



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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GISELE RABESAHALA

WALK TO THE ROYAL HILL OF AMBOHIMANGA



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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Cover illustration: Sleeping Pop
Layout: Dhiara Fasya, Maria Jesus Ramos

The background features a light-colored, sketch-style illustration of a large, multi-story building with prominent arches and windows. The drawing is done in a simple, line-art style. In the foreground, there are several trees with rounded, leafy canopies, also rendered in a sketchy manner. The overall aesthetic is clean and artistic, typical of a book cover for a historical or cultural work.

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WALK TO THE ROYAL HILL OF AMBOHIMANGA

UNESCO Series on Women in African History
Editorial and artistic direction: Edouard Joubeaud

Comic strip
Illustrations: Sleeping Pop
Script and text: Bako Rasoarifetra, Vero Rabakoliarifetra,
Edouard Joubeaud

3 Comic strip

Foreword

The following comic strip is a story inspired by the figure of Gisèle Rabesahala and certain parts of her autobiography entitled "Let freedom come to us!". The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research on Gisèle Rabesahala, the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga and twentieth century Madagascar. They do not claim to be an exact representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles, or clothing of the period.





GISÈLE RABESAHALA

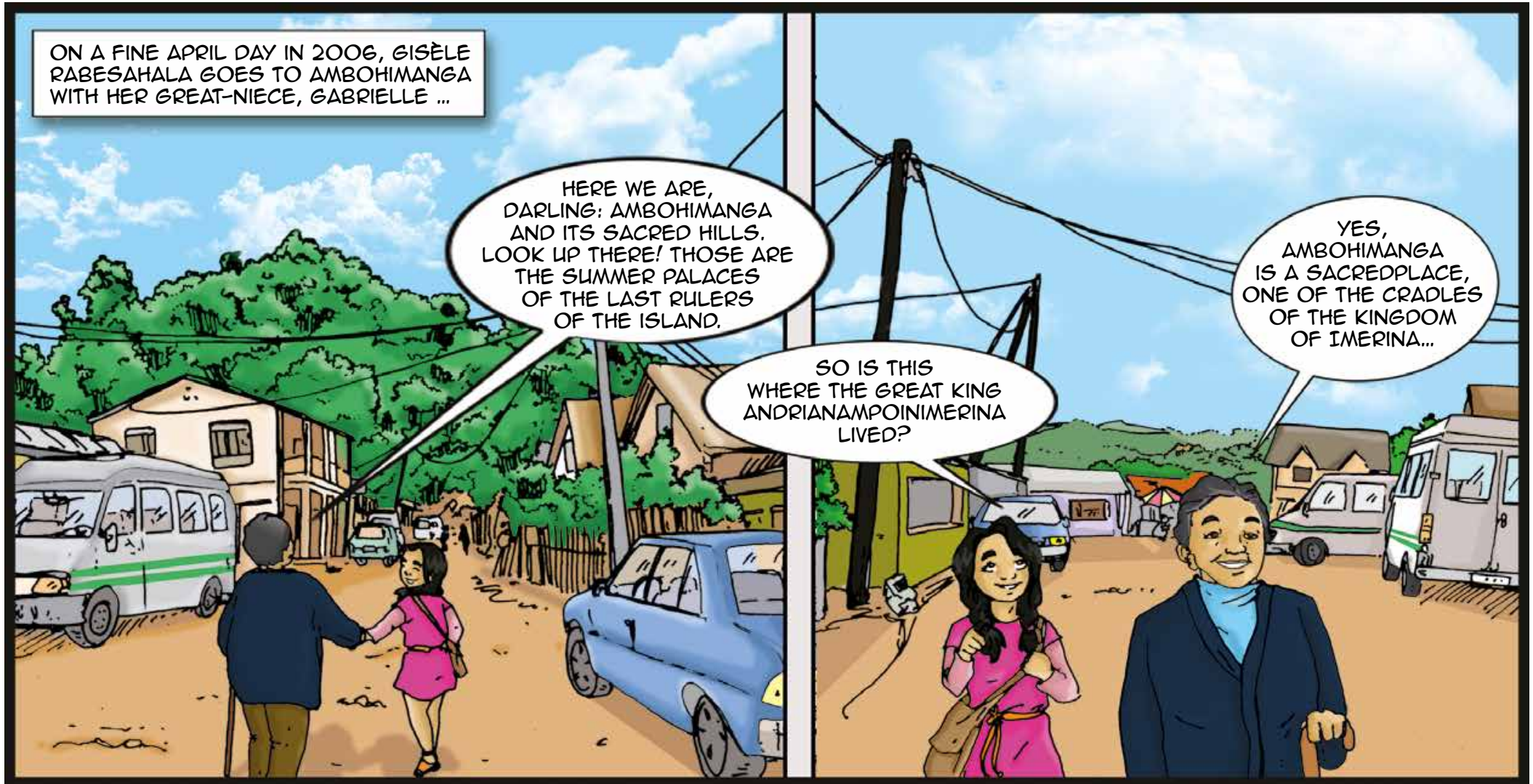
**WALK TO THE ROYAL HILL
OF AMBOHIMANGA**

