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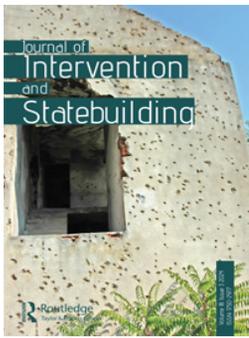
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Constructing the Local in Madagascar: Resistance and Politics of Scale

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ABSTRACT
Madagascar has historically served as an experimental ground for various externally led political and economic interventions and ideologies. This article uses the concept of scale to explore how these interventions have contributed to (re)defining and manipulating the local in Madagascar, at both epistemological and material levels. By focusing on three key periods (colonialism, post-independence socialist and communist policies, and contemporary peace processes), we show that the local in Madagascar has been associated with multiple, sometimes conflicting practices and interpretations, but that these understandings also constitute a source of power and resistance for Malagasy actors, possibly contributing to recurrent conflicts.

Introduction

Madagascar, a large island in the Indian Ocean, has attracted multiple external actors over time, starting with settlers of Indonesian and African origins around the third century, merchants of Indian and Arab origins as of the seventh century, and European settlers as of the sixteenth century. The island was later colonized by France at the end of the nineteenth century. Madagascar has also been a test bed for political and economic interventions during which key actors introduced various ideologies like the Juche, Maoism, communism, socialism, and liberalism (Jacob 1977). Since Madagascar acquired its independence in 1960, it has been the target of significant and numerous external interventions in the political and economic fields and outpouring support in the forms of peace programmes, development aid, loans from financial organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as humanitarian projects.

Despite or maybe because of all these interventions and development programmes, Madagascar's recent history has been marked by recurrent conflicts of various intensities (Razakamaharavo 2019). Nowadays, tensions among different political factions remain high, and human rights abuses are routinely perpetrated. In addition, the

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population lives with less than $2.15 a day on average which is the new extreme poverty line of the World Bank[1], insecurity persists in remote parts of the country as well as in cities, nature is decimated by criminal fires and illegal exploitation of natural resources, and natural hazards destroy whole villages every year and affect the lives of many.

Over the past decade or so, most national and international stakeholders have stressed the need to centre 'local' needs and actors in these political and economic interventions and support programmes (see, e.g. Razanatsoa, Andriantsaralaza, and Holmes 2021). In line with the famous 'local turn' in development and peacebuilding (Ejdus 2021; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013), focusing on local needs and including local actors have been presented as ways to solve the above-mentioned problems Madagascar faces. But how is the local defined in a country that has been the focus of so many external interferences? The assumption that focusing on the local is the remedy to all of Madagascar's current problems is built on the unquestioned belief that policies implemented during the past century by both national and international actors overlooked local actors and issues. In fact and as we will further explore, there is ample empirical evidence suggesting that at least since the colonization period, the local has been the target of multiple policies, and used as a source of legitimation by both national and international actors. Interactions and exchanges between national and international stakeholders have led to complex hybridization processes (Mac Ginty and Sanghera 2012; Richmond and Mitchell 2012; Millar 2014) in which local issues and actors have played a central role. For instance, initiatives such as peace mediation and negotiation have involved external and international ideals, ideologies, principles *as well as* the local as a source of legitimation by different sets of actors (Razakamaharavo 2020).

In this article, we argue that if many Malagasy feel unsure about their own identity, history and culture, it is not because the local has been eschewed in national and international policies targeting Madagascar and Malagasy culture, but rather because it has, on the contrary, been constantly defined, redefined and instrumentalized. As a political and policy scale (Brenner 2000; Cox 1998; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Marston 2000), the local has been produced and reproduced over the past century by national and international policies, at both epistemological and material levels. Far from being neglected, we posit that the local in Madagascar can be understood as a category of practice produced by different actors and discourses located at different scales, in function of their specific objectives. Instead of having a fixed meaning, what is called the local in Madagascar is thus changing and contingent – an observation that *de facto* applies everywhere, but that has not attracted much attention yet.

To explore how the local has been produced by both national and international actors, and how it has been used to empower and/or disempower certain actors and narratives, we rely upon various sources of data, including narrative workshops organized in five regions in Madagascar (Analamanga, Atsinanana, Analanjirofo, Boeny, and Diana) with 207 participants, 49 semi-structured interviews, as well as data collected at the national library in Madagascar and the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence (ANOMS) in France. According to the collected data, people living in Madagascar are unsure of who exactly can be considered as local, as Malagasy, and whether being Malagasy means being local. As one of our interviewees explained:

> Autochthony has always been an issue of concern. Being Malagasy … Does it mean that since you are a descendant of those who came here in the sixteenth century you are Malagasy? In that case, you exclude the majority of the population. Therefore, we ourselves wonder who is Malagasy and who is not (Dr. Denis Alexandre Lahiniriko, December 2021, Antananarivo).

Another added:

> I don't care about the history of my ancestors anymore. (…). What I mean is we've completely destroyed our archives. We live in a hypocritical environment. We forcibly associate a Malagasy identity with everything, but the environment we live in is not like that anymore. You learn the history of France during World War in Malagasy schools, but there is no history of Madagascar before 1800. We no longer recognize ourselves within our culture (Domoina Rasamoelson, narrative workshop, Female, Antananarivo, June 2022).

In the following pages, after offering a brief overview of the theoretical discussions regarding the local and the concept of scale in the fields of peacebuilding, statebuilding and development, we describe our data, methodology and operationalization of the concept of scale for the study of the local in Madagascar. We then explore how the local has been constructed and instrumentalized within the framework of political and economic interventions during three key periods, first during the colonization period; second during the three decades after independence during which socialist and communist policies were promoted; and third since 2002 and the adoption of the notion of 'national reconciliation', largely inspired by international narratives. In the last section, we draw together the empirical findings and argue that the local in Madagascar has been understood and practised, sometimes simultaneously, in different and contradictory ways. These multiple understandings and practices of the local constitute an important source of power and resistance for Malagasy actors, but they also most likely play a significant role in the recurring conflicts that Madagascar has been witnessing.

