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# On the determination of coherent solar climates over a tropical island with a complex topography

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## Abstract

Many tropical islands are aiming at a greener self-sufficient energy production based on renewable energy, notably solar-generated electricity. This work explores the mean solar cycles over La Réunion (southwest Indian Ocean: 21°S, 55.5°E) and their spatial behavior using the Solar surface RADIation Heliosat - East (SARAH-E) satellite data at high spatial and time resolutions (0.05°, hourly data over 1999-2016). Comparisons of SARAH-E satellite-derived data with ground-based measurements show differences of 15 % for diurnal-seasonal variations. The solar resource over the island has strong spatial variability, with differences larger than 100 W.m<sup>-2</sup> between coastal and mountainous zones. The mean solar resource is more than 20 % lower on the island than on the nearby sea. The strongest interaction between diurnal and annual cycles are found at the windward mid-slopes and at the active volcano, related to well-known cloud processes. A clustering of solar zones, based on diurnal-seasonal means, structures the island into a West/East dipole balancing the solar energy in a day through the year.

*Keywords:* Surface solar radiation, La Réunion island, Complex meteorological context, Seasonal/diurnal cycles, Cluster analysis, SARAH-E

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## 1. Introduction

Climate changes are leading to a major adaptation of the energy system and strategies (IPCC-WGII, 2014). This emulation has led the smart- and micro-grid concepts to appear. They are the next upgrade of our current power grid model (Hirsch et al., 2018; Clastres, 2011). They aim at increasing the efficiency of the power grid while ensuring greener energy production for countries, cities and even smaller districts (Unamuno and Barrena, 2015).

This challenge is more a need for isolated areas, notably for those dependent on fossil fuels (e.g. Timilsina and Shah, 2016). This is especially the case for small islands (e.g. Mendoza-Vizcaino et al., 2019; Praene et al., 2012),

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8 which face severe energy security issues (Kuang et al., 2016; Raghoo et al., 2018). Though highly variable, renew-  
9 able energy resources there can be abundant, which gives opportunities to explore for renewable power conversion  
10 (Weisser, 2004; Praene et al., 2012; Blechinger et al., 2016). Some of these islands have started to build models for  
11 greener self-sufficient energy production (e.g. Bağcı, 2009; Praene et al., 2012; Gils and Simon, 2017; Meschede et al.,  
12 2018; Obara et al., 2018; Mendoza-Vizcaino et al., 2019) that can be carried over to other islands (Meschede et al.,  
13 2016, 2018; Surroop et al., 2018). Quarters, cities and even bigger power grids also benefit from the technical and  
14 economic improvement resulting from the development of renewable energy use (e.g. Sen et al., 2016; Singh, 2018).  
15 Islands are then becoming study cases for the development of renewable energy and probably map the road for the  
16 future energy supply in the world (e.g. Notton, 2015; Bénard-Sora and Praene, 2018; Krajačić et al., 2011). Research  
17 on the development of renewable energy in isolated areas is now being addressed as part of new models of global  
18 energy self-sufficiency.

19 The solar resource has by far the highest energy potential on Earth (Perez et al., 2016). However, its intermittent  
20 character is the greatest obstacle to the seamless integration of solar generated power into the power grids (Scorah  
21 et al., 2012; Lauret et al., 2016; Blaga et al., 2019). The total amount of solar energy reaching the ground is modulated  
22 at different timescales (Perez et al., 2016) by many factors, mostly cloud cover and the position of the sun (Marquez  
23 and Coimbra, 2012). Forecasts try to anticipate short-term energy losses and to estimate future trend in the resource  
24 potential (Antonanzas et al., 2016). Hybrid energy systems combine forecasts with storage and production alterna-  
25 tives when the load differs from the incoming energy. This involves a correctly-sized storage system with energy  
26 production alternatives (Colmenar-Santos et al., 2019; Akbari et al., 2018). Seasonal and diurnal cycles may give  
27 useful information, which needs to be completed by site specifications (for instance due to topographic or climatic  
28 particularities: Práválie et al., 2019; Singh Doorga et al., 2019; Al Garni and Awasthi, 2017; Perdigão et al., 2017;  
29 Diabaté et al., 2004). The detailed knowledge of the solar resource and its spatial distribution are crucial for its pen-  
30 etration in the energy mix of any power grid (e.g. Polo et al., 2015; Wegertseder et al., 2016; Fouilloy et al., 2018;  
31 Singh Doorga et al., 2019; Koo et al., 2019). Optimized geographic allotment of PV plants smooths the impact of the  
32 solar variability (Urquhart et al., 2013; Lave et al., 2012; Olowu et al., 2018) and acts to reduce the cost of the solar  
33 energy (Perez and Fthenakis, 2015; Perez et al., 2019). Forecasts are usually improved when considering coherent  
34 spatial zones (Koo et al., 2019) and their typical scales of variability (Fouilloy et al., 2018; Mejia et al., 2018).

35 La Réunion (21°S, 55.5°E), our case study, is a French tropical island and one of the outermost regions of the  
36 European Union, in the South West Indian Ocean (SWIO). Since the mid-1980s, the island has experienced one of the  
37 fastest transition of its demography (Bénard-Sora and Praene, 2016). The number of inhabitants was just more than  
38 860,000 in 2017 and should exceed 1 million by 2037 (Merceron, 2017). The resulting increase in energy demand has  
39 induced and will continue to induce major changes to the power grid of the island. Hydropower was producing 99 % of  
40 electric demand in 1982 and only 30 % in 2002, when the politics started to turn the strong dependence of the island on  
41 imported oil into a greener energy self-sufficiency (RégionRéunion, 2003a,b). In 2017, 32.4 % of La Réunion electric  
42 mix was from renewable energy sources with 14 % from hydropower (OER, 2018). The large variability of the local

43 climate of La Réunion still limits the integration of renewable energy in the electric mix (Bénard-Sora and Praene,  
44 2018; Diagne et al., 2013). The island wants to build a self-sufficiency only based on its renewable resources and  
45 become a “zero-net energy” island (Praene et al., 2012; Selosse et al., 2018a). The local research aims at completing  
46 and deepening the knowledge required to better exploit renewable energies, notably Surface Solar Radiation (SSR).

47 The solar resource strongly varies in both space and time over La Réunion island (Bessafi et al., 2018b; Badosa  
48 et al., 2015, 2013; Jumaux et al., 2011). Both of these scales of variation need to be described to improve the solar  
49 energy use. Few studies exist focusing on either the diurnal or the annual cycle of SSR. In addition, some of them are  
50 based on ground-based measurements essentially at low and mid altitudes performed by the national weather service  
51 (Météo-France), though more than 80 % of the island lies above 200 meters. Badosa et al. (2013) classified the diurnal  
52 cycle into 5 daily regimes of SSR using data over 2 years (2007-2008) from 7 coastal and low altitude Météo-  
53 France stations (9-186 meters). Météo-France published two climate atlases using data from their measuring network  
54 (Soler, 1997; Jumaux et al., 2011). Jumaux et al. (2011) reconstructed monthly SSR maps using data over 10 years  
55 (2001-2010) from 32 stations mainly at low and mid altitudes. Recently, monthly SSR maps were derived from the  
56 Solar surfAce RAdiation Heliosat - East (SARAH-E; Huld et al., 2016) satellite dataset to describe the SSR patterns  
57 at higher elevations over the island (Bessafi et al., 2018b). The present paper complements the aforementioned studies  
58 by describing the spatial features of the diurnal cycle. It also specifies the intersection of the two orbital components  
59 (namely, the diurnal and annual cycles), which have spatial particularities and can separate the island into coherent  
60 zones of SSR. To that end, we use the Solar surfAce RAdiation Heliosat - East (SARAH-E) dataset which provides  
61 SSR data over a long time period (from 1999 to 2016) at a high spatial resolution ( $0.05^\circ \times 0.05^\circ$ ). The purpose of the  
62 present study is to:

- 63 1. describe the SSR diurnal cycle which was previously defined only at coastal and mid-elevated weather stations,
- 64 2. underline the intersection of the two orbital components of solar irradiance and its related spatial spread over  
65 the island,
- 66 3. identify, for the first time, favorable / complementary SSR zones for solar energy applications.

67 Section 2 describes La Réunion island case study, SARAH-E satellite dataset and the methods used. Section 3  
68 presents the local solar context of the island with its related spatial SSR structures and section 4 the solar potential  
69 zones as obtained from clustering. Finally, a discussion and some concluding remarks are developed in section 5.

## 70 2. Context, data and methods

### 71 2.1. The study case of La Réunion island

72 Figure 1(a) describes the topography of the island and locates its two highest peaks. The first one is the dormant  
73 Piton des Neiges volcano at 3,071 m above sea level (asl) and the other one is the active Piton de La Fournaise volcano  
74 at 2,560 m asl. They are separated by a 1,500 m-high plateau making the island an isolated and especially prominent  
75 obstacle to the atmospheric circulations in the SWIO (Figure 2).