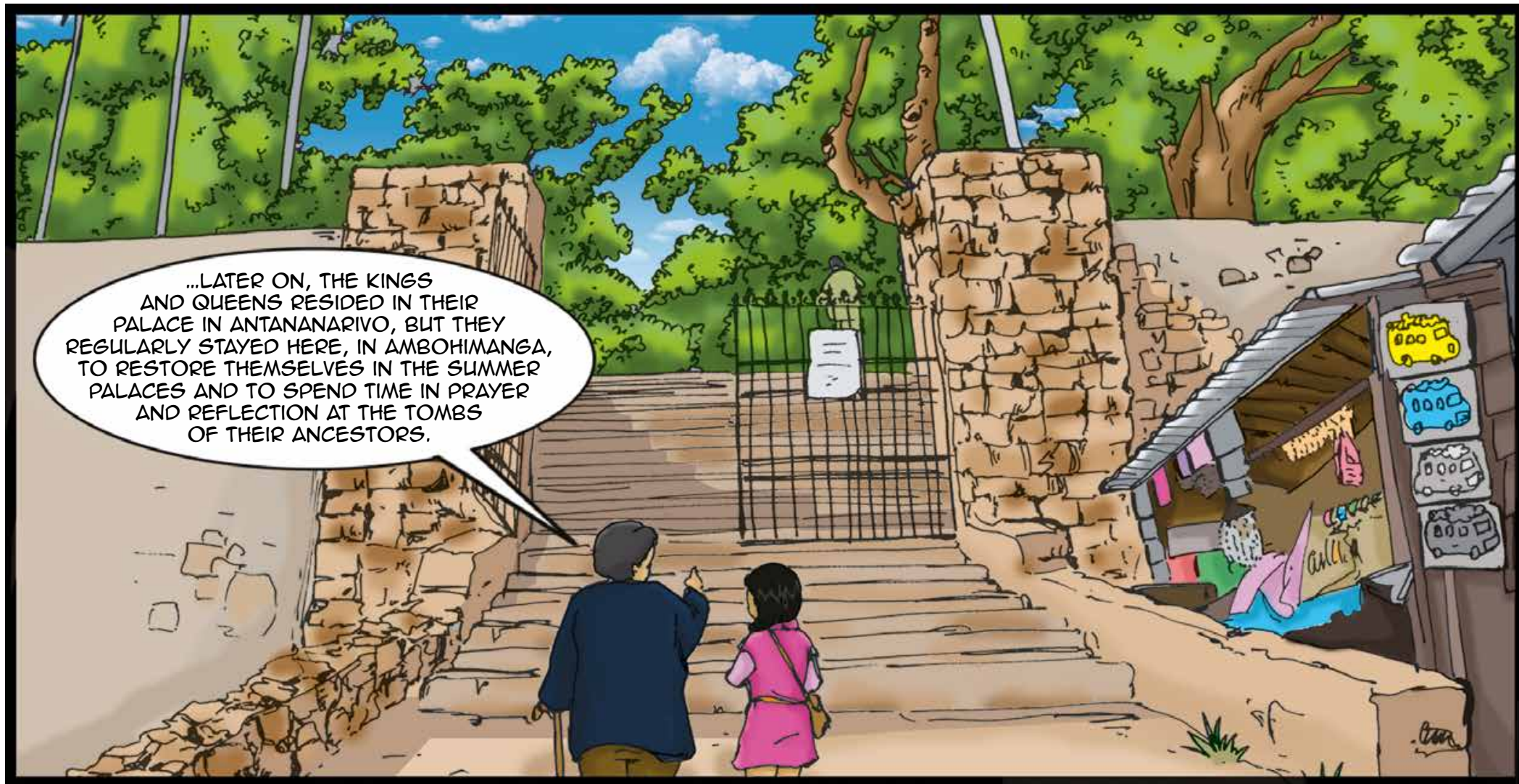
ON A FINE APRIL DAY IN 2006, GISÈLE RABESAHALA GOES TO AMBOHIMANGA WITH HER GREAT-NIECE, GABRIELLE ...

HERE WE ARE, DARLING: AMBOHIMANGA AND ITS SACRED HILLS. LOOK UP THERE! THOSE ARE THE SUMMER PALACES OF THE LAST RULERS OF THE ISLAND.

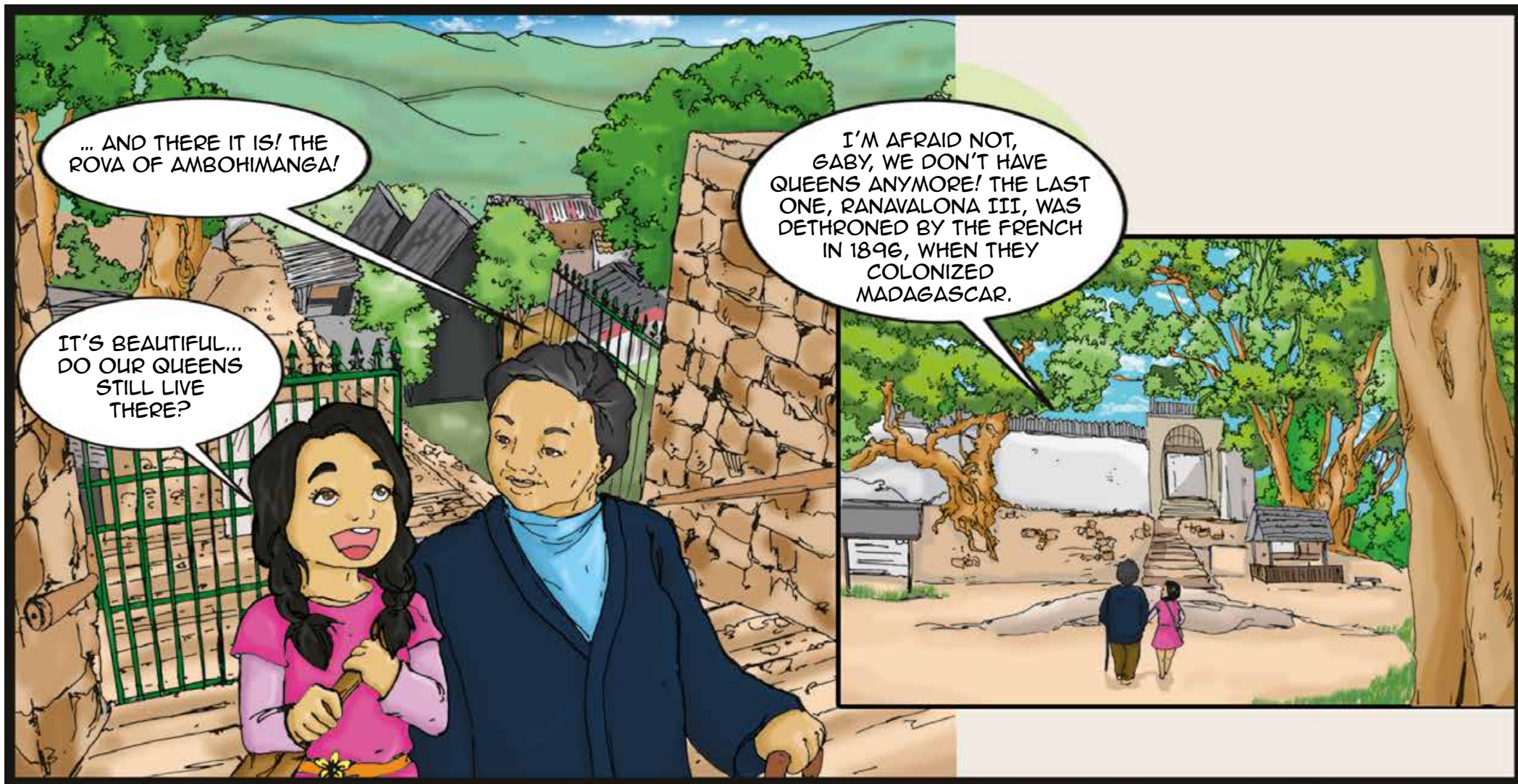
SO IS THIS WHERE THE GREAT KING ANDRIANAMPOINIMERINA LIVED?

YES, AMBOHIMANGA IS A SACRED PLACE, ONE OF THE CRADLES OF THE KINGDOM OF IMERINA...