The local, scales and hybridity

During the past decades, attention to scale has grown in the study of peacebuilding, statebuilding and development, especially since the so-called local turn in peacebuilding. The local turn in peacebuilding refers to what is known as a 'critical turn in the study of peace and conflict, and focuses on the epistemological consequences of the recourse to localism in the conceptualisation and execution of peace building' (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 763). In conventional peacebuilding literature, the local as 'an attribute to a referent object', is related to actors and institutions 'on the ground', and to a space where peacebuilding can be implemented (Hirblinger and Simons 2015). While the complex and relational nature of the local is increasingly acknowledged, 'the debate has also continued to be characterised through arguments which treat the local as a pre-given, and independent of knowledge production' (Hirblinger and Simons 2015, 424). Further, and although it insists that the local is complex and anything but monolithic (Belloni 2012), literature on peacebuilding rarely unpacks what is meant by the 'local'. This is notably the case in some of the literature on hybridity, usually seen as emerging from interactions 'between top-down and bottom-up forces' (Mac Ginty and Sanghera 2012, 4), where the top is equated with the 'international', and the bottom with the 'local' – often used as a synonym for 'national', especially when referring to countries in the Global South.

Hybridity is seen as characterizing political, economic and cultural 'local' orders resulting from international intervention (see, e.g. Mac Ginty 2010; 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). Existing literature shows that hybridity can stem from a variety of 'imports', for instance in terms of the imposition of, or exposure to, structures and institutions, norms and values, but also personnel originating from 'outside'. In addition, literature on hybridity in peacebuilding and development has underscored the complexity of processes leading to hybrid orders over time, for instance through the notion of 'prior hybridity' (Canclini 2005) highlighting 'a long history of interaction, fusion, competition, resistance and coalescence' (Mac Ginty 2011, 8).

Despite repeated claims to the contrary, in conventional understandings of hybridity, assemblages of institutions, actors and values located at (already hybridized) 'local' and 'international' levels still tend to be opposed and reified, and hybridity is understood as the product of these differences and oppositions (Hameiri and Jones 2017; Heathershaw 2013). In turn, these differences and oppositions are expected to result in 'frictions' or 'resistance' deployed by 'local' actors who bargain, resist, subvert, and develop their own models and strategies when interacting with international actors (see, e.g. Björkdahl et al. 2016; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013; Bourbeau and Ryan 2018; Féron and Krause 2022; Young 2015). Consequently, hybrid orders are often described in terms of degrees, types, or levels of hybridity, eschewing the question of why they are configured in a certain way, or whom they benefit, harm, or rely upon (Hameiri and Jones 2017, 61).

The concept of scale, borrowed from human geography, has helped to push these discussions further, by shedding light on how the local is epistemologically but also materially produced in international and national peacebuilding, statebuilding and development policies. Rather than simply referring to a level of analysis like the local, regional, or national, 'geographic scale is conceptualized as socially constructed rather than ontologically pre-given, and (…) the geographic scales constructed are themselves implicated in the constitution of social, economic and political processes' (Delaney and Leitner 1997, 93). In other words, rather than being fixed, scales are fluid and contingent (Marston 2000). Thinking from the perspective of scales is useful for understanding how certain interventions can empower and disempower actors situated differently in the political, social and economic order, something that scholars like Cox (1998) and Moore (2008) call the 'politics of scales'.

Two main conceptions of scale dominate the literature: on the one hand, scales as categories of practice, corresponding to 'real, material processes, events and spatial formations', and on the other hand scales as categories of analysis, as epistemological constructs presenting 'specific sociospatial orderings' (Moore 2008, 204). But as Moore warns, we should be careful not to oppose these two conceptions too strictly, because 'through deployment and social contestation, scalar representations can in turn have material effects' (2008, 205). In addition, we should be wary of treating scales as 'real' and fixed entities, and rather focus on analysing them as 'socio-spatial projects and political manoeuvers to be interrogated' (Moore 2008, 211). Scales are 'hierarchies of everyday power relations' (Brenner 2000, 374), which can interact and overlap, and each includes specific political opportunity structures. Scales, and discourses about scales, can thus be used by political, economic, social and cultural actors to promote and legitimize their projects and agendas, but also to contest and challenge existing hierarchies. This applies to both so-called external and local actors: 'Just as international interveners seek local allies,

indigenous actors based in villages all the way up to the national capital can also pursue principled or tactical alliances with international actors to advance or resist governance projects, in line with their interests and values' (Hameiri and Jones 2017, 62).

Taking these insights seriously entails paying attention not only to the effects of international intervention at the subnational or national levels, but also to political, social, economic and cultural groups active at each of these levels, and eager to defend their interests and enhance their position. Understood through this frame, hybridity is therefore not simply the result of interactions between the (already hybridized) local and international spheres, but also of power struggles between various actors with different agendas, networks and resources. Thus, hybridity can be conceptualized not as an interaction or an opposition *between* fixed scales, but as a struggle *about* constantly shifting scales (Hameiri and Jones 2017, 64). This means that as categories of practice, scales such as the local, national, regional or international are the ever-shifting products of power struggles occurring between a multitude of actors, many of which practise 'scale jumping', that is moving between scales to pursue their agendas (Ejdus 2021).

So far, one important perspective that the existing literature about peacebuilding, hybridity and scales has left aside is that of time: how do the repeated power struggles generated by international interventions over the long-term affect perceptions of scales, and specifically of the local in the concerned country? For instance, how is the conception of the nation, and related practices, affected by repeated externally-led interventions? What does the 'local' mean after decades or centuries of attempts by both 'external' and 'internal' actors to define the local in a way that best fits their interests and objectives? In the remainder of the article, after having briefly presented our methodology and data, we explore these questions in the case of Madagascar and examine how the local in Madagascar has been (re)invented by different actors located both in and outside the island.

