**Conclusion**

By the nineteenth century, globalization had ensured that the island of Madagascar was a critical link in world trade. Living between two oceanic systems of exchange, the Malagasy supplied commodities that could mean the difference between economic prosperity and financial disaster for European, African, Arab, and Asian merchants. The history of how this trade developed, how they obtained these supplies, and how they established relationships with the merchants sheds light on how communities within these systems of exchange interacted and shaped globalization during the early modern period.

Would the Sakalava state have transformed into a powerful empire in Madagascar without globalization? Without global trade, there would have been fewer incentives for Sakalava rulers to lead this transformation. This research has shown that the response of the Sakalava elites to the increase in global trade in Madagascar has been significant in shaping the development of the Sakalava Empire. Their desire to control this trade led them to resort to violence. As their control of trade expanded, so did their control of the land and their subjects. They became increasingly more powerful, especially after obtaining a monopoly over imports and exports, and the violence further increased. Their power came from the control of trade, monopolization of the movement of commodities within Madagascar, threats of violence, and establishment of alliances. Successful challenges to this control of trade by the Merinas, supported by Europeans, led to the weakening and eventual downfall of the Sakalava Empire in the nineteenth century.

This history demonstrates that global trade benefited elites. As global networks of exchange were created, powerful elites excluded the majority of their people from participation in these networks. Leaders benefited from the work of their subjects and gained a disproportionate share of rewards from their engagement with foreign merchants. By mediating contact between Europeans and Malagasy, the Sakalava rulers created at least an illusion of absolute control and prevented the establishment of alternate trading relationships. European merchants did likewise.

Beneath the blood brotherhood ceremonies and presents of *eau de vie* were acts of violence within Madagascar that enabled the formation of cross-cultural connections. Elite traders at sea and leaders on land created elaborate ceremonies, marked by the consumption of food and alcohol in front of their subjects who were not allowed to participate. In this process, slaves, workers, and soldiers became faces in the crowd, merely observers in these rituals that created and recreated hierarchies on the beaches of Madagascar. Sakalava subjects have disappeared from the history of the Sakalava Empire.

Despite their exclusion from trading rituals, the workers of Madagascar had a role to play in the development of the global economy. The scholarship of globalization, particularly of trade routes in the Indian Ocean, largely focuses on the impact of the expanded production or export of luxury items such as cloth. European merchants sailed into the Indian Ocean in search of cheaper supplies of silk, pepper, cloves, and other goods, but food and labor fueled this global trade in luxury items. Without rice, salted beef, and laborers, merchants could not successfully supply Europeans with pepper, cloves, and coffee. When seen from this perspective, supplies of goods from Madagascar were one of the building blocks to the spread of global trade during the early modern period. The English, Portuguese, Dutch, and French all depended upon supplies from Madagascar for their trading endeavors in the Indian Ocean. When the French were unable to purchase adequate goods from the east coast of the island, for instance, they were unable to maintain their naval fleets and colonies in the ocean. The French continually based their schemes for expansion in the ocean on the ability to purchase food and slaves on the island. In fact, most companies faced problems with profitability in part due to the lack of food and labor to support trading missions in the Indian Ocean.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Without the slaves, farmers, and soldiers within Madagascar, the plans of European monopoly companies would have failed. When Sakalava leaders exchanged commodities with European merchants, elites on both sides of the beach relied upon their workers to acquire these commodities. These farmers, soldiers, and cattle herders fueled long-distance trade within and from Madagascar. As globalization increased during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the duties that fell upon these workers became more onerous. In many ways, this development echoes similar ones in Europe, as well as in the Americas. Historians have drawn attention to the role of factory workers (and slaves in the Americas) in powering an industrial revolution that left them impoverished.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Over these centuries of increased trade, migration, and knowledge exchange, what did globalization mean for the fishermen, who went out every night in search of fish? What did it mean for the cattle herders focused on supplying their families with food? What did it mean to the farmers who sowed their fields and waited for rain? It would appear that the lives of non-elites hardly intersected with global trading networks and globalization did not affect their lives a great deal. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, their families may have moved to new locations and found new opportunities for supporting themselves. Yet their day-to-day lives were not so very different during these centuries. One could hardly say that the events of these centuries in Madagascar had been transformative, at least from a certain perspective. Life in southwest Madagascar was not unchanging, but we should avoid attributing the changes people encountered during these centuries as due only to external pressures. Globalization altered how people viewed their world but did not always revolutionize how they interacted with each other.

There were some signs of broader shifts during this period due to new economic pressures and new systems of domination. Politically and economically powerful leaders mediated access to imported goods. They dictated the price of commodities and their movement in Madagascar. The leaders used the threat of military force to discipline the lives of their subjects and their place in the local economy. These leaders were no longer accountable to local councils that could express their displeasure with the actions of rulers. In particular, the expansion of Sakalava power over the western portion of the island had placed new demands on Malagasy communities and these demands increased during the colonial period. Laws and regulations now ensured the systematic subjugation of most Malagasy who lacked access to channels of colonial power. This process was rooted in the seventeenth century, when elites began to dominate interactions with foreign traders, but continued through the colonial period. Globalization did not fundamentally alter how the Malagasy interacted with one another in communities, but it did alter their relationships with their rulers.