...LATER ON, THE KINGS AND QUEENS RESIDED IN THEIR PALACE IN ANTANANARIVO, BUT THEY REGULARLY STAYED HERE, IN AMBOHIMANGA, TO RESTORE THEMSELVES IN THE SUMMER PALACES AND TO SPEND TIME IN PRAYER AND REFLECTION AT THE TOMBS OF THEIR ANCESTORS.



... AND THERE IT IS! THE ROVA OF AMBOHIMANGA!

IT'S BEAUTIFUL... DO OUR QUEENS STILL LIVE THERE?

I'M AFRAID NOT, GABY, WE DON'T HAVE QUEENS ANYMORE! THE LAST ONE, RANAVALONA III, WAS DETHRONED BY THE FRENCH IN 1896, WHEN THEY COLONIZED MADAGASCAR.



AFTER OUR QUEEN WAS DEPOSED, TIMES WERE HARD FOR THE MALAGASY PEOPLE.

DID IT ALL HAPPEN A LONG TIME AGO, GISÈLE? WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE GIRL?

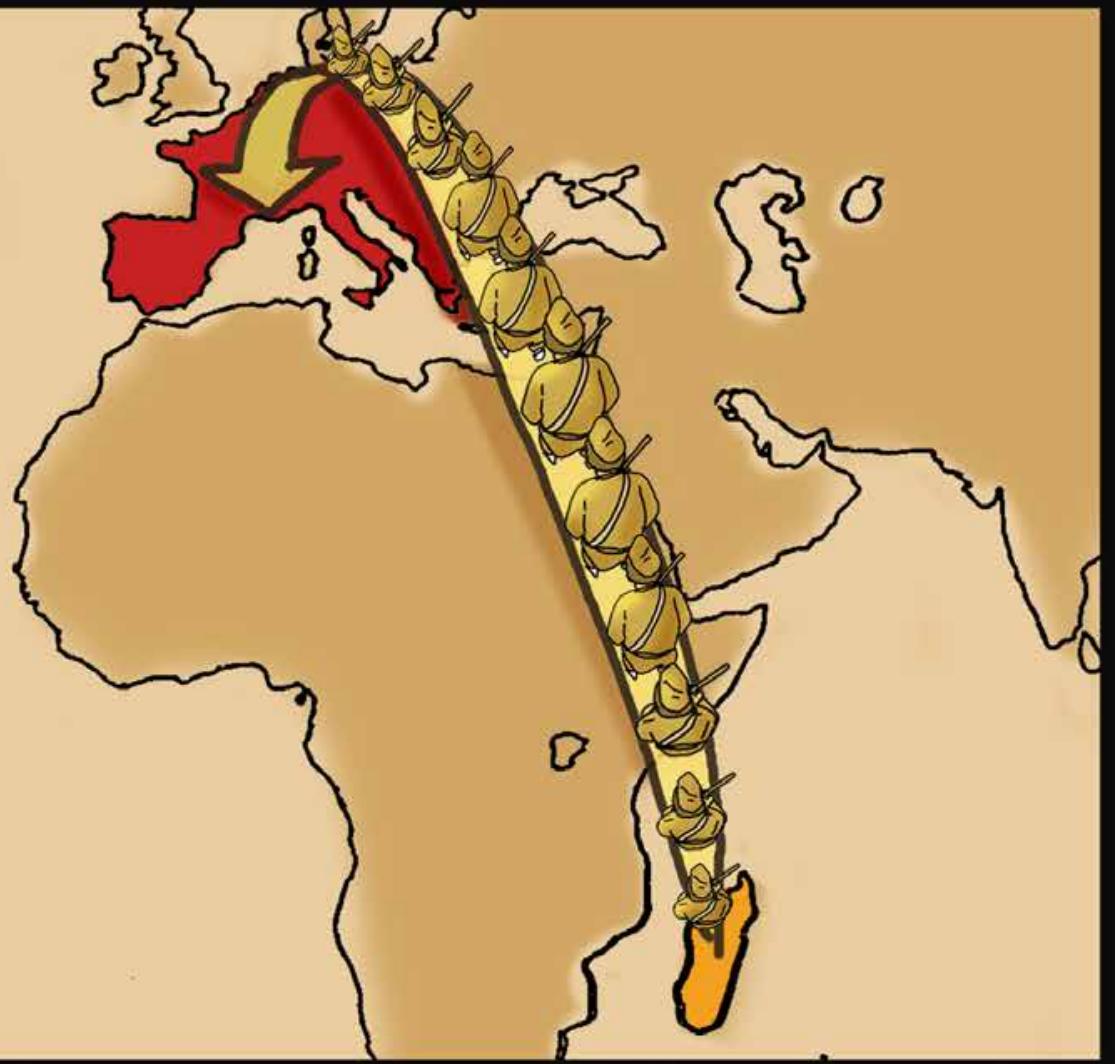


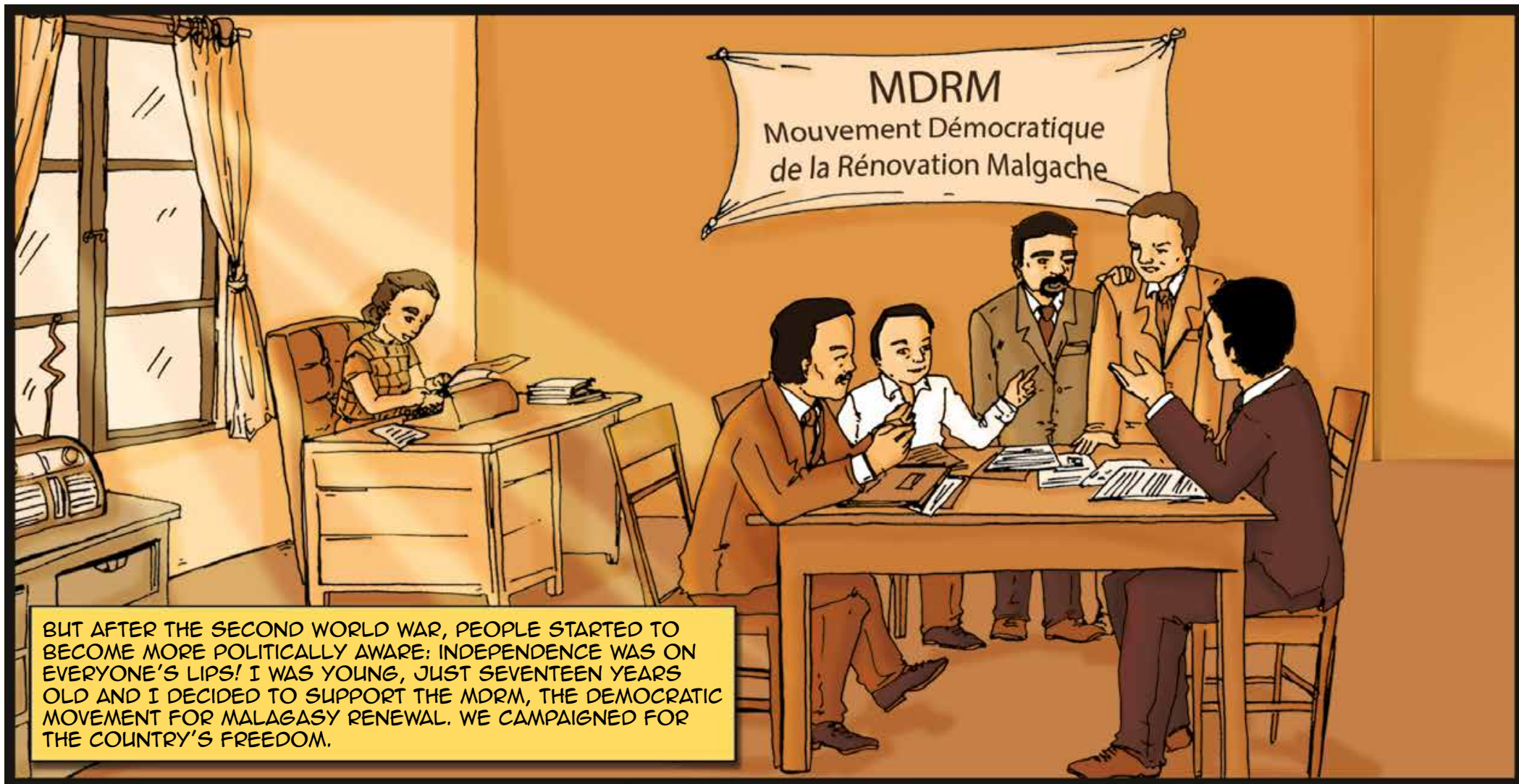
YES. WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, MADAGASCAR WAS A FRENCH COLONY, TOTALLY DOMINATED AND DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM. THE PEOPLE SUFFERED PHYSICAL ABUSE, HUMILIATION AND COLONIAL DOMINATION...