Approach, sources and methods

To understand how the local has been produced through repeated interactions and confrontations between Malagasy and external actors, we centre our analysis on the concept of scale. More specifically, we examine how different actors situated in Madagascar and outside have pushed forward and/or resisted certain interpretations of the local, and how some actors and narratives have been empowered or disempowered as a result. Exploring such 'politics of scale' (Cox 1998; Moore 2008) entails focusing on how various national and international actors intervening in Madagascar have deployed the 'local' scale to further their political and economic projects, like colonialism, communism and socialism. In other words, we propose to move away from essentialist understandings and to study the local as emanating from various scalar relations and processes.

For these purposes, we focus on three historical periods that are representative of the different ways in which the 'local', often opposed to the 'international', has been constructed, narrated and instrumentalized within the framework of political and economic interventions: first, the colonial period (1897–1960); second, the period during which socialist and communist ideologies inspired by Russian populism were actively promoted by Malagasy politicians and governments in the 70s and early 80s, notably through the concept of the Fokonolona community village (an entity which existed already during

the royal period); and third, contemporary internationally-inspired peace initiatives, notably promoting the idea of a 'national reconciliation' in Madagascar. It is important to underscore that although we recognize the dynamics of the extractive economy in Madagascar, our main focus is on political and/or economic policies implemented by the colonial power or the national government during the colonial period, the communist and socialist period, as well as the more recent (since 2002) period of externally led peace processes. Hence, we do not focus on private business interest groups or actors extracting natural resources and engaging in all sorts of trafficking such as in the mining industry or the field of environment.

For each of the three studied periods, we follow Moore's advice (2008, 218) to focus on 'how actors utilize scale categories to spatially "frame" problems and solutions, include or exclude certain actors, legitimate political projects, rework relations of power and coalesce political processes around particular scalar orders'. Therefore, we pay attention to the involved actors and their discourses, projects and practices as related to the local, and we examine how the local becomes not only a topic and a source of interactions but also a locus of struggle between them. Looking at both relevant actors and their discourses, we unpack scalar configurations within Madagascar and internationally-led policies and initiatives. Additionally, our analysis covers more than a century of policies implemented in Madagascar, allowing us to explore patterns over the long term, and therefore to better understand how prior hybridity informs, influences and/or contradicts current hybridization processes around the conception of the local in Madagascar.

The sources we build upon are quite varied. First, given that the timeline we focus on includes the period of French colonization in Madagascar, we collected data on French colonial policies at ANOMS. Second, we organized 33 narrative workshops/collective discussion sessions to collect narrative data from local communities in Madagascar. During those sessions, we invited 'ordinary' Malagasy people to participate, such as mothers, young people, and students, but also elders and traditional leaders, state officers, as well as members of civil society organizations. A total of 207 people were involved in these sessions. We used Malagasy during the workshops, and French when it was the preferred language of foreign participants or natives. Third, we held 49 semi-structured interviews in Malagasy with key Malagasy actors knowledgeable about international, national but also subnational peace and conflict processes. We discussed with them the various episodes of conflicts Madagascar witnessed, and the roles of the 'local' in those dynamics.[2] Finally, we consulted reports from national and international institutions involved in major policies and interventions in Madagascar, like those related to local and national peace processes. We therefore collected opinions, interpretations, narratives and factual accounts. We paid specific attention to the fact that some documents we consulted provide a very partial and biased view of the situation in Madagascar, like the documents collected at ANOMS, written by the French colonizers.

It is important to note that the two authors of this article have what we see as complementary positionalities since one is Malagasy and the other French. Some relatives of the Malagasy researcher directly experienced or are descendants of the Malagasy who went through the events studied in this article. Her worldviews, values, principles, beliefs and opinions influenced the data collection process and the analyses that followed. While such a positionality might induce bias when selecting the events and narratives to be discussed, it helped in uncovering and compiling forgotten stories, or

some of those that were purposefully erased. For the French researcher, shedding light on these stories, narratives and events, and contributing to a better knowledge and understanding of the history and situation in Madagascar, as well as of the long-term effects of colonization, is not only important scientifically but also a moral and ethical imperative.

The construction of the local in Madagascar since the beginning of colonization

To explore how the local has been constructed and instrumentalized in Madagascar during the past century, we focus on three key periods illustrating different types of external interventions, and various understandings and practices of the local: first the colonization period, which can be described as a 'hard' and militarized international intervention; second the three decades after the country's independence, when socialist and communist policies were promoted through external intellectual and ideological influence; and third, the period since 2002, during which the 'international community' has been intervening via institutional engineering and the promotion of specific understandings of peace and reconciliation in Madagascar. It is important to note that we do not argue that the understandings and practices of the local promoted by these direct or indirect external interventions are or were the only ones during the concerned period, but that they are or were sufficiently dominant to structure most political and policy discourses and practices in Madagascar.

The colonial rule

One of the main effects of colonial regimes was to reshape colonized societies, as they sought to maintain order and recruit wage labour (Stoler and Cooper 1997). The colonial manipulation of space and place was central to this endeavour, but it could not happen without any kind of alliance with pre-existing authorities. Critical literature on the history and practices of colonialism has well established that colonial orders relied on alliances and collaborations with specific economic and political actors in the colonies themselves. Co-opted elites in villages, regions, and at the national level played a central role in supporting colonial regimes, especially because they enabled the functioning and outreach of the colonial state at all levels of the colonized territory (Fanon 2007). In Madagascar, as we will see this notably took the shape of 'politics of race' which, combined with other policies for instance at the urban level, aimed to support France's political objectives (Wright 1997). As the Malagasy population and elites resisted, deflected or tried to instrumentalize these policies, various definitions and practices of the local started to emerge.