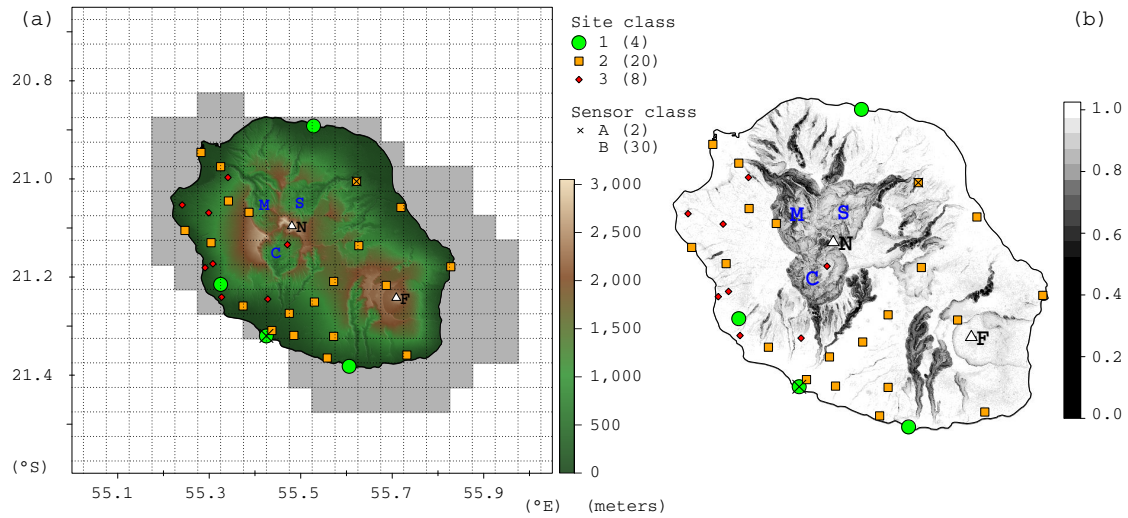


Figure 1: Topographical characteristics of La Réunion island : (a) elevation (in m) map based on SARAH-E grids (dotted gray lines). The pixels in grey locate where the island changes sea SSR. (b) the sky view factor map (unitless). Both maps are based on the Digital Elevation Model from [NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory \(2009\)](#). The letters in blue stand for Cilaos (C), Mafate (M) and Salazie (S) Cirques; the triangles locate the volcanos : Le Piton de La Fournaise (F) and Le Piton des Neiges (N). Symbols refer to the WMO classification for site (1 to 3) and sensors (A to B). Sites classed 1 have no shade at  $\pm 3$  degrees above the local horizon, class 2 at  $\pm 5$  degrees and class 3 at  $\pm 7$  degrees. Sensors classified A are more precise than the B.

76 The island is mainly under an east-southeast trade wind (*e.g.* [Badosa et al., 2015](#); [Baldy et al., 1996](#)), which  
 77 changes in direction according to the season: easterly in summer and more southeasterly in winter ([Figure 2](#); [Lesouëf](#)  
 78 [et al., 2011](#)). This main flow is more a “flow around” than a “flow over” regime. The latter particularly occurs during  
 79 violent wind conditions, such as tropical cyclones (TC). The main cloud regimes over La Reunion are (a) orographic  
 80 clouds generated by the local topography and (b) clouds caught on the island driven by synoptic systems ([André et al.,](#)  
 81 [2019](#); [Cécé et al., 2016](#); [Badosa et al., 2015](#); [Garrett, 1980](#)). The vertical development of the clouds in these two  
 82 regimes is limited by the thermal inversion whose height over La Réunion ranges from 1,700 to 3,100 meters, with  
 83 an average value of  $\sim 2,000$  m ([Bhugwant et al., 2000](#); [Guilpart et al., 2017](#); [Réchou et al., 2019](#)). Recently, [Vérèmes](#)  
 84 [et al. \(2019\)](#) found two peaks of cloud occurrence in the SWIO, the first one related to deep convection in summer  
 85 and the other one to predominant liquid clouds at low altitudes in winter.

86 Associated precipitations vary according to elevation, with maximum amounts at 650 m asl along the windward  
 87 slopes ([Réchou et al., 2019](#); [Sisavath et al., 2011](#)). In addition, the island experiences extreme events such as heavy  
 88 rainfalls and storms as well as TC whose effects on rainfall are enhanced by the marked topography ([Jumaux et al.,](#)  
 89 [2011](#); [Morel et al., 2014](#); [Pohl et al., 2016](#); [Leroux et al., 2018](#)). During TC Gamede, extreme rainfalls reached two  
 90 world records of 3, 930 mm over 72 hours and 4, 936 mm over 4 days ([Quetelard et al., 2009](#)).

91 Factors modulating SSR variability include clouds and their intrinsic characteristics (for instance: extension,  
 92 shape, depth) but also aerosols and water vapor in the air column, especially under clear sky conditions, and site

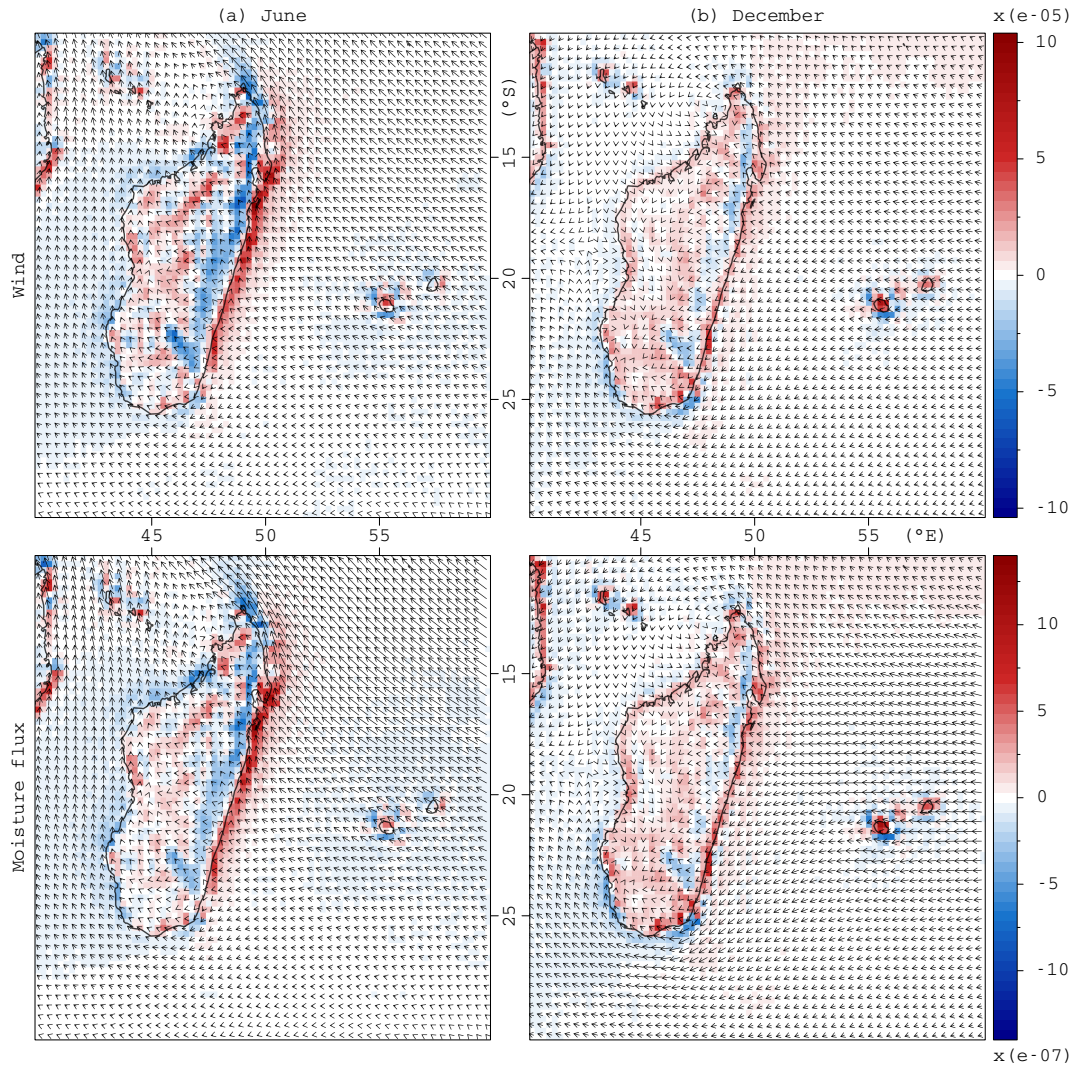


Figure 2: Seasonal characteristics of the wind ( $\vec{U}$ , in  $\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ ) and the moisture flux ( $q_{sat}\vec{U}$ , in  $\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ ), for June (winter) and December (summer). Vectors refers to the eastward and northward components of the two variables (*i.e.*  $\vec{U}$  and  $q_{sat}\vec{U}$ ). Blue-to-red colors are the mass (humidity) flux. Data comes from ERA5 (1979-2018): wind ( $\vec{U}$ ) is the surface level U and V components of winds at 10 meters; near-surface specific humidity ( $q_{sat}$ ) is computed from 2 meter dew-point temperature and surface pressure.