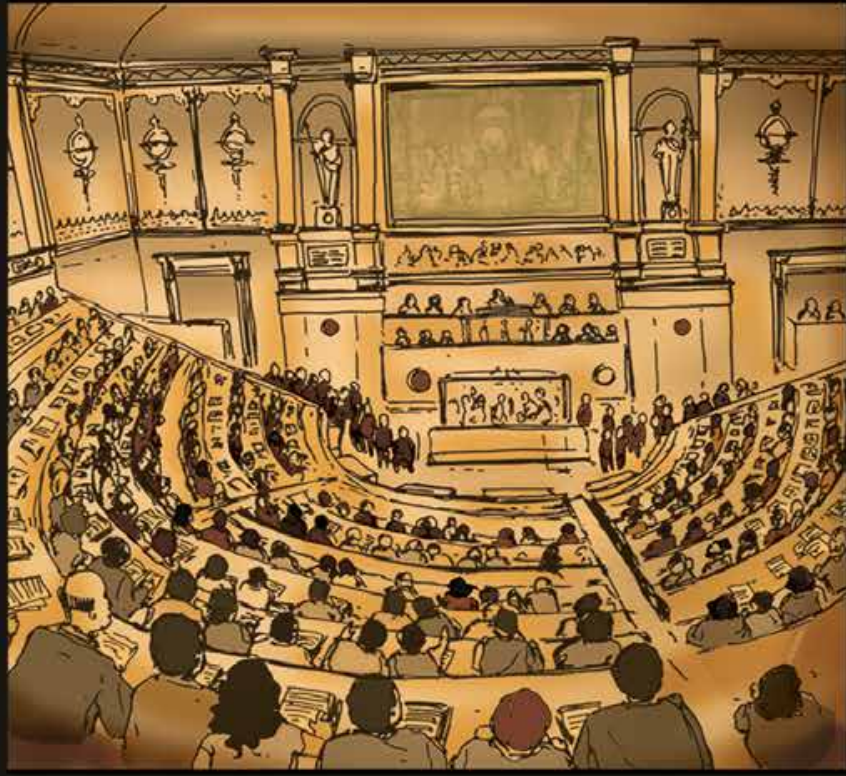
...AND THEN THE TWO WORLD WARS, IN WHICH THOUSANDS OF MALAGASY SOLDIERS WERE CALLED UP TO SERVE IN THE FRENCH ARMY AGAINST THE GERMANS...





BUT AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, PEOPLE STARTED TO BECOME MORE POLITICALLY AWARE: INDEPENDENCE WAS ON EVERYONE'S LIPS! I WAS YOUNG, JUST SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD AND I DECIDED TO SUPPORT THE MDRM, THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR MALAGASY RENEWAL. WE CAMPAIGNED FOR THE COUNTRY'S FREEDOM.

IN 1946, THE MDRM PUT UP CANDIDATES FOR THE FRENCH GENERAL ELECTION AND THEY WERE ELECTED. WE WERE OVERJOYED! THREE MALAGASY INTELLECTUALS SAT IN THE FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: RAVOAHANGY AND RASETA, WHO BOTH HAD DOCTORATES, AND THE WRITER RABEMANANJARA.