The majority of the people who participated in our narrative workshops and discussed the construction of a Malagasy nation argued that Madagascar was never a nation before the French arrived, despite the existence of powerful political actors like the Merina[3] Kingdom or other kingdoms in the periphery. 'Whenever we talk about the Malagasy nation it is always vis-à-vis the external influence' (Dr Denis Alexandre Lahiniriko, Dec 2021, Antananarivo). Therefore, some of our interviewees view French colonization as the main trigger for generating nationalist feelings in Madagascar:

> France sowed in the Malagasy mind this longing to build a nation … France introduced this to us but before that, each region was called by its ethnic group and the latter were independent. Before King Radama's conquest in 1820-22 … when Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony wrote letters he used the terms Sakalava nation, Sihanaka nation, Betsileo nation. The historians during the second republic, the socialist period changed this and said that there was already a powerful nation countering France when the latter arrived here. (Professor Rabesa Zafera Antoine, politician, Professor and former Ambassador, May 2022, Mahajanga)

However, building a Malagasy nation was not among the colonizer's objectives. In fact, during the colonial period, France emphasized racial and ethnic divisions in Madagascar, thereby preventing the emergence of a united Malagasy nation and weakening the opponents of the French empire. During the six decades that colonization lasted, multiple alliances, internal conflicts and betrayals occurred among the French and the Malagasy. These complex relationships centred on who, where and what the local in Madagascar was, and in particular on the 'politics of race' and the code de l'indigénat, imposed by the colonial power.

The 'politics of race' ('politique des races') was at the centre of France's policy for controlling Madagascar (Boetsch and Savarese 2000), and followed a 'divide and rule' strategy. Depending on the period and the location, France used different ethnic groups to back its colonial policies. Before the island's annexation, the country had kingdoms or confederations formed by various ethnic groups. One of them, considered the most powerful, was the Merina kingdom in central Madagascar. During the royal period (c. 1540–1897) the Merina conducted bloody wars to conquer territories, especially the ones Radama I 'the Great' (1793–1828) led. The central part of Madagascar where the majority of the Merina lived was privileged. The Merina were given better access to services, education, jobs, and so on. In its politics of race, France used the collective memories of physical, structural and cultural violence that the Merina committed during the royal period to cement its rule and build a political order serving its interests. For instance, the French authorities opposed the Merina identity to that of the 'Côtiers' – literally, those who come from coastal areas and have darker skin, as opposed to the Merina who come from the Highlands and have lighter complexion – to determine the contours of the local in Madagascar. Despite the existence of multiple ethnic groups and kingdoms cutting across this binary, the French authorities mainly categorized the Malagasy along these lines and instrumentalized the resulting divisions. For instance, France supported the Côtiers political party PADESM (Parti des déshérités de Madagascar, 'Party of the Disinherited of Madagascar', established in 1946), which considered the Hova who were among those who initiated the independentist movements in Madagascar (Randriamaro 1997) as their opponents. The Hova were subjects of the Merina King Andrianampoinimerina and had a higher status than the freed slaves who were among those who founded the PADESM. France contended that if the Hova movements were successful in discarding France, the Merina would get the power back. Supporting the PADESM was therefore a way for France to counter the political party MDRM (Democratic Movement of Malagasy Renovation), which it accused of being Merina and leading the struggle for independence. Such a discourse resonated well with the PADESM, since among their motto were the fight against Merina supremacy, poverty eradication, and helping the Côtiers to raise their status within the society, for example by providing them with education (Randriamamonjy 2006, 175–176). As such, PADESM used its connections to France to further its

political objectives, and vice versa. The politics of race framed the opposition between the Merina and the Côtiers as central to the formation of the Malagasy identity, despite the rich tapestry of (over) 18 distinct ethnic groups in Madagascar, each contributing to the complex mosaic of local diversity. Over time, both national and international actors like France used these constructions of the local to shape policies or to justify actions or solutions to specific conflicts and governance issues, for instance in discourses and policies revolving around decentralization and federalism.

Another colonial practice about the local centred around a mechanistic, formal and regulatory-based practice: the code or 'régime' de l'indigénat, a legal device the French empire used in its colonies. It regrouped legal texts and regulations that evolved over time (Merle 2004, 166), and that were used to penalize natives without trials, for instance through fines or jail time. The decree of 21 October 1899 established the Code de l'indigénat in Madagascar, and the decree of 13 November 1899 cited 37 groups of punishable offences. Particular dispositions were set in place and oppressed the 'natives' because of their traditions, cultures, and ways of living. France used the code to reconfigure and fashion the perfect Malagasy individual who would serve its interests, who would be a civilized and docile colonial subject, and who would adopt 'modern' practices like paying taxes and doing the 'fanompoana' (servitude/services) as well as forced labour. The code shaped how the Malagasy should live (e.g. they had to give birth at the hospital rather than at home, using traditional midwives) and interacted with each other, as it shaped the relations between the indigenous administrators and the wider population. Traditional beliefs tied to traditional medical practices were banned, like the use or provision of traditional medicines and the practice of witchcraft. All these cultural practices and traditions were inherent to what the Malagasy considered as local and central to their identities, and were used by France to single out, shape and control the 'local'.

Another main purpose of the code de l'indigénat was to establish who would count as indigenous, and who would, by contrast, be considered a French citizen. Article 1 of the decree of 13 November 1899 defined 'indigenous' as 'people residing in the colonies, either born in Madagascar or in other French possessions, and [who] do not have French citizenship'. This decree therefore defined the local in spatial (people residing in the colony) and legal terms (people who do not have French citizenship). The decree of 30 October 1904 similarly emphasized the difference between those who could be considered indigenous and those who could not, by underscoring the difference between French citizens (those who were already French and some Malagasy who became citizens) and indigenous people (most of those born Malagasy). In another move resulting in deeper divisions within the Malagasy population, the decree of 18 July 1914 further defined specific categories of Malagasy people as exempt from the code de l'indigénat, notably the Merina elite such as the '1st class licensed merchants, members of municipal councils, notable assessors of indigenous courts, holders of a French decoration, doctors of medicine, civil servants of the indigenous administration' (Fremigacci 2013). In 1914, the natives who served in the French army during the First World War were added to that list.