93 orography (*e.g.* André et al., 2019; Mazorra Aguiar et al., 2019; Bessafi et al., 2018a; Wild et al., 2018; Obregón et al.,  
 94 2018; Polo et al., 2017; Lauret et al., 2016; Gueymard, 2014; Soubdhan et al., 2009). Their respective influences are  
 95 discussed below.

## 96 2.2. Satellite dataset and pre-processing

97 Satellite Application Facility on Climate Monitoring (CMSAF) produces and provides satellite-derived datasets  
 98 of the global energy and water cycle. Several product families of particular interest for the study of SSR are available  
 99 such as the Solar surfACE Radiation Heliosat - East (SARAH-E) regional climate data record which is based on

Table 1: Comparison of statistics of  $\Delta_{s-i}$  ( $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$ ) and  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  (%) for the cases : (1) all hours considered, (2) only 0800 to 1700 RET, (3) all case when *in situ* > 50  $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$  (for hours in 0800-1700 RET) and (4) during TC Bejisa days (from the 1st of January 2014 to the 3rd of January at 1000 RET). *Sd* : standard-deviation;  $n_h$  : numbers of hours available all sites combined.

	All		8-17h		> 50 $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$		TC Bejisa	
	$\Delta_{s-i}$	$\Delta_{s/i-1}$	$\Delta_{s-i}$	$\Delta_{s/i-1}$	$\Delta_{s-i}$	$\Delta_{s/i-1}$	$\Delta_{s-i}$	$\Delta_{s/i-1}$
Max	1,017	11,027	1,017	11,027	962	1,323	504	11,027
99%	465	452	480	416	483	311	369	2,379
90%	185	131	200	113	201	93	143	452
75%	81	45	90	38	90	32	63	207
Median	14	4	14	3	11	2	31	59
25%	-43	-11	-52	-11	-55	-11	5	4
10%	-151	-32	-167	-32	-171	-32	-43	-20
1%	-458	-67	-475	-66	-479	-66	-230	-47
Min	-992	-96	-992	-93	-992	-93	-496	-81
Mean	16	36	16	30	14	21	40	190
Sd	155	117	164	102	166	70	95	528
$n_h$	615,288		539,912		522,208		896	

100 geostationary METEOSAT satellites. Data from the IODC (Indian Ocean Dipole Coverage) Service are used to  
 101 provide the SARAHE data record that covers the Indian Ocean, India and parts of China (Huld et al., 2016). In this  
 102 study, this SARAHE record which spans the time period from 1999 to 2016 has been used. Data are extracted over a  
 103 3, 355-pixel grid covering the region (53.975, 57.025°E, 22.525, 19.775°S) at the spatial resolution of 0.05°, *ie.* ~ 5.3  
 104 km at this location, and with 89 pixels covering the island (Figure 1).

105 A thorough overview of the basic retrieval principle of the Solar surface Radiation Heliosat (SARAH) climate  
 106 data records can be found in Müller et al. (2015) and more details for SARAH (Amillo et al., 2014). Information  
 107 on aerosols comes from a monthly climatology derived from the Monitoring Atmospheric Composition and Climate  
 108 (MACC) reanalysis (Inness et al., 2013; Benedetti et al., 2009; Morcrette et al., 2009; Müller et al., 2015) over the  
 109 period 2003-2010, at the spatial resolution of 120 km. Water vapor data are monthly means from the ERA-Interim  
 110 reanalysis at the spatial resolution of 79 km (Dee et al., 2011). A topographical correction to the water vapor to  
 111 better account for the effects of topography has been applied in the second version of SARAH (SARAH-2; Pfeifroth  
 112 et al., 2018), but not in SARAH-E. The complex topography of La Réunion island should then be smoothed, probably  
 113 leading to different SSR values at elevated areas where the path to the surface is overestimated. Yet, the use of  
 114 SARAH-E still appears better than SARAH-2, in which the position of the island is too close to the picture limits.

115 The reliability of the SARAH-E against *in-situ* measurements has been assessed over India (Riihelä et al., 2018),  
 116 China (Wang et al., 2018) and La Réunion (Bessafi et al., 2018b). Riihelä et al. (2018) evaluated the accuracy of

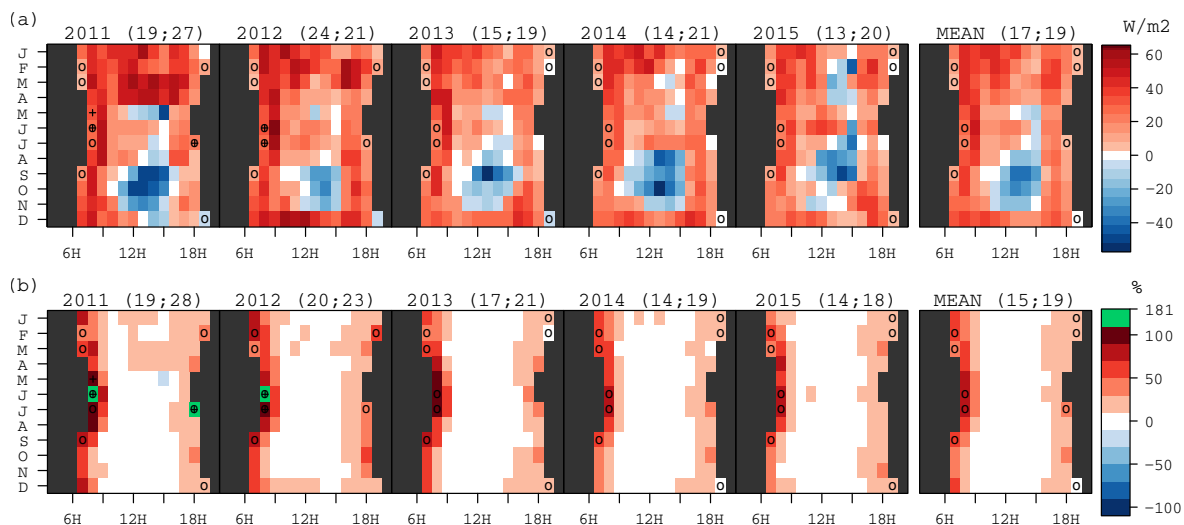


Figure 3: Hourly-monthly means of (a)  $\Delta_{s-i}$  ( $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$ ) and (b)  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  (%) for each year and for a mean over 2011-2015. The circles  $\circ$  locate the *in situ* averages  $\leq 50 \text{ W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$  and the crosses  $+$  locate when  $\Delta_{s/i-1} \geq 100\%$ . All 32 Météo-France stations are used. Subtitles values in brackets are (mean;standard-deviation).

117 SARAH-E against *in situ* SSR measurements at 17 stations (and 120 station-year) over India (1999-2014) and showed  
 118 that, before 2009, SARAH-E estimates are 10-20 % higher than observations. Wang et al. (2018) using 59 stations  
 119 for China (1999-2015) also concluded on overestimations (by  $7.5 \text{ W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$  on average) with the same positive trend in  
 120 the differences as that found by Riihelä et al. (2018). Results of these studies are consistent with increasing levels of  
 121 Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD) over India and China (Li et al., 2017; Allen et al., 2013). For example, Indian aerosol  
 122 daily means are defined with a minima of 0.25 for the AOD at 440 nm and of 0.8 for the AOD at 675 nm during  
 123 the years from 2005 to 2016 (Riihelä et al., 2018). In contrast, lower levels of aerosols (mainly biomass and marine  
 124 origin) are found over La Réunion (Dufflot et al., 2019; Lamy et al., 2018; Horowitz et al., 2017; Ruiz-Arias et al.,  
 125 2016; Gueymard, 2012). Recently, Mallet et al. (2018) compared the aerosol climatology used in SARAH-E to the  
 126 AERONET *in situ* measurements over La Réunion (2005-2012) and found well-reproduced variations of the monthly  
 127 mean AOD, with a fitting equation slope close to 1. SARAH-E SSR could underestimate La Réunion SSR due to  
 128 an overestimated AOD climatology, but aerosol levels there are low (0.148 for MACC, 0.068 for AERONET), with  
 129 a quadratic error of 0.084 (Mallet et al., 2018). Hence, SARAH-E should well capture SSR for La Réunion with no  
 130 major estimation error due to aerosol levels, even though the size and complexity of the terrain make the evaluation  
 131 step there necessary.