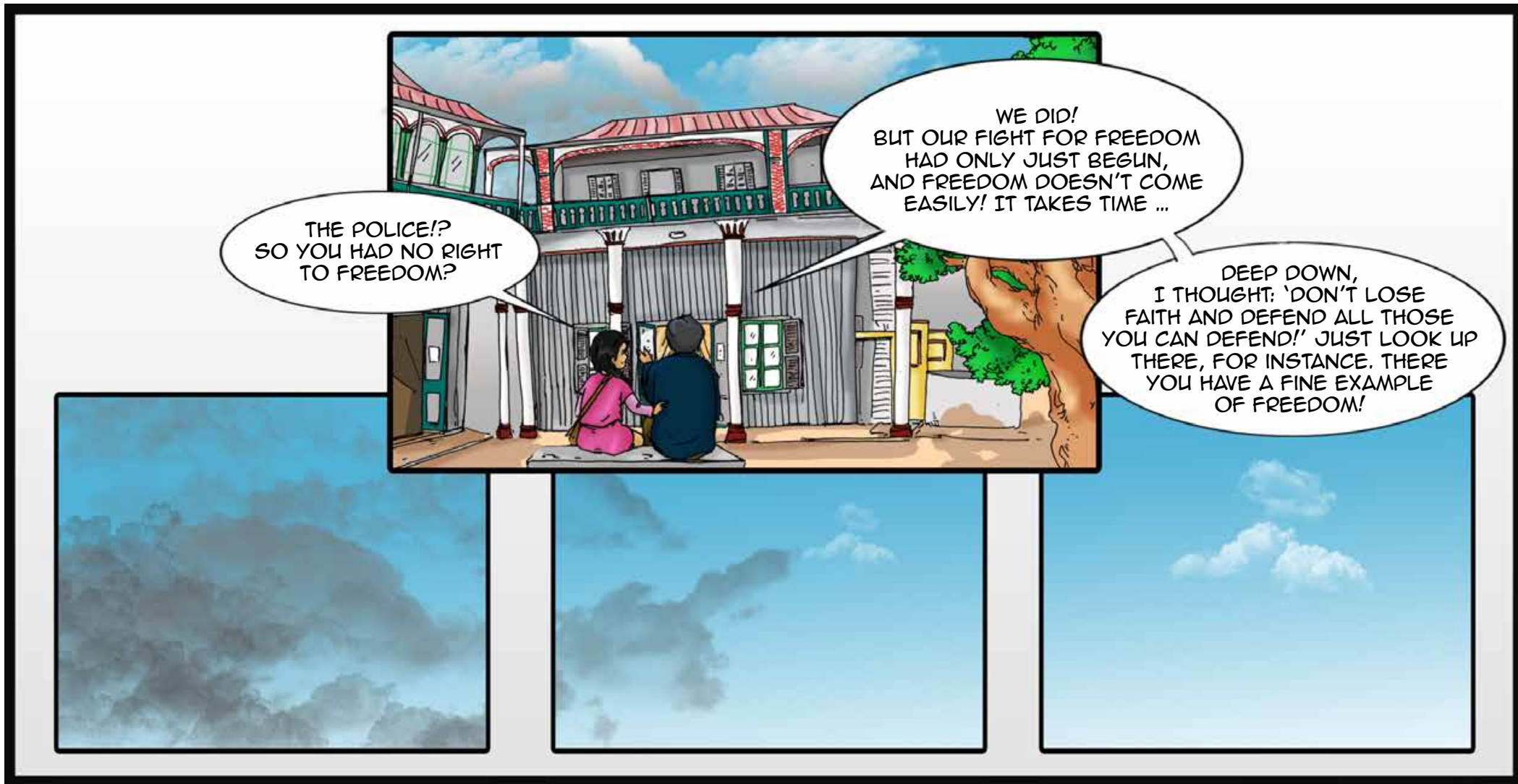


SADLY, IT ONLY TOOK THE SLIGHTEST INCIDENT FOR THE MDRM TO BE ACCUSED AND HARSHLY REPPRESSED BY THE COLONISTS. SOME OF MY OWN FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS WERE IMPRISONED.

MDRM
Mouvement Démocratique
de la Rénovation Malgache

HERE IS A NEWS FLASH! MEMBERS OF THE MDMR WERE TAKEN FROM THEIR HOMES FOR QUESTIONING BY THE POLICE AT SIX O'CLOCK THIS MORNING. THEY ARE NOW IN PRISON FOR PUBLIC ORDER OFFENCES!

I WAS UNDER POLICE SURVEILLANCE MYSELF.



THE POLICE!?
SO YOU HAD NO RIGHT
TO FREEDOM?

WE DID!
BUT OUR FIGHT FOR FREEDOM
HAD ONLY JUST BEGUN,
AND FREEDOM DOESN'T COME
EASILY! IT TAKES TIME ...

DEEP DOWN,
I THOUGHT: 'DON'T LOSE
FAITH AND DEFEND ALL THOSE
YOU CAN DEFEND!' JUST LOOK UP
THERE, FOR INSTANCE. THERE
YOU HAVE A FINE EXAMPLE
OF FREEDOM!



UNFORTUNATELY,
WE DIDN'T KNOW JUST HOW
BLOODY AND HOW LONG THE ROAD
WOULD BE. IN 1947, THE SITUATION
WAS BECOMING INTOLERABLE. THE
COLONISTS COULD NO LONGER
CONTAIN THE PEASANTS'
ANGER AND THERE WAS
AN UPRISING ...



... AT MIDNIGHT ON 29 MARCH 1947, HUNDREDS OF MALAGASY INSURGENTS, ARMED WITH GUNS AND MACHETES, ATTACKED COLONIAL MILITARY CAMPS AND BUILDINGS. THE ATTACKS BEGAN IN THE EAST OF MADAGASCAR AND SPREAD TO VIRTUALLY THE WHOLE ISLAND...