Depending on the period, France thus relied on various sections of the Malagasy population – defined in racial, ethnic, cultural and/or functional terms – to implement its policies. Those who did not belong to these categories were tightly controlled and mostly

deprived of rights, whereas those fitting the criteria could be seen, at times and under certain conditions, as allies of France or even as French citizens. Building on divisions that had emerged during the Merina-dominated royal period, the colonial construction of the local through the politics of race and the code de l'indigénat shaped the power dynamics among the Malagasy and generated animosities, hatred, and conflicts. Some people benefitted from the resources France offered the Malagasy while the large majority suffered, with problems of access to education, jobs, and benefits for the wider population. These attempts at constructing the local by France also engendered significant resistance among the Malagasy, which underpinned nationalist movements in Madagascar. The politics of race and the code de l'indigénat indeed generated discourses and narratives about citizenship and the construction of the Malagasy nation, as the Malagasy wanted to enjoy the same rights as French citizens. So whereas French policies attempted to secure the support and cooperation of 'local' allies, they ended up fostering Malagasy nationalism among a larger part of the population, who practised upscaling and embraced a national identity overshadowing – but not replacing – racial, ethnic or indigenous ones.

Thus, the politics of scale implemented by France during the colonial period shaped and defined the local around different dimensions, notably spatial (the island of Madagascar itself), but also racial, ethnic, cultural and occupational. The local scale was thereby mostly used to differentiate between on the one hand the Malagasy population and on the other hand France and its (local) allies.

The Fokonolona and socialist and communist influences

In 1960, Madagascar obtained its full independence, and the Malagasy chose to 'return to [their] roots'[4] by trying to (re)construct the local scale through the concept of the Fokonolona, which had characterized the organization of rural life long before colonization. The Fokonolona can be defined as a 'community village that is both human and spatial, based on cohabitation. This geographical solidarity is constructed and strengthened most often by the existence of family ties at the scale of the village' (Andriamirado 1977, 52). No one knows when exactly the Fokonolona was established as an institution. Scholars have traced it back to the reign of the Merina King Andrianampoinimerina (1787–1810). 'Foko' means an ethnic group, a clan, and 'olona' means human. The Fokonolona can therefore be understood as a group of individuals belonging to one or more 'foko'. Some assign a spatial meaning to the Fokonolona (based on geographical solidarity deriving from family ties), while others[5] interpret it as based on parental systems, ancestors (the razana) and ethnicity. The principles of the Fokonolona revolve around communitarianism, cohabitation, solidarity, mutual aid, consultation, common interests, respect for common unofficial rules, and collective decision-making. The participants in our narrative workshops still consider these to constitute the fundamental core of the Malagasy identity.

During the colonial period, even though the Fokonolona was present everywhere in Madagascar, the French administrators saw it as embodying the Hova, the wealthy Merina involved in resistance against colonial rule. Consequently, France attempted to formalize and control it. In the decree of 9 March 1902, the code de l'indigénat institutionalized the Fokonolona into an administrative unit and gave responsibilities to peasant

collectivities – thus trying to preclude Hova's influence. Later, the 'Charter of Fokonolona' (GGM 6D (7) 4, ANOMS) was established by French jurists and the governor Rasanjy, whom the Malagasy considered a traitor. It conceived the Fokonolona in spatial terms and defined it as formed by the population living in districts called 'Fokontany'.

After Madagascar's independence, the Fokonolona regained a central place in the discourses and policies of the successive administrations. It was one of the bases of what the Malagasy called 'Malgachisation': making everything Malagasy, returning to the roots and to what is Malagasy including its values, principles, beliefs, and so on. With a decree published in March 1973, the Malagasy government officially recognized and made the Fokonolona the starting point of the structuring of the rural world, to ensure a popular control of development. The Fokonolona was considered not only as the basis of economic decision-making (production and distribution) but also as playing key political and administrative roles.

In many ways, and although it was presented as traditional, the promotion of the Fokonolona model was tightly related to the growing influence of socialism and communism among Malagasy political elites. Indeed, even if the type of socialism practised in the 1970s and 1980s in Madagascar was not a strict reproduction of Marxism-Leninism as implemented in the Soviet Union but rather a 'synthesis of the classic and Third World elements of Marxism-Leninism' (du Bois 2013, 105), Madagascar was deeply influenced by the Soviet Union, China, and even North Korea. This influence spanned the military, economic, political, but also cultural sectors (Sellström 2015). The Russian populism that inspired economic policies in independent Madagascar posited that the revolution and reforms must involve the peasants, who made up 80% of the Russian population at the time. Interestingly, this reflected the composition of the Malagasy society too. This policy was supposed to give the power back to the rural world, to the farmers, that is what was constructed by national political elites as the local.[6] Following the Russian example, the Fokonolona was placed at the core of the agrarian reforms that were implemented in Madagascar in the 1970s. For instance, land management and exploitation were to be executed by the Fokonolona. However, contrary to its stated objectives, rural notables like land owners, retired civil servants and members of the village councils were its main beneficiaries. Institutions such as economic commissions and the institutions collecting and stocking produce such as coffee, vanilla and rice were co-opted, and were used to amass significant amounts of wealth.

According to Professor Aboubakary Abd-El-Kader of the University of Antsiranana (interview, June 2022), the Fokonolona is based on values that are similar to communist principles. As such, communism is part of the Malagasy ways of thinking and everyday life. Malagasy proverbs like 'Velona iray trano ary maty iray fasana' (alive in the same house and buried in the same grave), 'Aleo very tsikalakalam-bola toy izay very tsikalakalam-pihavanana' (it is better to lose money than losing relationship), 'asa avadi-drano tsy vita raha tsy hifanakonana' (work cannot be done without collaboration) demonstrate the extent to which the Fokonolona and its 'fihavanana' are built upon communist principles. The Fihavanana is an ideal, a principle that kins or friends use to achieve peace and harmony. It embodies various concepts related to kinship, goodwill, friendship, love, etc. (Loyola Rakotondramiadanirina 2015).