Between the seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries, Europeans gradually eliminated some of the flexibility African and Asian elites had in deciding how to engage with global trade. During this period as well, large numbers of people sought protection within centralized states and empires. The relationship between ruler and ruled underwent a transformation and was increasingly marked by inequality. By the colonial era, previously prosperous ports became backwaters and communities in these regions became impoverished. Populations that used to export rice became net importers. Along with the marginalization of suppliers in Madagascar came the development of increased wealth disparities among communities on the island.[[3]](#footnote-3)

By the late nineteenth century, fewer and fewer ships visited the ports of southwestern Madagascar. Almost no ships went into St. Augustine’s Bay, as captains preferred to deal directly with merchants at Tulear. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the coming of steam-ships, fewer European captains stopped along the shores of Madagascar for food or laborers. In search of goods from India or China, they bypassed the shores of the island during the nineteenth century. Under French colonial rule, exports were controlled and colonial officials focused on increasing the cultivation of certain cash crops. The southwestern region became a backwater, primarily visited by tourists in search of the “real” untouched, authentic Madagascar.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In 1914, Walter D. Marcuse published an account of his visit to the western portion of Madagascar, entitled *Through Western Madagascar in Quest of the Golden Bean*.[[5]](#footnote-5) From the beginning of his narrative, Marcuse described the remoteness of southwestern Madagascar. Marcuse complained continually about the lack of roads and other problems that forced colonists to rely upon fishermen, farmers, and hunters to travel through Madagascar.[[6]](#footnote-6) In many ways, the life he observed appeared similar to that found in the bay centuries earlier.

He described the cultural similarities between pastoralists living to the south of St. Augustine’s Bay, the Mahafaly, and the Sakalava to the north, particularly in terms of religious beliefs.[[7]](#footnote-7) These people all lived as farmers and herders. They farmed yams, bananas, and manioc, but relied heavily on their animal herds. In lean years, when the rivers did not rise, people moved with their herds in search of new pastureland.[[8]](#footnote-8) He described the multitude of people moving to Tulear to trade. He observed women marching towards Tulear, with corn, beans, and manioc in baskets on their heads.[[9]](#footnote-9)

A passing remark from Marcuse speaks to the increasing intervention of elites in the global exchanges during the colonial period. When his convoy passed a group of men traveling to Tulear, they “salaamed to us,” meaning they greeted him and his men.[[10]](#footnote-10) Marcuse stated that the men were “eyeing our firearms covetously the while; and as I looked at them, I wonder how many of their kind they had murdered with gunfire before the French had deprived them of their cherished flintlocks.”[[11]](#footnote-11) This observation was significant on several levels. When the French colonized Madagascar, they denied the Malagasy the right to carry guns, unless they were soldiers or other officials in the colonial government. This domination of the use of firearms represented a form of violent control that harkened back to the Sakalava monopoly on the importation of firearms on the west coast. Marcuse assumed that these farmers had murdered “many of their kind” prior to colonization. Marcuse, and the French colonial government, firmly believed that pre-colonial Malagasy communities lived in chaotic, antagonistic relationships with each other.

What Marcuse was missing was the connections these men could have drawn between pre-colonial and French governance in western Madagascar. Any covetous glance from the men arose from recognition of the privileges previously held by the Sakalava now granted to the Europeans. Over these centuries, people supplied food and labor to power global trade, but still dealt with the granting of special privileges to the elites that ruled them. Despite growing the corn, manioc, and beans that allowed kings, queens, and governors to participate in global trade networks, the farmers still could not own firearms themselves. The French had passed laws and rigorously protected their monopoly with more precision than the Sakalava. Malagasy who served the French colonial government were given permission to hold arms. What the Sakalava had began centuries earlier, the French continued, but with a bureaucracy to assist them in preserving their control over the labor of the Malagasy.

The story of the rise and fall of the Sakalava Empire has been written as a litany of rulers, events, and complex diplomatic maneuvering. Indeed, the available sources have given us little opportunity for telling the history in any other way. In writing a history of southwestern Madagascar, we are left with these sorts of fragments to understand the day-to-day lives of people in places such as southwestern Madagascar. We are left with very little to make sense of the lives of these men and women who enabled and continue to enable the circulations of people, goods, and ideas throughout the world.

1. Holden Furber, *Rival empires of trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See debates on this issue particularly by George Dalton and Karl Polanyi: George Dalton, *Traditional tribal and peasant economies: an introductory survey of economic anthropology* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1971); Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the slave trade; an analysis of an archaic economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

Scholars have also examined the cloth production in India and they draw our attention to the role of family producers in powering the export of this desired good. See, for instance, Prasannan Parthasarathi, “Rethinking Wages and Competitiveness in the Eighteenth Century: Britain and South India,” *Past & Present* 158 (Feb. 1998): 79-109; Morris D. Morris,“Towards a Reinterpretation of Nineteenth-Century Indian Economic History,” *The Journal of Economic History* 23, no. 4 (Dec. 1963): 606-618; Vijaya Ramaswamy, “The Genesis and Historical Role of the Master Weavers in South Indian Textile Production,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 28, no. 3(1985) 294-325. Some of these scholars explicitly refer to cloth production in India as a moment of “proto-industrialisation.” On this debate, see Ramaswamy, “Genesis and Historical Role,” 294-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In making sense of the growing imbalance between western and non-western societies during the nineteenth century, scholars in Africa and Asia have blamed economic dependency, political disputes, and the use of violence in European colonial policies. On this transition period in East Africa, see Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (London: J. Currey, 1987). See also Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1997). The three scholars consider the transition to the colonial period in Africa from different perspectives. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the presentation of southern Madagascar in one popular guide for tourists: Gemma Pitcher and Patricia C. Wright, *Lonely Planet Madagascar & Comoros*, 4th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Walter D. Marcuse, *Through Western Madagascar in Quest of the Golden Bean* (1914?). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 127, 138-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 195, 199. For details on these spiritual practices, see Chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The term Salaam, a greeting in many regions of Madagascar, comes from Arabic greeting *As-Salāmu `Alaykum*, itself evidence of the impact of global influences on a region where Islam was rarely practiced. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)