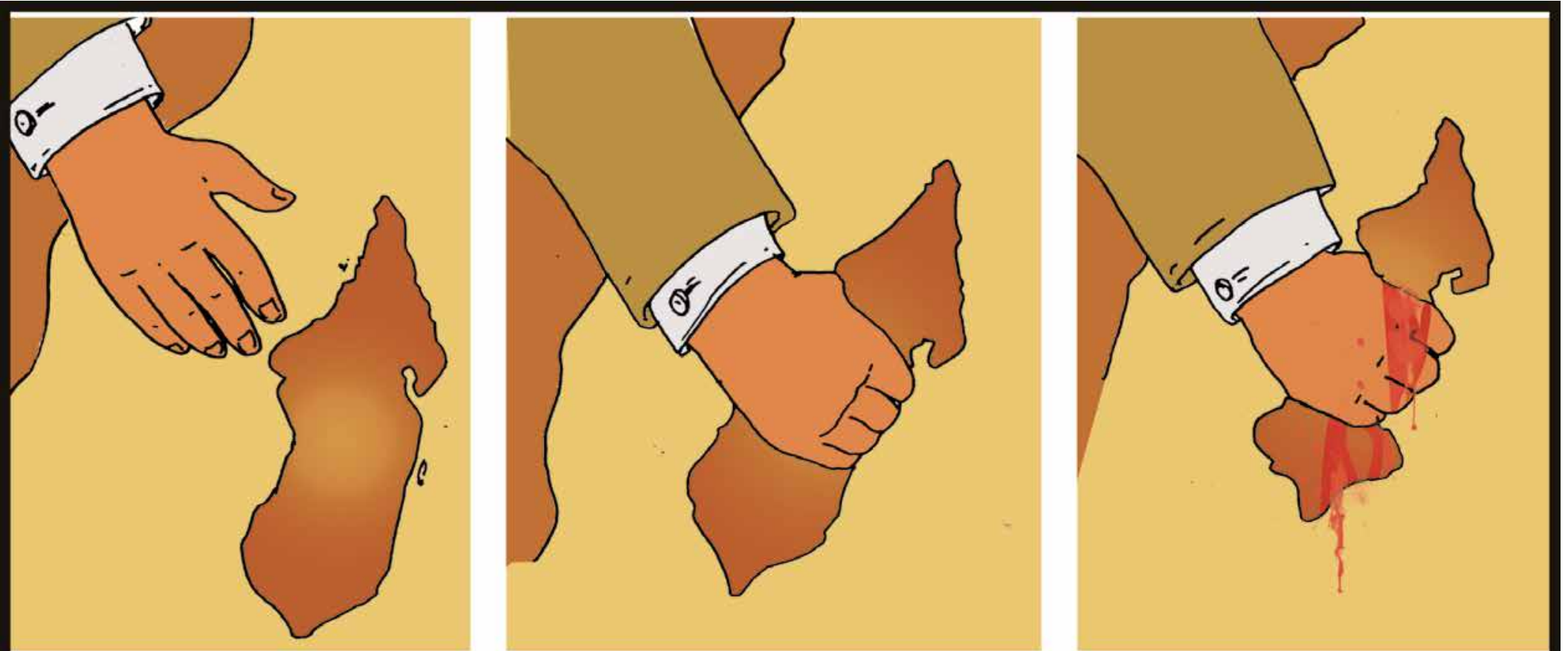


RADIO-TANA,
THIS IS RADIO-TANA! THE MDRM,
WHICH WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR LAST
NIGHT'S EVENTS, HAS JUST BEEN
DISSOLVED! NEWS HAS JUST COME
THROUGH THAT THE PARTY MEMBERS
AND THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
RAVOAHANGY AND RABEMANANJARA
HAVE BEEN ARRESTED
AND IMPRISONED.

... THE COLONIAL AUTHORITIES USED THIS INCIDENT
TO ACCUSE THE MDRM OF PLOTTING THE REBELLION.
ACTUALLY, THE MDRM WAS ONLY EXPRESSING THE
WILL OF THE PEOPLE TO LIVE FREELY.

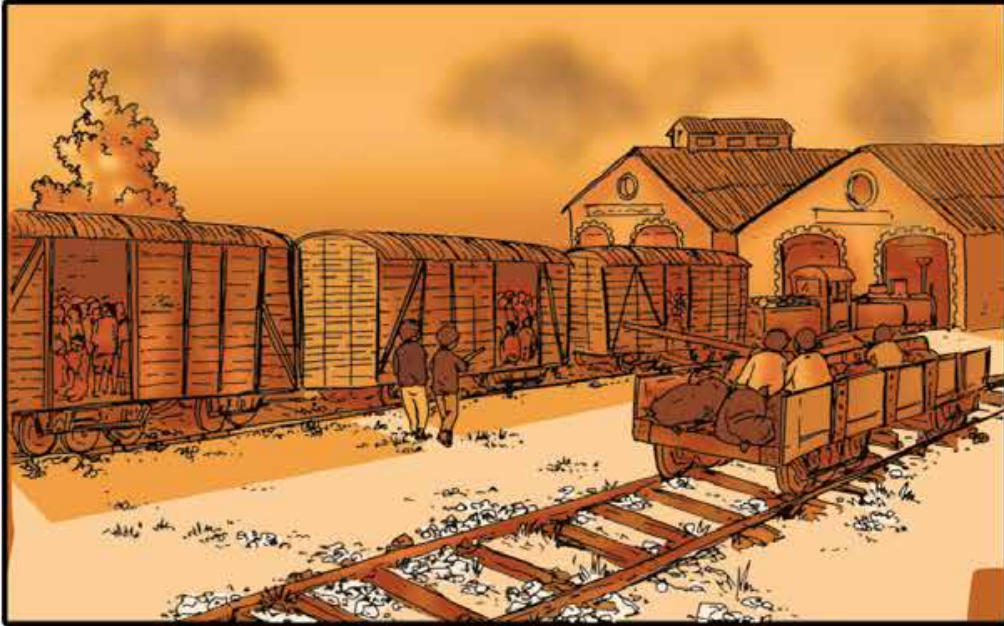


HOW DARE THEY! OUR
PARTY STANDS FOR PEACE
AND FREEDOM!



THE REPRESSION WAS TERRIBLE. IN AUGUST 1947, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT SENT REINFORCEMENTS TO MADAGASCAR TO SUPPRESS THE MALAGASY UPRISING BY FORCE: SOLDIERS, PLANES AND ARMOURD VEHICLES ARRIVED ON THE ISLAND. THE COLONIAL FORCES BRUTALLY ATTACKED CIVILIANS. MORE THAN 89,000 MALAGASY WERE KILLED DURING THIS REPRESSION IN 1947.

THERE WAS THE TERRIBLE MORAMANGA CARRIAGE INCIDENT, FOR EXAMPLE ...



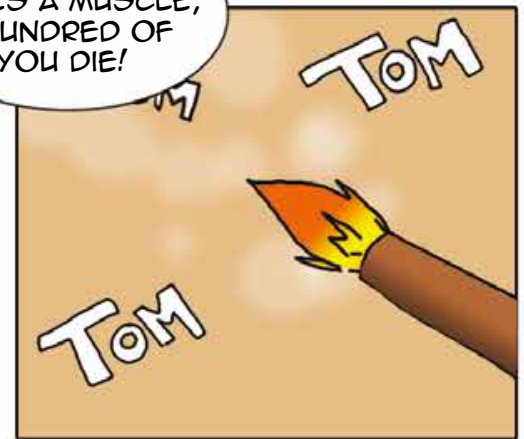
ALTHOUGH I AM DEEPLY ATTACHED TO FRANCE, I WAS HORRIFIED THAT THE COUNTRY SHOULD BE REPRESENTED IN MADAGASCAR BY SUCH CRUEL AND CONTEMPTUOUS SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS: ARBITRARY ARRESTS, MASSACRES, SUMMARY EXECUTIONS, TORTURE, DEATH SENTENCES...



IF ANYONE MOVES A MUSCLE, A HUNDRED OF YOU DIE!



FIRE!



THERE WAS SO MUCH TO BE DONE: RESISTING, CARING FOR THE WOUNDED, HELPING THE VICTIMS AND THE VICTIMS' FAMILIES. SO WE GOT OURSELVES ORGANIZED. IN 1950, ALONG WITH OTHER MDRM MEMBERS, I SET UP THE MADAGASCAR SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE OR FIFANAMPIANA MALAGASY (FIFA) IN SUPPORT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE VICTIMS OF REPRESSION.



DON'T GIVE UP!
WE ARE HELPING
YOUR FAMILIES AND
ARE DOING ALL WE
CAN TO GET YOU
OUT OF HERE.



TELL MY WIFE
I'M ALL RIGHT!



GIVE MY
CHILDREN THIS
MESSAGE!



AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, GISOU? DID THEY LEAVE YOU ALONE?

UNFORTUNATELY NOT, GABY. THE COLONIAL AUTHORITIES TOOK ME TO COURT FOR WRITING NEWSPAPER ARTICLES TO GET POLITICAL PRISONERS RELEASED FROM JAIL. IN SPITE OF THE OPPRESSION, WE WENT ON CAMPAIGNING FOR JUSTICE AND FREEDOM.

LOOK UP THERE, GISOU!