During the 1970s and the 1980s, under the influence of socialism and communism, the Fokonolona discourses revolved around the ideas of class struggle, revolution, and the

opposition between the bourgeoisie and the populace. With the socialist revolution of 1975 which saw Didier Ratsiraka made head of state, such discourses were further entrenched at the political and institutional levels. For instance, Article 1 of the 1975 Constitution stated that 'the Malagasy population is formed by an organised nation built upon a socialist and democratic community, the Fokonolona'. The conception of the local embodied by the Fokonolona and promoted in the new constitution was inspired by Russian (and possibly North Korean) experiences:

> We were sent to the URSS to learn about proletarian dictatorship so that when we went back home we would bring back and apply ideologies such as Marxism Leninism or socialism, and we would fight against capitalism. (Professor Aboubakary Abd-El-Kader, Antsiranana, June 2002)

> Ratsiraka got his inspiration from the USSR. He also had a partnership with North Korea (…) And the influence of Marxism Leninism we disseminated at the universities exists for real, in true education. The Malagasy were just forced to be socialists. (…) The Red Book is a program, an economic and social strategy that was nationalist, shaping a new decentralised state and power. (Politician close to late President Ratsiraka, Fenoarivo Atsinanana, May 2022)

The successive policies promoting the Fokonolona feature descaling, which is a politics of scale entailing the relocation of spaces where power is exercised. In this case, the nation-state delegated power to the smallest scale, the farmers. The actors involved in the implementation of the Fokonolona saw this as an opportunity to put the rural world back at the centre of Malagasy 'local' identity.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Fokonolona was considered not only as an administrative unit but also as the essence of the local, Malagasy traditional values, spirit, ways of thinking and principles. While it already existed during both the royal period and colonization, its reinvention in the 1970s as epitomizing the local was hybridized. It drew its principles and practices of communitarianism, collectivism, and proletarianism from various ideologies (Maoism, Marxism, Leninism, Juche, socialism, communism, among others). The actors involved in the re-enactment of the Fokonolona created local institutions called 'popular councils', using spatial politics and aiming at eradicating colonial institutions. However, the popular council elections put in power a new generation of notables using the Fokonolona for their interests. Here again, the local was constructed, instrumentalized and manipulated to advance political objectives or the interests of specific groups or actors. But contrary to what happened during the colonization period with stress put on racial, ethnic and cultural identities, the local during the communist/socialist period was constructed primarily in spatial and occupational terms, as a rural and working-class space, as opposed to the urban and bourgeois world.

Externally led reconciliation processes

After its independence, Madagascar witnessed multiple episodes of internal violence and political instability, leaving the country impoverished and divided (Razakamaharavo 2019). The idea of national reconciliation began to take root during the 1990s in the discourses of Malagasy political actors, notably of President Zafy Albert who created in June 2002 a structure called Committee for National Reconciliation (Comité pour la

Réconciliation Nationale, CRN). This entity gathered Malagasy actors close to the President, including politicians, economic actors and notables. Unfortunately, this initiative did not attract much support from the Malagasy people, due to narratives presenting President Zafy as a racist and Merina hater, and the fact that CRN was perceived as the opposition.[7] Interestingly, the CRN defended a 'local' – understood here as national – approach to reconciliation and protested against the involvement of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in national matters and specifically in the peace process. The CRN also advocated for more involvement from the Churches, namely the FFKM (Fiombonan'ny Fiangonana Kristiana eto Madagasikara or Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar including the Protestant, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches) and civil society. However, given the political and ethnic elements attached to the CRN, the desire to 'localise' the peace process translated into the exclusion of certain ethnic groups (e.g. the Merina) and political parties, thus promoting a political and partial understanding of the local – that is, of the Malagasy nation.

Unsurprisingly, this restrictive understanding of the Malagasy nation was contested by numerous factions, groups and political parties, who wished to participate in the peace process. To this day, and as was apparent during our narrative workshops, the idea that peace processes should be led 'locally' – that is, by Malagasy actors – and problems solved internally is shared by many civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and Malagasy individuals. This has led to multiple bottom-up initiatives to solve the political crises plaguing Madagascar. For instance, members of the Malagasy civil society like the Coalition of the Civil Society Organisations, the Alliance of the Civil Society Organisations and the KMF/CNOE (National Council for the Observation of the Elections) initiated a mechanism called Malgacho-Malgache[8], an internal Malagasy process of exit strategy to the 2009 crisis. Civil society organizations also offered to mediate between the conflicting parties and gathered around the Collectif des Citoyens et des Organisations Citoyennes (CCOC, Collective of Citizens and Citizen Organisations). However, this initiative was short-lived, because when Rajoelina took over power in March 2009, some civil society organizations like the ones under the aegis of the Collectif des Citoyens et du Comité préparatoire des Etats Généraux pour la Démocratie et les Valeurs Républicaines (Collective of Citizens and of the Preparatory Committee for the General Assembly for Democracy and Republican Values) joined the government of transition and participated in the Assises Nationales (broad-based national partnerships and consultations) organized by the transitional government.