132 The accuracy of SARAH-E is assessed over La Réunion through comparisons with in-situ measurements per-  
 133 formed by Météo-France. The WMO evaluates each station sensor and site by a classification (WMO, 2014). Site  
 134 classification evaluates shades projected by surrounding obstacles while sensor classification evaluates sensor sen-  
 135 sitivity measurements. Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of both classifications for all the SSR Météo-France

136 stations. These are equipped with sensors classified B (ISO 9060:2018) except for two stations with sensors classi-  
 137 fied A, and sites are classified from 1 to 3. More characteristics of the Météo-France dataset (instrumentation, sites,  
 138 etc.) are given in Bessafi et al. (2018b). Bessafi et al. (2018b) compared monthly means of SARAHE estimates  
 139 to Météo-France SSR. This first comparison showed a relative difference of 10 % between the two datasets with  
 140 higher divergence locally. Our study further compares the diurnal scales of SSR variations. The comparison here is  
 141 performed over the period 2011-2015 with regard to the data at the same Météo-France stations as in Bessafi et al.  
 142 (2018b) but at an hourly timescale. The Météo-France SSR measurements have to be converted into hourly means in  
 143  $W.m^{-2}$  because they are hourly cumulative values in  $J.cm^{-2}$  integrated on the previous hour, sampled every 6 minutes,  
 144 while SARAHE estimates of SSR are instantaneous values. For the comparison with observations, we approximated  
 145 hourly averaged data from the satellite by, first, temporal interpolation of the hourly clearness index (i.e., the ratio of  
 146 the SSR to the radiation at the top of the atmosphere) to generate a 1-min clearness index time series. In a second step,  
 147 this time series is multiplied by the top of the atmosphere radiation to result in a 1-min time series of SSR, which, in a  
 148 third step, is used to calculate the hourly-averaged SSR data from SARAHE (see also Trolliet et al., 2018). Hereafter,  
 149 satellite will refer to SARAHE hourly means and *in situ* will stand for Météo-France surface measurements. For a  
 150 given *in situ* station, differences are given by:

$$\Delta_{s-i} = SSR_s - SSR_i, \quad (1)$$

$$\Delta_{s/i-1} = \Delta_{s-i} / SSR_i, \quad (2)$$

151 where  $SSR_i$ : the *in situ* SSR at x longitude, y latitude and z elevation,  $SSR_i \neq 0$ , and  $SSR_s$ : the satellite SSR,  
 152 extracted by nearest neighbor and converted into hourly means. Table 1 summarizes  $\Delta_{s-i}$  and  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  statistics of  
 153 available hours for all sites combined. Thereafter, we exclusively use the REunion Time (RET) format for hours,  
 154 corresponding to GMT+4 (e.g. 0000 UTC is 0400 RET). The two datasets differ by  $16W.m^{-2}$  (30 %) on the average  
 155 for hours between 0800 and 1700 RET and by  $14 W.m^{-2}$  (21 %) after the removal of hours for which *in situ* values  
 156 are less than  $50W.m^{-2}$ . Percents of difference through 1,323 % to 11,027 % occur for *in situ* measurements under 50  
 157  $W.m^{-2}$ . The largest relative difference (11,027 %) occurs at 0800 RET on January 3, 2014 with *in situ* value at 2.78  
 158  $W.m^{-2}$  and satellite at 343  $W.m^{-2}$  at a station lying at an altitude of 595 m (Figure 1: “B class” sensor and class 3 site).  
 159 During this day, the island was also affected by TC Bejisa (Pianezze et al., 2018). Moreover, differences during the  
 160 three days of TC Bejisa are higher than in stable meteorological conditions (Table 1), at  $40 \pm 95 W.m^{-2}$  and  $190 \pm 528$   
 161 %. The differences between SARAHE and *in-situ* SSR should be analyzed with care, especially since large percent  
 162 differences can also result from shaded measures in the early and late hours and from sensor disturbances possibly  
 163 caused by violent meteorological conditions.

164 As the present study uses hourly monthly means, Figure 3 displays for each hour and month the averaged differ-  
 165 ences of  $\Delta_{s-i}$  and  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  for all the *in situ* stations.  $\Delta_{s-i}$  tends to be positive at all times except in the early afternoon  
 166 during the winter-to-summer transition months (SON). At this time, La Réunion is under the influence of biomass



167 burning in Madagascar and eastern Africa (Randriambelo et al., 2000; Queface et al., 2011; Lamy et al., 2018). The  
 168 overestimation of aerosols in SARAHE should lead to a different behavior, with a global underestimation persisting  
 169 during the whole biomass burning period. Low  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  are found at the same period, at  $\pm 10\%$  (Figure 3), consistently  
 170 with Bessafi et al. (2018b). The largest  $\Delta_{s/i-1}$  differences mostly occur in the early morning, during the first full-hour  
 171 of daylight (Figure 3). Early and late hours are the most challenging to estimate by SARAHE, and this is when *in*  
 172 *situ* measurements are the most probably shaded, which can lead to strong biases. Overall, selecting hours from 0800  
 173 RET to 1700 RET centers analysis on daylight (5 hours before to 5 hours after solar noon) and removes most of the  
 174 potentially-biased data. These hours are also defined as the photovoltaic use hours by two scenarios with low and high  
 175 renewable energy integration (Drouineau et al., 2015). Hence, this study only retains and interprets the grids between  
 176 0800 RET through 1700 RET.

177 We also compared SARAHE to the latest version of SARAH (namely SARAH-2; See in Supplementary Ma-  
 178 terials). Differences are, in general, very small and both data sets perform comparably with slight advantages for  
 179 SARAH-E.

### 180 2.3. Hierarchical clustering analysis and Ward's clustering

181 Clustering-based approaches help assessing SSR variability by regrouping a large amount of  $n$  elements into a  
 182 smaller group number. Among these approaches, agglomerative hierarchical clustering (AHC) is used here to compute  
 183 all the clustering cases between 1 and  $n$  groups. Each of the  $n$  clustering cases iterates to optimize an agglomerative  
 184 criterion. Here we choose Ward's criterion (Ward Jr, 1963) which minimizes the within-group variance to produce  
 185 groups as coherent as possible.

186 This clustering-based approach was successfully used to group non-Gaussian time series of SSR and other climate  
 187 parameters such as rainfall: for instance, Willmott and Vernon (1980) defined 10 solar climates over the United  
 188 States from averaged global radiations as well as the stations day-to-day perturbations. This method was also used  
 189 on 62 stations defined by their 12 monthly means of clearness index over Africa (Diabaté et al., 2004). Lima et al.  
 190 (2016) pointed out four homogeneous zones from data of global solar radiation and air temperature at 2 meters high,  
 191 using 110 meteorological stations in the tropical North-eastern region of Brazil. Weather regimes were successfully  
 192 extracted from rainfall data for La Réunion and South Africa (Crétat et al., 2012, 2019; Morel et al., 2014).

193 In this work, this clustering approach is used to identify SSR zones from the pixels of the SARAHE grid. Each  
 194 pixel is characterized by a description of its two orbital components ( $OC$ ) defined as following :

$$OC(h, m) = \frac{1}{n_y} \sum_{i_y=1}^{n_y} \frac{1}{n_d} \sum_{i_d=1}^{n_d} SSR(h, m, i_d, i_y) \quad (3)$$

195 with  $(h, m, y, d)$  for hour, month, year and day and  $(n_y, n_d)$  for number of years and days. Considering hours between  
 196 0800 RET to 1700 RET, each pixel OC regroups 120 combined averages, *ie.* 12 months  $\times$  10 hours. A first clustering  
 197 on all the 3, 355-pixel grid is used to delimit the shape where the island topography changes the global SSR behavior.

198 SSR zones of solar mean behavior are grouped together considering only the 147 pixels inside this area (Figure 1).  
199 Others pixels are grouped together to be representative of the sea mean SSR but are excluded for the clustering of  
200 solar zones. To our knowledge, clustering of solar radiation have never been made in this way: using the two orbital  
201 components together to determine coherent “solar zones”. These zones (obtained here as statistical classes resulting  
202 from the grouping of pixels having a similar behavior) are usually defined differently, for instance through monthly  
203 means, daily differences or variation metrics (Philippon et al., 2016, 2019; Zagouras et al., 2014; Diabaté et al., 2004;  
204 Badosa et al., 2013; de Lima et al., 2019; Watanabe et al., 2016).