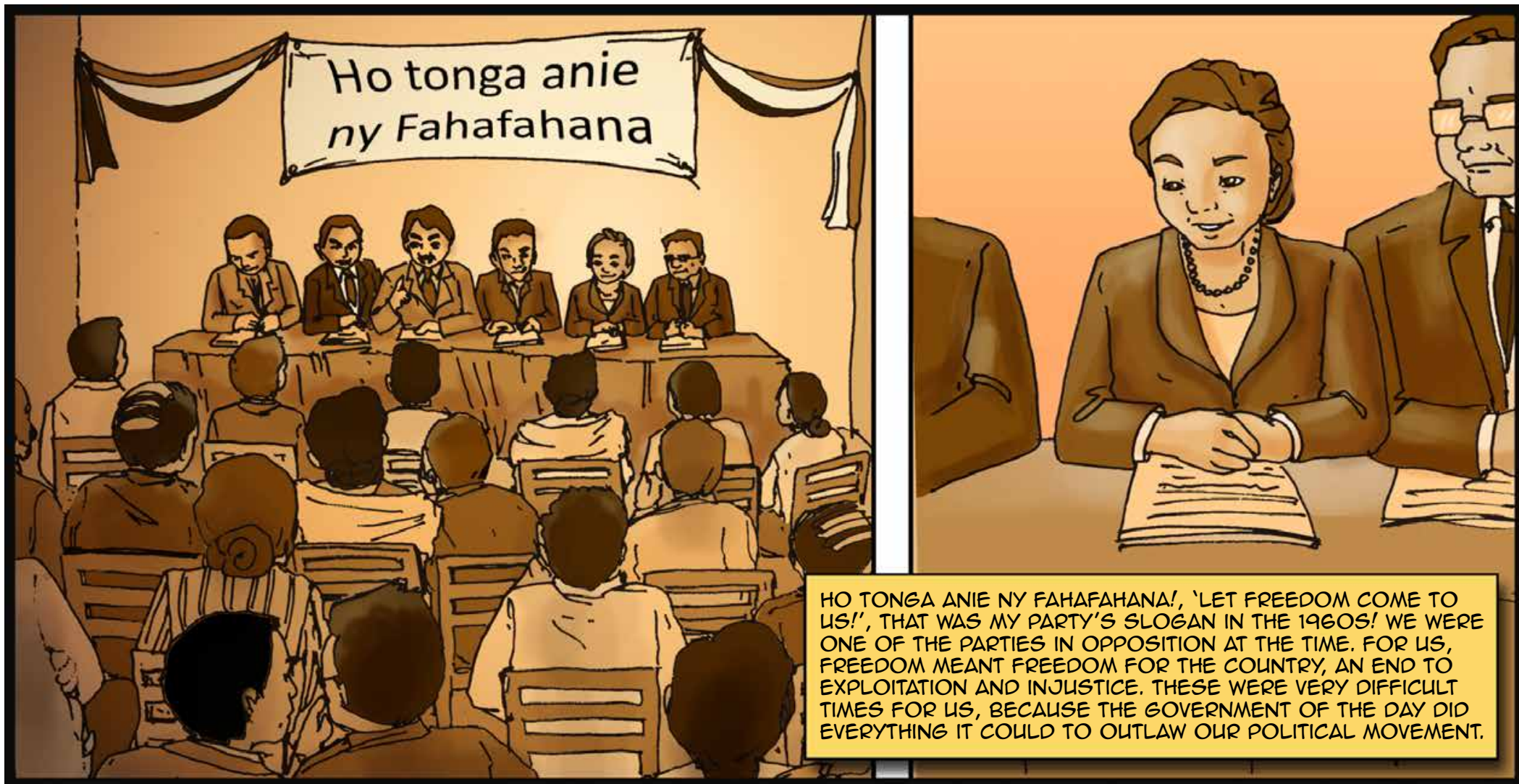
COME ON, GISÈLE!
I WANT TO CLIMB UP TO
THE TOP, TO THE QUEEN'S
PALACE! FROM THERE,
WE'LL BE ABLE TO SEE
THE CLOUDS
BETTER!

STEADY ON,
SWEETHEART,
YOU'RE WALKING
TOO FAST, I CAN'T
KEEP UP WITH YOU!



GISOU! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MY MADAGASCAR CLOUD?

IT'S GONE, DARLING! AS QUICKLY AS IT CAME ... JUST LIKE OUR HOPES FOR FREEDOM IN 1960. IT WAS IN THAT YEAR THAT WE FINALLY GAINED OUR INDEPENDENCE, BY A REFERENDUM. AT LEAST, WE THOUGHT WE HAD, BUT, IN FACT, FRANCE CONTINUED TO PULL THE STRINGS. OUR CULTURE, WHICH HAD SUFFERED SUCH NEGLECT DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD, WAS STILL A MINOR CONCERN... AND YET THERE WAS SO MUCH TO BE DONE... SO WE WENT ON FIGHTING, WITH THE SAME DETERMINATION AS BEFORE!



Ho tonga anie
ny Fahafahana

HO TONGA ANIE NY FAHAFAHANA!, 'LET FREEDOM COME TO US!', THAT WAS MY PARTY'S SLOGAN IN THE 1960S! WE WERE ONE OF THE PARTIES IN OPPOSITION AT THE TIME. FOR US, FREEDOM MEANT FREEDOM FOR THE COUNTRY, AN END TO EXPLOITATION AND INJUSTICE. THESE WERE VERY DIFFICULT TIMES FOR US, BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DAY DID EVERYTHING IT COULD TO OUTLAW OUR POLITICAL MOVEMENT.