As these initiatives failed to bear fruit, international mediation took over, led as of 2009 by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). States such as Libya, Uganda and Burkina Faso, and organizations like the African Union, the United Nations, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Common Market for Eastern Southern Africa and the European Union participated in the mediation and negotiation initiatives (Ratsimbaharison 2017). Those actors initially decided that Madagascar, that is in their view, the 'local', would be represented by the main political factions led by the three former presidents (Ratsiraka, Zafy Albert and Ravalomanana) and the back then former Mayor of the capital city Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina. Between 2009 and 2013, several meetings were held in South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Ethiopia. Eventually, the FFM (Malagasy Reconciliation Council), a hybrid entity designed to manage national reconciliation in Madagascar, emerged. Besides the

above-mentioned political factions, Malagasy civil society was given the important role of overseeing the reconciliation process:

> 25 – A national reconciliation process led by a national institution called Filankevitry ny Fampihavanana Malagasy (Malagasy Reconciliation Council) and facilitated by the international community shall be initiated in order to begin healing past individual and collective wounds and lay down a sound foundation for the future of Madagascar (…) 28 – The members of the Malagasy civil society (…) shall monitor and oversee the implementation of this Roadmap across the country until the end of the transitional period (13 September 2011 – Roadmap for ending the crisis in Madagascar)

What is noticeable here is the hybridity of the involved processes and actors. While seemingly taking into account Malagasy values and principles, the external actors provided a blueprint for how reconciliation should be conducted. We can also observe a shift in how local agency was conceptualized, with a significant emphasis on civil society organizations tasked with monitoring and overseeing the implementation, and thus with representing the Malagasy. Interestingly, in the texts designing the reconciliation process, the Fokonolona was never mentioned, and the principles underpinning it like collectivity and solidarity were seemingly abandoned.

The construction of the Malagasy in this context has significant occupational and functional dimensions, emphasizing the roles of actors like political parties and civil society organizations. Interestingly, many participants in our narrative workshops explained that most members of the civil society in Madagascar come from educated, noble and wealthy families. Those are the people the international community invites to attend receptions, participate in activities and even conduct studies, programme evaluations, etc. In other words, rather than embodying the Malagasy people, civil society organizations represent Malagasy elites and privileged groups.

In any case, despite national and international efforts, by 2016 it had become clear that the FFM could not achieve its targets, and it was replaced with another entity, the Conseil du Fampihavanana Malagasy[9] (CFM or Council for the Malagasy Reconciliation), a state institution established by the law 2016-037 of 2 February 2017. Like the FFM, the CFM was built upon the South African model of conflict resolution and national reconciliation, and its members were trained by experts from South Africa familiar with the South African reconciliation process, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations. Constituted by 33 members (down from the 44 members of the FFM) selected on the basis of the regions where they live and their social status, the CFM was supposed to be representative of the Malagasy. The President, considered by the Malagasy constitution to be a guarantor of national unity, had the prerogative to choose one-third of its members. The CFM members were composed of personalities

> chosen because of their refusal of nepotism in all its forms, their sense of justice, duty, public good and general interest, their competence and their real knowledge of Madagascar (…) [and] appointed from a list proposed by a national selection committee composed of personalities renowned for their integrity and competence, respecting the gender approach, from among others religious associations, civil society, traditional authorities and from the private sector. (Articles 12-13-14 of Law n°2016-037)

Thus, initially, national actors like civil society, traditional authorities and religious actors were expected to represent the 'local' (that is, in the eyes of the international community,

the Malagasy nation) and monitor the process of national reconciliation. This functional conception of the local, in line with the 'local turn' in peacebuilding, was however complicated by spatial, ethnic, and even cultural considerations that came into play in the CFM activities, as the CFM introduced new activities designed to foster reconciliation. Indeed, since its inception, the CFM has foregrounded certain practices or actors selected along spatial or ethnic lines. For example, the CFM created 'espaces de dialogue' (spaces for dialogue) defined on a geographical basis (CFM Annual Report 2020, 34–39). This is the case for instance of the KIANJA MAITSO (Green Field) in the rural commune of Andriambilany, a basic community structure set up by the Mayor, where the inhabitants live concretely and daily the Malagasy cultural value that is the 'Fihavanana'.

At times, the CFM also foregrounds ethnic understandings of the local. For instance, the discussion forum 'S.I.Toa' ('Sehatra Ifampiresahana etoToamasina') created in February 2020 focuses on solving dissensions among ethnic groups. As there have been internal dissensions among the natives of various regions based in Toamasina, associations representing specific ethnic groups were invited to discuss, like the natives of Fianarantsoa (FIZAFAFI), Toliara (FIZAFATO), and Toamasina (FIZATO).

In other cases, the CFM has conceptualized the local around institutional identities reifying past practices and identities. For instance, in the commune and district of Amparafaravola, a workshop on 'Soatoavina enti-mitantana' (modes of management based on cultural values) was organized in February 2020. It was meant as an inclusive discussion forum between the Mayor and his councillors, focusing on: 'Fanjakana teny ierana, Fanjakana iaraha-mihevitra' ('An Administration of consensus, an Administration of common reflection'). This endeavour openly re-enacted and mimicked what village elders did during the royal period.

Therefore, and perhaps a bit paradoxically, the CFM members, mostly representing the civil society, traditional authorities and religious actors at the national level, practised descaling and tried to remove the international from the equation, by promoting bottom-up approaches and 'localised' peace processes. So far, no study or report has assessed whether these initiatives have had positive impacts in terms of national (and/or subnational) reconciliation, or whether they have been openly resisted by other actors. Many of the people we met during the data collection process were highly critical of the CFM. They questioned its existence, accusing it of not being representative of the Malagasy, of being a state institution and thus using tax-payers' money without results, among other criticisms (e.g. Narrative Workshops, May 2022, Toamasina).

The case of the reconciliation processes underscores the multiple understandings and practices of the 'local' coexisting in Madagascar. This allows various shifts of strategies and motives among the involved actors. In some cases, the local is constructed along functional lines or national and ethnic lines. In other cases, sometimes simultaneously, the local is built on spatial and traditional or cultural elements. Altogether, the local is understood and practised concurrently in different ways, both in opposition to and in continuity with practices of the precolonial, colonial and socialist/communist periods.