#### 205 2.4. Parameters selected for the characterization of clusters

206 Clusters interpretation is done regarding associated solar and topographical parameters. SSR diurnal cycles are  
207 computed on monthly bases. Daily amplitudes are averaged over the monthly maxima of the mean SSR diurnal  
208 profile. Seasonal amplitudes are the highest differences between 12 monthly maxima of the mean SSR diurnal profile.  
209 Topographical parameters (slope, aspect and distance to the sea) are derived from the 30-meters resolution Digital  
210 Elevation Model (DEM) from NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (2009). Slope is the highest difference on the 4  
211 neighbors of each DEM pixels. Aspect gives the direction of the slope. Distance to the sea is calculated as the  
212 minimum Euclidean 3-D distance from each 30-meters pixel the DEM to the coastline.

213 These parameters are selected for their relevance for solar energy. The day amplitude reveals the mean solar poten-  
214 tial meanly produced in a day while the season amplitude will design the energy systems such as solar farms. Daily  
215 mean SSR changes are important for short-term forecast and storage (such as Li-ion batteries). Monthly variation  
216 gives indication for the sizing of a solar farm or for hydrogen storage (fuel cells technologies). Topographical param-  
217 eters underlines the terrain characteristics, useful for the energy systems installation. They can be seen as indicators  
218 of the easy installation and maintenance considering that the biggest cities of the island are concentrated on the coast.

### 219 3. Local solar context

#### 220 3.1. Mean SSR

221 Mean SSR from 1999 to 2016 of the SARAHE dataset is displayed in Figure 4(b). It is significantly higher over  
222 the sea: the lowest 10 % sea-averaged SSR values are similar to the highest 50 % island-averaged SSR values. Only  
223 the sea pixels close to the island are impacted by the topography (Figures 1 and 4(b)). Over the island, mean SSR  
224 is lower by ~ 19.5 % on average, mostly due to clouds caused by orographic instability. Yet, SSR over the island is  
225 highly variable spatially, due to differential cloud cover, with values ranging from 380 to 550 W.m<sup>-2</sup> (Figure 4(b)).  
226 The locations of the extreme SSR are indicated in Figure 4(c). Largest SSR (> 520 W.m<sup>-2</sup>) is mostly found over  
227 coastal plains, while lowest SSR (< 420 W.m<sup>-2</sup>) is at higher elevations, on both the lee and windward sides of the  
228 island (Figure 4(b); Table 2).

229 At the eastern side of La Réunion, the lowest SSR values are found near the two wettest parts ( $Z_{NE}^-$  over the NE mid  
230 slopes and  $Z_V^-$  at the volcano site) where orographic clouds and associated rain develop on the windward slopes facing



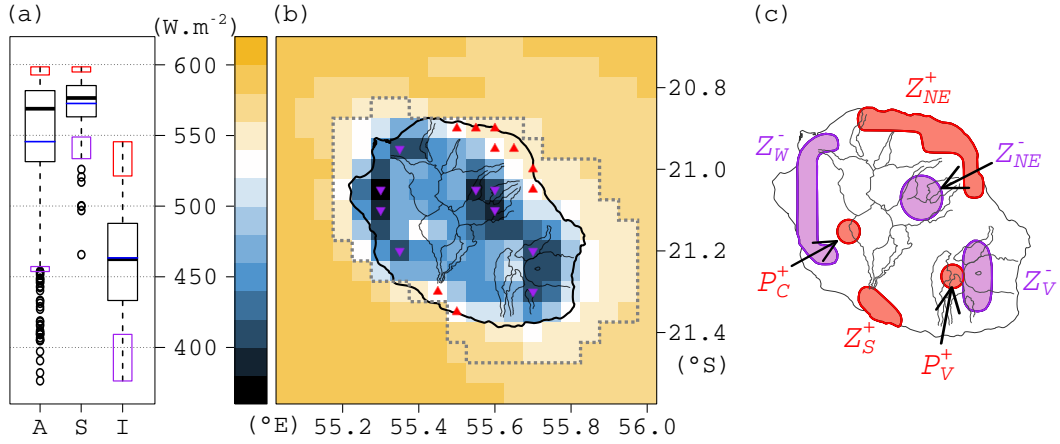


Figure 4: SSR mean characteristics : (a) boxplots for all (A; 360 pixels), sea (S; 271 pixels) and island (I; 89 pixels) fields (*middle black boxes refer to the distribution 50 % around the median in large black lines; blue lines refer to the mean value; the whiskers in black dashed lines indicate the 99 % of the distribution; up (down) rectangles refer to 10 % upper (lower) percentile; circles correspond to outliers, if any*), (b) mean SSR map (*up (down) triangles locate the 10 % highest (lowest) values in red (purple) on the island; the grey dotted line shows the area where the island changes global SSR; the black lines follow island contour (in bold) and ridge lines*) and (c) zones of particular SSR interest (*Z and P for zone and pixel; superscripts + or - denote higher or lower SSR; subscripts indicate location : (N,E,S,W) for cardinal directions and (C,V) for Cilaos, Volcano*).

231 the dominant trade-wind flow (Figure 2; Jumaux et al., 2011). This is also where the main run-of-river hydropower  
 232 plants of the island have been installed (Selosse et al., 2018b). At the western side, low SSR is at mid-slopes (~ 499-m  
 233 elevation on average), due to thermally-driven orographic clouds leading to much less rain than further east (Badosa  
 234 et al., 2015; Jumaux et al., 2011; Cécé et al., 2016).

### 235 3.2. Seasonal and diurnal cycles of SSR

236 In this section, we refine analyses at the seasonal and diurnal timescales. The annual mean SSR over the island is  
 237 lower in winter (358  $W.m^{-2}$  in June) and larger in summer (543  $W.m^{-2}$  in December: Figure 5(a)). Spatial variability

Table 2: SSR and elevation averaged by zones as defined in Figure 4.

Zone	SSR ( $W.m^{-2}$ )	elevation (m)
$Z_{NE}^+$	534	114
$Z_S^+$	533	105
$P_C^+$	520	2,100
$P_V^+$	510	1,894
$Z_W^-$	402	499
$Z_{NE}^-$	399	1,314
$Z_V^-$	407	1,883

238 in SSR is also lower in winter ( $123 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$  in June) and higher in summer ( $271 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$  in November), illustrating that  
 239 SSR does not behave similarly throughout the year.

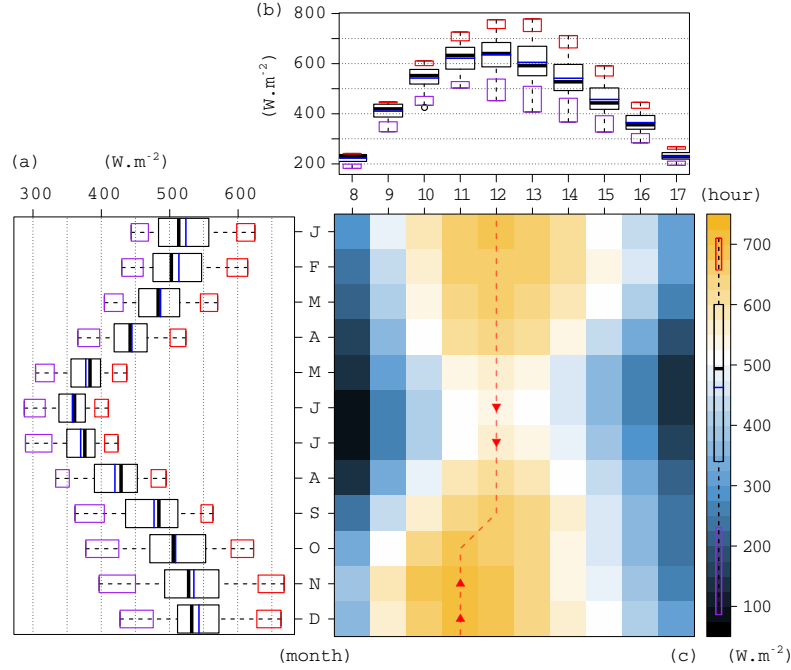


Figure 5: SSR diurnal and seasonal cycles characteristics : In (a) and (b), boxplots detail the SSR mean distribution of the 89 pixels on island (a) for each month and (b) for each hour from 0800 to 1700 RET (*boxplot formalism is the same as in Figure 4*). (c), SSR means (in  $\text{W.m}^{-2}$ ) for each hour-month combination. (*each mean is computed from all the 89 pixels of the island; red dashed lines locate the maximum from all the hours, from 0800 to 1700 RET, for each month; up (down) red triangles locate the two maxima (minima) on the dashed red line*).