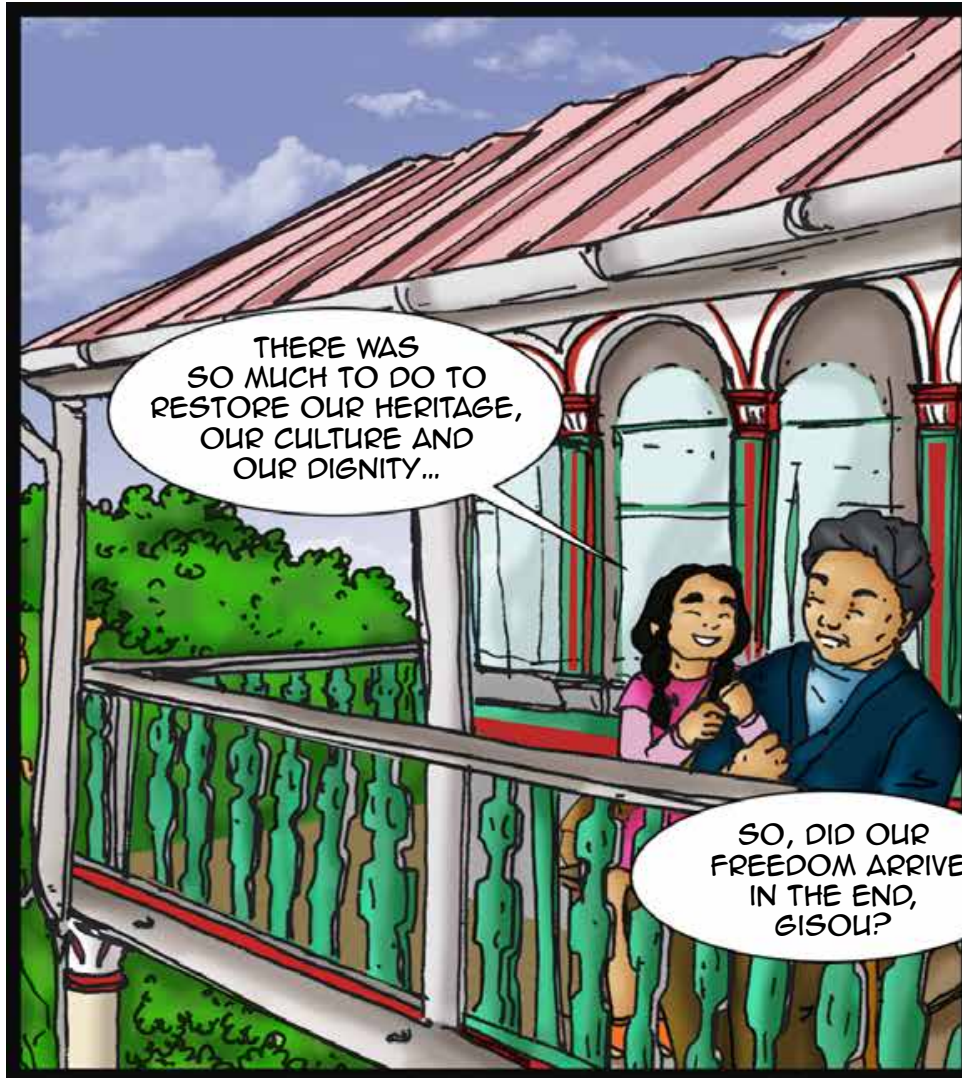
AFTER YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING, OUR WORK AND PERSEVERANCE WERE REWARDED: IN 1977, I WAS APPOINTED MINISTER OF CULTURE AND REVOLUTIONARY ART. I WAS CONVINCED THAT, FOR THE PEOPLE TO FULLY REGAIN THEIR DIGNITY, MORE THAN ANYTHING, THEIR IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE HAD TO BE RESTORED.

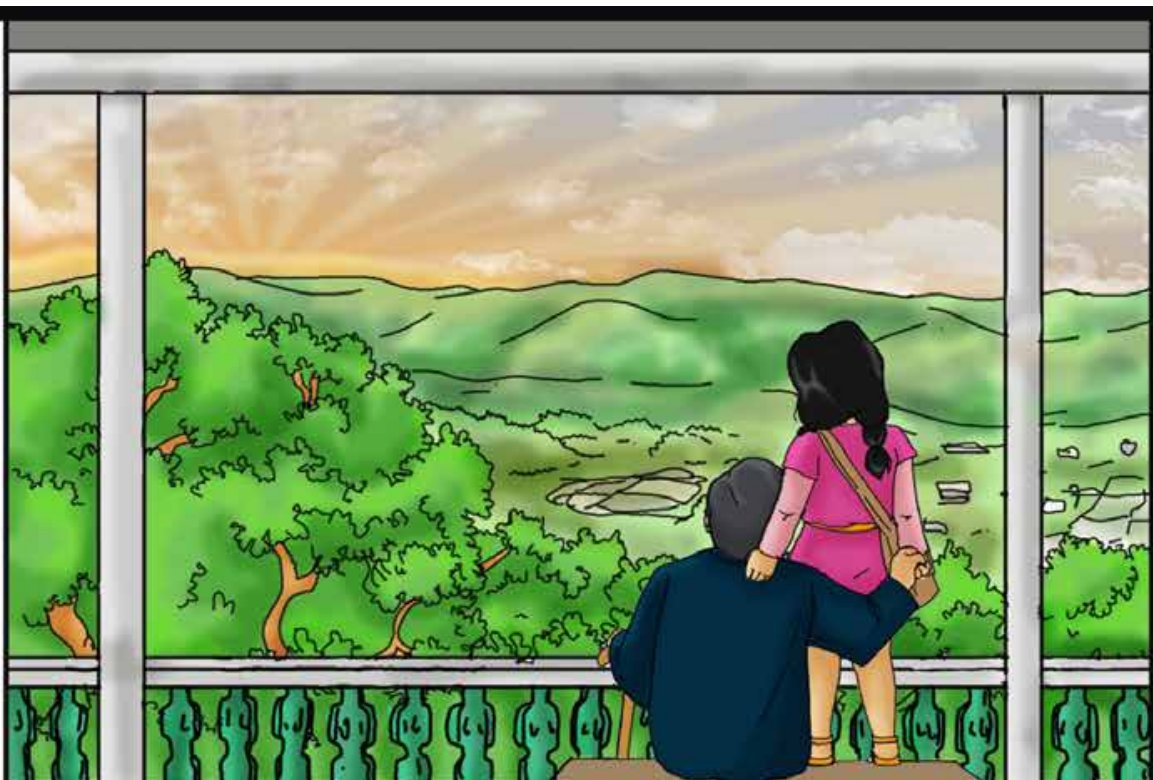












A CELEBRATED MALAGASY WOMAN POLITICIAN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, GISÈLE RABESAHALA (1929-2011) DEVOTED HER LIFE TO HER COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE FREEDOM OF PEOPLES. THE FIRST MALAGASY WOMAN TO BE AN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE (1956) AND A POLITICAL PARTY LEADER (1958), AND TO BE APPOINTED MINISTER (1977), SHE IS REGARDED AS A PIONEER IN MALAGASY POLITICS.



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Gisèle Rabesahala

As a celebrated Malagasy woman politician of the twentieth century, Gisèle Rabesahala (1929-2011) devoted her life to her country's independence, human rights and the freedom of peoples. The first Malagasy woman to be elected as a municipal councillor (1956) and political party leader (1958), and to be appointed minister (1977), she is regarded as a pioneer in Malagasy politics.

Women in African History

Through various pedagogical resources and the use of Information and Communication technologies (ICTs), UNESCO seeks to highlight the legacy of a selection of key women figures of African history and its diaspora. This project demonstrates that African women have always distinguished themselves in the history of their continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), the defense of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti), and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

This list of 20 women represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

For additional resources, please visit the website www.unesco.org/womeninafrica

The UNESCO project *Women in African History* was realized with the financial contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria.



Republic of Bulgaria