a Paradise: I Love You Mauritius*, *op. cit.*, p.180.

<sup>209</sup>*Le Mauricien*, 31 August 1961

<sup>210</sup>Richard Titmuss and Brian Abel-Smith, *Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

sufficient explanation. At least some part of it must be attributed to movement of the population after the cyclone. Nevertheless we do not have the figures immediately before the cyclone (say 1959) to make a more precise assessment.

There have been changes in the list of suburbs between 1952 and 1962. Suburbs like “Camp Benoit”, “Camp Chapelon” and “Plaine Lauzun” were created and subsumed under the Grand River North West V.C.A. On the other hand, the “Vallée du Pouce” was absorbed in “Vallée Pitot”. As shown in the above table, the population of all the suburbs increased between 1952 and 1962. However, the increase was not uniform as it oscillated between 227.1 % in Sainte Croix to only 10.71 % in Bell Village.

**Table 5: Changes in population in the district of Port Louis (1952-1962)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Population (1952)</b>	<b>Population (1962)</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Bell Village	672	744	+10.71
Cassis	2,340	6,127	+161.83
Dauguet	3	-	NA
GRNW	1,213	1595	+31.5
Montagne des Signaux	179	-	NA
Pailles	77	-	NA
Roche Bois	3,655	7,219	+97.5
Sainte Croix	1,753	5,735	+227.1
Tranquebar	2,112	4,016	+90.15
Vallée Pitot	1,139	2,053	+80.24
Vallée des Prêtres	1,542	2,316	+50.19
Vallée du Pouce	166	-	NA
Camp Benoit	-	159	NA
Camp Chapelon	-	848	NA
Plaine Lauzun	-	42	NA
<b>Total for the Suburbs</b>	14,846	30,854	+107.82
<b>Town of Port Louis</b>	69,693	89,096	+27.84
<b>Grand Total</b>	84,539	119,950	+41.89

Compiled from Central Statistical Office, *Population Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 17 and Central Statistical Office, *Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1952, Part 1, p. 17<sup>211</sup>

### **Impact of migration on the ethnic composition of the population**

There was a redistribution of the population from town to suburbs after the cyclones but this did not result in any major alteration in their ethnic compositions. Taking into consideration the censuses, the General Population always formed a major component of the inhabitants in the district of Port-Louis. For the 1948 elections, the population in Port-Louis was as follows: General Population – 7226, Hindus – 2451, Muslims – 2708 and Chinese –

<sup>211</sup> Sometimes figures are not available in the Census for the year mentioned.

1005. In 1962, out a total population of 119,950, there were 44,362 – General Population, 29,773 – Hindus, 33,855 – Muslims and 11,960 Chinese<sup>212</sup>. Unsurprisingly, after cyclone Carol, the majority of the refugees whose lodging had been destroyed during the cyclone in the district of Port-Louis were from the General Population category.

Despite the migration, the impact on the ethnic composition of the population, whether in the town or suburbs, remained strikingly insignificant. As shown in Table 6 and Table 7, the changes remained well below 10% in all suburban areas. For the General Population and the Indo-Mauritian population, figures indicate that changes were in the rate of less than 5% in six of the eight areas selected. As far as the grand total for the district of Port Louis is concerned, the change is -1.24 % for the General Population and +1.73 for the Indo-Mauritian population, confirming the point that policy makers were successful in maintaining the ethnic balance while responding to the refugee crisis.

**Table 6: Ethnic Distribution of the Population 1952-1962 (%)**

Year	1952	1962	1952	1962	1952-1962	
Ethnic group	General Population		Indo-Mauritian		General Population	Indo-Mauritian
Town of Port Louis	36,2	34	51,3	54,1	-2,2	+2,8
Cassis	46,9	45,6	51,9	51,95	-1,3	+0,05
GRNW	41	49,7	56,9	49,1	+8,7	-7,8
Roche-Bois	55,5	51,8	38,85	36,93	-3,7	-1,92
Sainte-Croix	62,2	57,2	32,85	39,70	-5	+6,85
Tranquebar	53,2	50,7	43,75	46,28	-2,5	+2,53
Vallée Pitot	38,1	33,2	60,3	65,12	-4,9	+4,82
Vallée des Prêtres	4,02	2,3	95,97	97,40	-1,72	+1,43
<b>Total for Suburbs</b>	47,4	45,6	49,52	50	-1,8	+0,48
<b>Grand Total for the District</b>	38,24	37	51,31	53,04	-1,24	+1,73

Calculated from Central Statistical Office, *Population Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 17 and Central Statistical Office, *Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1952, Part 1, p. 17

Finally, as the Tables show, both the suburbs and the town of the district of Port Louis remained largely multicultural in their population composition. The only exception is Vallée des Prêtres which has remained an area overwhelmingly inhabited by Indo-Mauritians since at least 1952.

<sup>212</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Population Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 17.

Overall, as things stand in 1962, the construction of housing estates after Carol did not result in the 'ghettoization' of one specific ethnic group.

### Conclusion

The two cyclones had a devastating impact on the country and magnified its existing economic, social and political problems by producing an unprecedented refugee crisis. The government responded by embarking on a housing policy by initially constructing temporary shelters and in the long term cyclone resistant houses in order to avoid a recurrence of crises of such magnitude in the future. That housing policy in turned was shaped by the financial, spatial and political circumstances of the island. Several housing estates were constructed in the suburbs where space was still available. The net result was a migration of part of the population of Port Louis from town to the suburbs. That redistribution had little impact on the ethnic composition of the population in both the town and the suburbs. This indicates that the government sanctioned an internal migration process and successfully maintained the pre-existing ethnic balance by keeping the inhabitants close to where they used to live. This converged with the needs of the population who did not want to resettle far from the places they used to live before the cyclones. In terms of human experience, the migration process did not lead to an improvement in the living conditions.

**Table 7: Ethnic Distribution of the Population 1952 -1962(Real Term)**

Year	1952				1962			
	General Population	Indo Mauritian	Chinese	Total	General Population	Indo Mauritian	Chinese	Total
Town of Port Louis	25,290	35,761	8,642	<b>69,693</b>	30,287	48,199	10,610	89,096
Bell Village	447	215	10	<b>672</b>	445	287	12	744
Cassis	1,098	1,214	28	<b>2,340</b>	2,800	3,183	144	6,127
Daughet	0	3	0	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-
GRNW	498	690	25	<b>1,213</b>	794	783	18	1,595
Montagne des Signaux	125	41	13	<b>179</b>	-	-	-	-
Pailles	60	16	1	<b>77</b>	-	-	-	-
Roche Bois	2,032	1,420	203	<b>3,655</b>	3740	2,666	813	7,219
Sainte Croix	1,092	576	85	<b>1,753</b>	3,283	2,277	175	5,735
Tranquebar	1,125	924	63	<b>2,112</b>	2,036	1,859	121	4,016



Vallée Pitot	434	687	18	<b>1,139</b>	682	1,337	34	2,053
Vallée des Prêtres	62	1,480	0	<b>1,54</b>	54	2,256	6	2,316
Vallée du Pouce	71	91	4	<b>166</b>	-	-	-	-
Camp Benoit	-	-	-	-	11	148	-	159
Camp Chapelon	-	-	-	-	222	619	7	848
Plaine Lauzun	-	-	-	-	8	14	20	42

Compiled from Central Statistical Office, *Population Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 17 and Central Statistical Office, *Census of Mauritius and Its Dependencies*, 1952, Part 1, p. 17