240 **Figure 5(b)** summarizes the spatial variability of the annual mean SSR over the island for each hour of the day.  
 241 Daily maximum SSR occurs at 1200 RET with a value of  $635 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$  on average over the island but with a maximum  
 242 value of  $779 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$  at 1300 RET locally. Boxplots for the afternoon hours (1200 to 1500 RET) have a larger spread  
 243 (up to  $371 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$  at 1300 RET) than those for the rest of the day. This denotes larger spatial variability in the middle  
 244 of the day than in the early and late hours, consistent with the formation of orographic clouds (Badosa et al., 2013).

245 **Figure 5(c)** represents the time evolution as a function of both hour and month of the spatial mean SSR for the  
 246 island (89 pixels). The shape and timing of the diurnal cycle vary throughout the year. The maximum SSR is generally  
 247 at noon, except in late austral winter/early summer (OND) during which it occurs one hour earlier. This is because  
 248 clouds develop earlier in the day in summer.

249 **Figure 6** shows the spatial distribution of annual mean hourly SSR. Locations of the minimum and maximum  
 250 values as displayed in Figure 4, are likely to vary during the day. On the eastern part of the island, minimum values  
 251 of SSR occur in the morning (0800-1100 RET), notably between 0800 and 0900 RET at  $Z_{\bar{V}}$  and at 1000 RET at  $Z_{NE}^-$   
 252 where SSR remains low during the whole day. On the west, minimum values occur later in the day (1100 RET) over

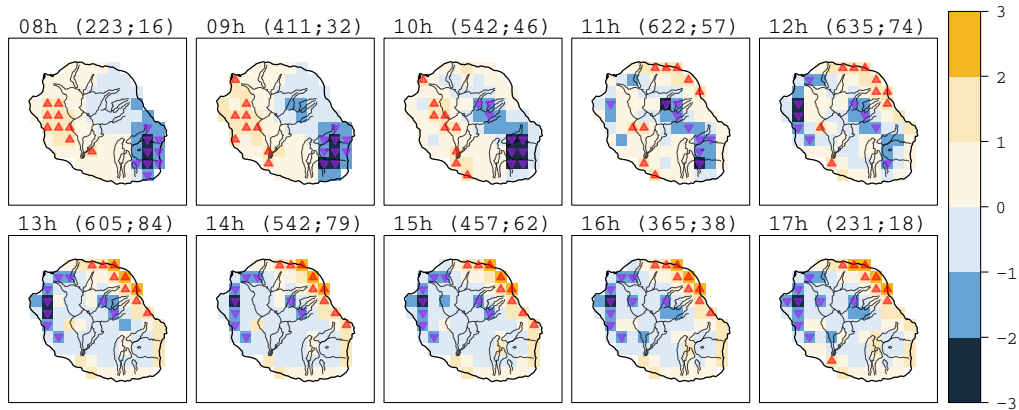


Figure 6: Diurnal evolution of the mean SSR spatial distribution (*unit-less: a spatial standardization is performed over the 89 islands pixels; the black lines show island contour (in bold) and ridge lines; red up (purple down) triangles locate the 10% maxima (minima) of the island; each hour subtitle refers to the island mean and standard deviation (in  $\text{W.m}^{-2}$ ) in bracket; the equivalent non-standardized maps (in  $\text{W.m}^{-2}$ ) are in supplementary materials*).

253 a small area that increases in size during the afternoon, covering pixels at mid slopes and forming thus an elongated  
 254 C-shaped pattern following the topography. This east/west differentiation in the diurnal cycle is consistent with the  
 255 initiation and evolution of cloud cover (Badosa et al., 2013, 2015; Jumaux et al., 2011). In the early morning, clouds  
 256 advected from the sea by the dominant trade winds are often seen along the windward slopes, causing rainfall with  
 257 intensities and peak locations depending on the season and the trade-wind inversion height. The leeward side, by  
 258 contrast, experiences clear-sky conditions. During the day, orographic clouds with vertical development limited by  
 259 the trade-wind inversion layer, form on the mountain slopes due to the combined effects of trade winds and thermal  
 260 winds on the windward side and to thermal winds solely on the leeward side. Clouds on that side often spread  
 261 towards the coast around or after noon. This spatial extension of clouds is common over islands with a mountainous  
 262 topography which involves a return flow created by the combined blocking effect of the orography and the inversion  
 263 layer above (Badosa et al., 2015; Cécé et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2015; Garrett, 1980).

264 As the synoptic wind direction changes over the year (Figure 2), so do the windward and the leeward zones, with  
 265 major implication on cloud formation (Badosa et al., 2015; Jumaux et al., 2011) and hence on SSR spatial distribution.  
 266 Figure 7 shows the particularities of summertime (December) and wintertime (June) diurnal cycles against the annual  
 267 mean. It locates the pixels where the SSR means for individual months differ most from the annual mean (Figure 6).  
 268 SSR spatial distribution in summer (Figure 7(a)) does not differ significantly from that on the annual mean, except  
 269 in the mid-morning when negative values occur at 1000 and 1100 RET in the  $Z_w^-$  zone due to earlier development  
 270 of local clouds. In contrast in winter (Figure 7(b)), positive values occur in  $Z_w^-$  in line with the later development of  
 271 orographic clouds. In addition, large negative differences to the annual mean are found in  $Z_v^-$ , associated with the  
 272 minimum values of SSR throughout the day. This is likely due to orographic rainfall and clouds usually found on

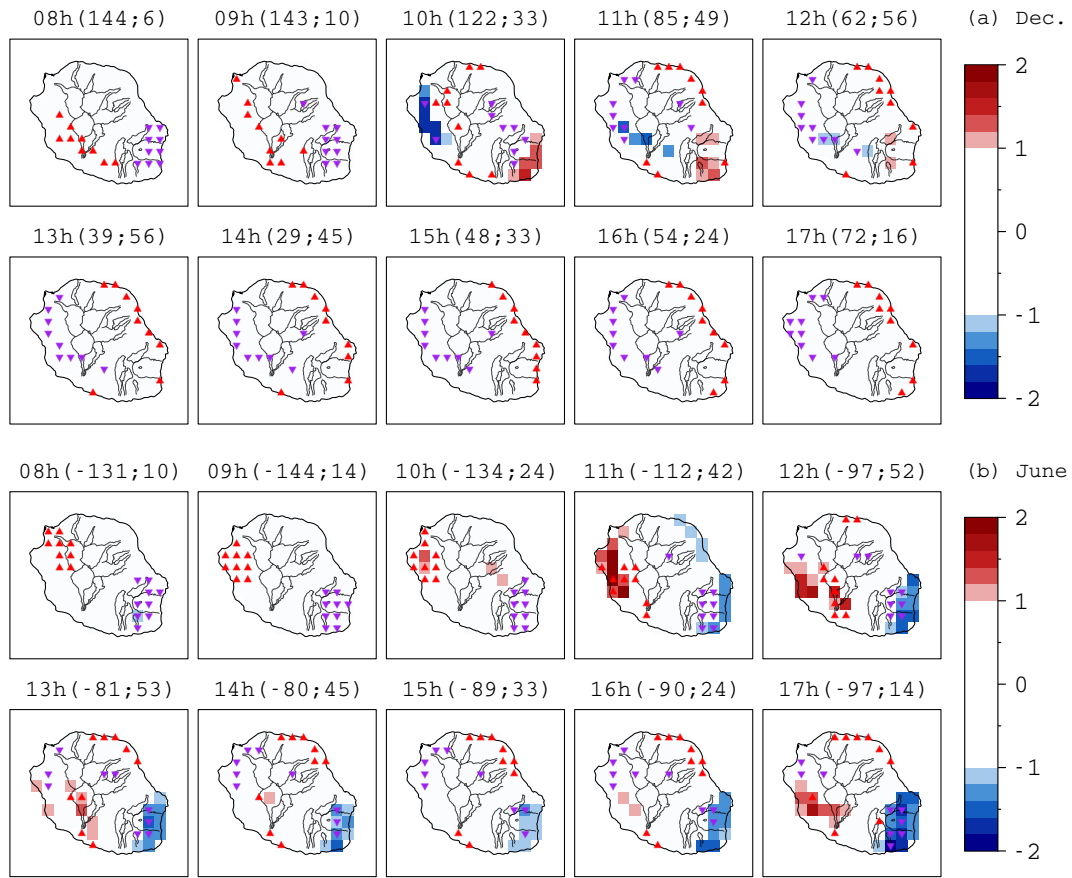


Figure 7: Diurnal standardized SSR maps for (a) December and (b) June after the removal of the annual cycle (in Figure 6). (*unit-less as it is a difference between two standardized maps (annual and month one); the black lines follow island contour (in bold) and ridge lines; red up (purple down) triangles locate the 10% maxima (minima) of the mean SSR of the month; each hour subtitle refers in bracket to the island mean and standard deviation (in  $W.m^{-2}$ ) of the differences between the mean SSR map of the month and the annual mean one; the process to plot the maps combine many steps whom description is done in supplementary materials*).