Discussion and preliminary conclusions

The main question explored by this article relates to the impact of externally-led political and economic interventions over the long term on the perceptions of scales and

specifically of the local in Madagascar. As a category of practice and as an epistemological construct, the local has been produced and reproduced by interactions between different actors located both within and outside Madagascar. Far from being eschewed in national and international policies targeting Madagascar, the local has been constantly (re-)defined and instrumentalized, and some local actors empowered and disempowered. As a result, what it is to be Malagasy, what Malagasy culture is, who represents the nation, where the local 'is' and how it is defined (spatially, ethnically, culturally, and so on), do not have simple answers. In other words, the local in Madagascar does not have a fixed meaning but is changing and contingent.

Our rapid historical overview shows that both internal and external actors have used the local as a scale to frame problems and solutions, and to include or exclude specific actors (Moore 2008). Under colonial rule, the 'local' population did not just live in a particular space, Madagascar, it was also defined along specific (and at times shifting) racial, ethnic, cultural and occupational lines. France attempted to repress and control the majority of the Malagasy while empowering a minority of co-opted local allies. But while France was busy trying to disempower its opponents by reinforcing divisions within the colonized population, it also inadvertently fostered Malagasy nationalism. The local in Madagascar was thereafter mostly framed by the Malagasy in opposition to France and in national terms. However, the decades following Madagascar's independence were characterized by the influence of socialist and communist ideologies, leading to the revival of the Fokonolona model. Although part of the national culture, the Fokonolona model foregrounded a spatial understanding of the local as a rural space, a group or even as an unofficial administrative unit, in which the population representing the local was defined in ideological and occupational terms, as rural workers and farmers, and opposed to the bourgeoisie. This model strived to empower those seen as representing the local, but the system was instrumentalized by a minority elected in popular councils. When the influence of socialist and communist ideologies faded, and the need to address the recurring conflicts plaguing Madagascar imposed itself, the prevailing understandings and practices related to the local shifted again. Attempts by the international community to impose an understanding of the local as related to Malagasy national political elites and civil society organizations were circumvented and resisted by some Malagasy actors, who stressed instead the spatial, ethnic and cultural dimensions of the local.

The case of Madagascar shows that the local is not just defined and practised spatially, but also ethnically, racially, culturally, as well as temporally and occupationally. As a scale, different understandings and practices of the local coexist and compete, which can explain the previously-mentioned confusion among the Malagasy about what the local is. However, these multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings and practices of the local can also constitute an important resource for Malagasy actors, especially at the political and policy levels, as they can leverage whichever understanding of the local serves their interests and objectives best, at a certain moment in time. In that sense, the local constitutes a scale from which resistance can stem, including but not limited to resistance against externally led interventions (see Féron and Krause 2022). While 'local' resistance to peacebuilding has already been well studied (see, e.g. Björkdahl et al. 2016; Lee 2015; Mac Ginty 2011), the role played by scales – both as epistemological constructs and as categories of practice – in this process has so far received limited

attention. In the case of Madagascar for instance, the so-called local actors have used their co-opted positions in the reconciliation process to promote alternative understandings of the local.

In addition, what the case of Madagascar demonstrates is that hybridity is more than just the result of interactions between (already hybridized) local and international spheres (Mac Ginty 2011). Hybridity is also produced through power struggles between actors with specific interests and objectives, who manipulate understandings of scale to defend these. In other words, as Hameiri and Jones (2017) have argued, hybridity is not just produced through an interaction or opposition between (fixed) scales, but also through a struggle about ever-shifting and contingent scales. The colonial period in Madagascar provides multiple examples of these processes, with the colonial power frequently readjusting its definition of the local in function of its own shifting needs, and of the opposition and resistance of the Malagasy.

In this perspective, identifying who or where the local is exactly, is impossible: rather, because the local has been defined differently depending on the politics of scale of various sets of (sometimes opposing) actors, it is possible to understand the local as a co-constructed scale of intervention, whose exact location and definition keeps shifting. These contingent and shifting definitions of the local most likely play a significant role in the conflicts that Madagascar has been witnessing, as many focus on who can legitimately represent the Malagasy nation, who is entitled to make decisions for whom, and at which level important decisions should be taken. Thus, contestations about the local are also tightly related to the legitimacy of political orders and practices.

Many questions related to the production of the local as an epistemological construct and as a scale would merit further investigation, such as what roles the contestations about the local play in violent conflicts, and how to factor these roles in conflict transformation and peacebuilding initiatives. Beyond studies focusing on specific countries, exploring scalar representations, practices and relations within international organizations, traditional institutions, civil society organizations and their impact on international policies could also prove fruitful. In addition, research could focus on the multiple constructions of the local scale within the framework of hybridization processes extending beyond Western and liberal influences, and on the roles these diverse influences play in peace and conflict processes.

Notes

1. https://data.worldbank.org/country/madagascar (Accessed on 29/04/2024)
2. The research was reviewed and approved by the University of Reading's Ethics Committee (SREC). All individuals mentioned in the article have granted us explicit authorization to include their names in any content we produce. Prior to conducting interviews or narrative workshops, we meticulously reviewed and read the informed consent document with all participants, offering them an opportunity to seek clarification if any aspects of the document were unclear. Every participant retained the right to withdraw from the project at any point. The signed informed consent forms are securely archived on the University of Reading's Drive, and copies are available upon request.
3. Merina is a term used to qualify the ethnic group from the Highlands, the central part of Madagascar.
4. In French, 'retour aux sources' is an expression the Malagasy use to qualify the act of respecting traditions, of using traditional values and principles in everyday life, etc.

5. For instance, the French administrators during the colonial period understood the Fokono-lona through the prism of ethnicity.
6. https://mg.eferrit.com/ireo-mpikatroka-rosiana/ (Accessed on 29/04/2024)
7. https://www.madonline.com/le-crn-agace/ (Accessed on 29/04/2024)
8. Madagascar: Solution malgacho-malgache - Retour à la case départ - allAfrica.com (Accessed on 29/04/2024)
9. https://www.cfm.mg/ (Accessed on 29/04/2024)

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