273 mountainous island slopes, which are fed in moisture by the main trade-wind flow (Chu et al., 2009; Laing, 2004).

#### 274 4. Clustering of solar coherent zones

275 In this section, cluster analysis is used to regionalize spatial features of SSR variability over La Réunion island.  
 276 The AHC clustering method is tested for a number of groups ranging from 2 to 18 and on the 147 pixels with similar  
 277 monthly mean diurnal cycles of SSR (details in Section 2.3). The number of clusters finally retained is 7 which allows  
 278 to structure the solar resource of the island into zones that are fine enough to be linked to the local meteorology but  
 279 not too small with a smallest cluster containing 7 pixels. More details of the clustering analysis for different numbers  
 280 of groups along with the dendrogram and indices used to choose a cluster number are presented in Supplementary  
 281 materials.

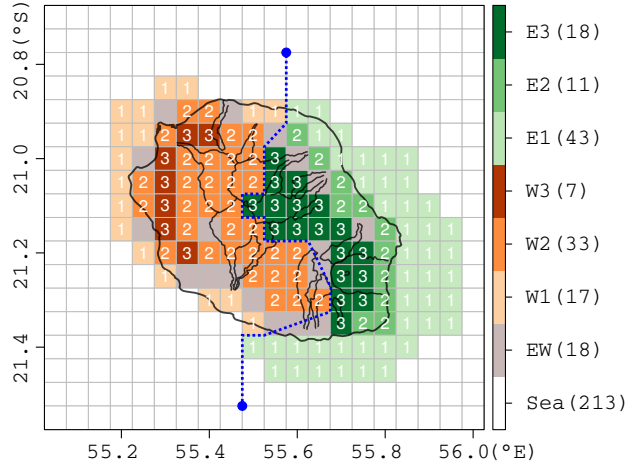


Figure 8: Solar potential micro-climates on La Réunion (each colour refers to one group; for group names, E (green) is for East and W (orange) for West and EW (grey) for East-West; numbers refers from lowest (1) to highest (3) SSR; blue dotted line underlines the east-west clusters limit; numbers in brackets are the number of pixels for each group; Sea group (white) was determined by a first clustering; details in section 2.2).

282 **Figure 8** shows the spatial distribution of the 7 clusters. The pixels are separated graphically to an East and a West  
 283 group, (corresponding respectively to clusters E1-3 and W1-3), and located at the eastern (windward) and western  
 284 (leeward) sides of the island. The EW cluster can be found over both sides of the island, being mainly coastal on the  
 285 leeward side and located at a higher elevation on the opposite side.

286 The eastern (E1-3) clusters are sorted out by increasing elevation and decreasing SSR. As shown in **Table 3**  
 287 and **Figure 9**, E1 stretches along the coastline and experiences the highest mean SSR among the eastern clusters,  
 288 while E3 is located at higher elevations and displays the lowest SSR on this side of the island. The relationship  
 289 between elevation and SSR value is not as straightforward for the western (W1-3) clusters. W3, which experiences  
 290 the lowest mean SSR among all clusters and is coincident with  $Z_W^-$  zone, lies at lower altitudes than W2 (**Figure 9**).  
 291 The Sea and eastern clusters have sensibly larger diurnal than annual cycles of SSR, while western clusters show an  
 292 opposite behavior. E1 and Sea clusters have the largest diurnal variations from all clusters and W2 has the largest SSR  
 293 seasonality.

We next analyse the diurnal and seasonal cycles of SSR (ie.  $OC$  as defined eq. (3)) in each cluster through the difference between the cluster and the island average, and the standard deviation of the cluster. These two metrics are further normalized to the island average as follows:

$$\Delta \overline{OC}(h, m) = \frac{\overline{OC}_{Ci} - \overline{OC}_{island}}{\overline{OC}_{island}}(h, m) \quad (4)$$

and:

$$\sigma(h, m) = \frac{\sigma(OC_{Ci})}{\overline{OC}_{island}}(h, m), \quad (5)$$

294 where (h, m) is for an hour and a month given,  $\overline{OC}_{Ci}$  is the OC average over all the pixels of the class  $i$  and,  $\overline{OC}_{island}$   
 295 over all the 89 pixels of the island (**Figure 5 (c)**) and  $\sigma$  is the standard-deviation operator.

Table 3: Mean parameters group description (*topographical parameters : E for elevation (in meters), a for aspect, s for slope (in degrees) and D<sub>Sea</sub> for sea distance (in kilometers); 3 solar parameters (in W.m<sup>-2</sup>) : SSR, A<sub>Day</sub> day and A<sub>Season</sub> season amplitudes*).

	SSR	A <sub>Day</sub>	A <sub>Season</sub>	D <sub>Sea</sub>	E	a	s
Sea	581	968	91	1	0	91	0
EW	490	797	111	6	597	166	12
E1	552	931	100	0	15	96	1
E2	508	864	105	3	272	115	8
E3	419	755	88	12	1,289	149	18
W1	542	874	136	1	39	118	2
W2	461	705	160	10	1,022	198	19
W3	404	581	120	4	620	222	14

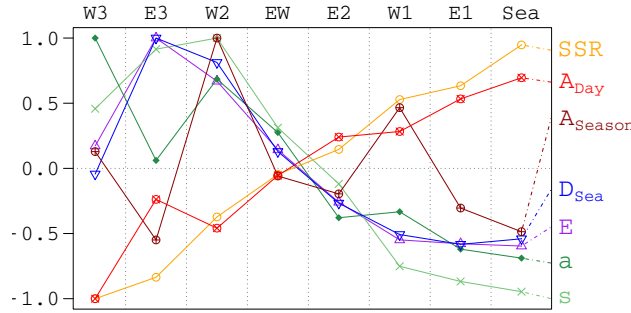


Figure 9: Mean parameters group comparison (*sorted by increasing SSR; each parameter is standardized; the topographical parameters : E for elevation, a for aspect, s for slope and D<sub>Sea</sub> for sea distance; the 3 solar parameters : SSR, A<sub>Day</sub> day and A<sub>Season</sub> season amplitudes*).

296 **Figure 10** shows the time evolution of  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  and  $\sigma$  for each class. Sea SSR differs most from island SSR in the  
 297 afternoon, especially at 1400-1500 RET. This relative difference is larger in summer than in winter, reaching +60 %  
 298 ( $\sim 330 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$ ) in November. The largest  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  occurs in November-December for all land clusters, except for W2  
 299 and W3 for which it is at its lowest value in October-November. Internal  $\sigma$  is larger in midday and early afternoon in  
 300 summer, especially in SON, except for E1 and E2.

301 W3 has a distinctive diurnal cycle of  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  which is higher in the morning than the island average, and lower  
 302 during the rest of the day.  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  reaches a minimum of -34 % ( $-185 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$ ) at 1400 RET in October. This cluster  
 303 is co-located with  $Z_W^-$  in **Figure 4** where orographic clouds with specific diurnal and seasonal cycles usually develop  
 304 (as described in **Figures 6** and **7**). These clouds form earlier in summer (with increased intensity, notably in  
 305 October). W2 evolves in a similar way, though the relative differences to the island average are smaller (minimum of  
 306 -10 %,  $-56 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$ , at 1400 RET in November). Even if orographic clouds occur preferentially at the lower altitudes  
 307 of W3, they are likely extended occasionally to W2, particularly in summertime. The seasonality of the  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  behavior  
 308 of western groups can be related to the Mascarene anticyclone which is further southward and stronger in winter than

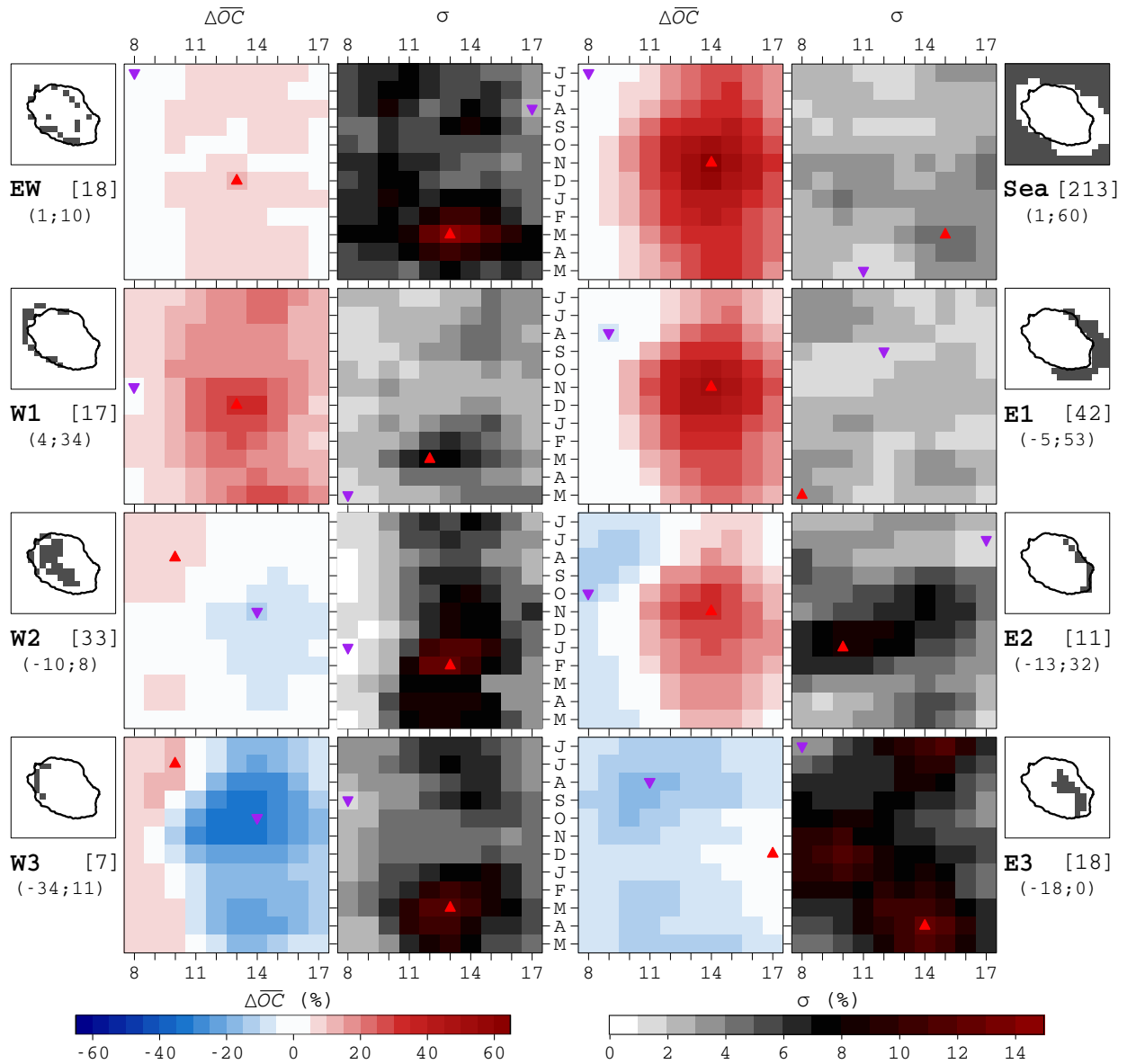


Figure 10: Seasonal and diurnal evolution of each class  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  and  $\sigma$  (both percentages are based on the island mean and are expressed in two color-bars (a) for  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  and (b) for  $\sigma$  (in Figure 4); up red (down purple) triangles locate the maximum (minimum) by class; for each class, values are (min; max)  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  (in %) and [number of pixels])

309 in summer (e.g. Jumaux et al., 2011; Baldy et al., 1996). Cloud processes are then mainly governed by local flows  
 310 thanks to higher sea-land differences of temperatures. Higher sea temperatures also provide more humidity to bring at  
 311 higher elevations, notably due to the higher elevation of the inversion layer in summer. This induces that orographic  
 312 clouds can form more easily and expend over the leeward of the island (Badosa et al., 2015). This process especially  
 313 occurs in the afternoon in October-November.

314 Eastern classes have lower  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  in the morning than during the rest of the day. For these classes,  $\Delta\overline{OC}$  is largest



315 at 1400 RET, except for E3 (maximum at 1700 RET). This cluster displays negative  $\overline{\Delta OC}$  at all times, particularly in  
316 the mid-morning (1100 RET) where a minimum relative difference of  $-18\%$  ( $-103 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$ ) is found in September.  
317 The diurnal evolution of  $\overline{\Delta OC}$  for the two western classes, W2 and W3, is the reverse to that of the eastern classes,  
318 with positive values in the morning and negative ones during the afternoon. By contrast, western class W1 displays  
319 positive  $\overline{\Delta OC}$  at all times, with lower values in the early morning and higher values during the afternoon.

320 Solar energy production could greatly benefit from the complementary timing of the mean SSR between the eastern  
321 and western sides of the island (Jurasz et al., 2019), reducing its cost through a geographic smoothing (Lave et al.,  
322 2012; Perez et al., 2016, 2019). Solar energy systems are mainly installed at locations with high mean SSR (Figure  
323 4; OER, 2019). Their mean variations of production can be considered according to the spatial and diurnal-seasonal  
324 mean variations described here (Figure 10). They are usually  $+30\%$  higher than the mean SSR of the island during  
325 summertime afternoon for sites located in  $Z_{NE}^+$  and  $Z_S^+$  (Figure 4; matching with some E1-W1 pixels, see Figure 10).  
326 Western production sites, if they can be installed at higher altitudes (W2-W3), could receive  $+5\%$  more ( $-5\%$  less)  
327 SSR in the morning (afternoon) than the island mean (Figure 5), with a peak at  $+11\%$  ( $-34\%$ ) during summer. The  
328 diurnal variation of solar energy could also be stabilized by combining western sites with eastern ones, for instance in  
329 zone E2. There, the timing is opposite to the western side, with a mean SSR of  $-10\%$  ( $+25\%$ ) than the mean SSR of  
330 the island during summer morning (afternoon) and a peak of  $-13\%$  ( $+32\%$ ). Storage of solar production could also  
331 smooth these mean variations over seasons and during the day. A systematic overproduction occurring in the morning  
332 should then be automatically stored and redelivered during the afternoon, sized according to the mean amplitudes  
333 defined. Secondary sources of energy production could be set to deliver the recurrent loss of energy (Kougias et al.,  
334 2016; Jurasz and Ciapała, 2018; Jurasz et al., 2019; Jerez et al., 2015). Yet, in addition to these smart grid approaches,  
335 temperature and wind velocity should also be considered as they influence the PV production (Mattei et al., 2006;  
336 Goossens et al., 2018; Kabeel et al., 2019), paving the way for future research and adjustments to be done over La  
337 Réunion and nearby southwest Indian Ocean region.

## 338 5. Conclusion

339 This work focused on the spatial distribution and timing of the solar resource over the complex topography of the  
340 small tropical island of La Réunion in the SWIO. The SARA-H-E satellite dataset was used here at an hourly timescale  
341 over a  $0.05^\circ \times 0.05^\circ$  grid of 89 pixels on the island covering the period 1999-2016. It allowed us to delimit the area  
342 where the mean solar behavior is influenced by the island topography. The intersection of the seasonal and diurnal  
343 scales at particular locations emphasized the necessity to consider jointly the two orbital components to describe the  
344 solar behavior. Coherent solar zones were defined by applying an ascending hierarchical clustering on the diurnal  
345 and seasonal mean SSR. A side opposition in the SSR patterns in the form of an east-west dipole was found over the  
346 island, in accordance with the differentiated windward and leeward cloud processes.

347 This dipole usefully complements the spatial knowledge of the solar potential by their particular timing through

348 months and hours. Solar energy use can be improved considering this side opposition and the complementary timing  
349 of both sides of the island. The production and storage sizing should be done with regard to both the seasonal and  
350 diurnal amplitudes of SSR. Around these average behaviors, natural and anthropogenic-forced climate variability  
351 (from local to global scales, and from synoptic meteorology to climate change) can induce changes to the mean solar  
352 resource (Tang et al., 2019). Forecasts can help anticipate drop of solar energy at different horizons (De Felice et al.,  
353 2019; Antonanzas et al., 2016). They can prevent the short- and long-term variations which can be compensated  
354 by specific storage (e.g. Li-ion batteries, fuel-cells; Akbari et al., 2018). Robustness of smart grids energy systems,  
355 under a complex meteorological context such as La Réunion island, has to combine a steady knowledge of the essential  
356 cycles of its solar resource, that can strongly vary due to the abrupt topography, to efficient forecasts. The island solar  
357 resource can also vary due to large-scale dynamics. Regional-scale atmospheric configurations known to influence  
358 local-scale SSR, which first need to be assessed, could then be used to analyze and interpret coarse-resolution global  
359 forecasts (e.g. S2S, C3S respectively: Vitart et al., 2017; Manzanas et al., 2019) for PV applications in La Réunion.  
360 Analysis of the predictability of these features at various lead-times, from a few hours to a few months in advance,  
361 could help adjust energy production or management.

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## 369 **Appendices**

370 Supplementary materials are downloadable on website version of the article at *doi place holder*.

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# Coherent zones of mean Solar Surface Radiation (SSR) on a tropical island

*the case of La Réunion*

**SSR West Zones**  
on the leeward side

**SSR East Zones**  
on the windward side

