The exhibition "Histoires du rugby *malagasy* 1900-2021" [Stories of Malagasy Rugby 1900-1921]: the story of an instrumentalised sports practice

The presentation begins with a teaser video of the exhibition's film (1.36 minutes).

This talk presents the exhibition on the history of Malagasy rugby, which is the result of an international collaboration that took place in late 2021 in Antananarivo, Madagascar. We will then revisit the particular role that this practice has played in the political history of Madagascar. First used by the French as military training for indigenous guards, rugby experienced a rapidly growing number of practitioners (clubs) and huge popular success. This sport became the emblem of the Malagasy nationalist struggle until their independence. Then, from the 1960s to the present day, even though practitioners of this sport were becoming increasingly poor, all leaders and political parties tried to use them during political crises.

1. Presentation of the exhibition (figures, background, future)

The aim of this exhibition is to explain Malagasy rugby as accurately as possible from its origins to the Makis and to appreciate its long history full of exploits and dramas. The exhibition allows visitors to discover a wide range of surprising documents, works, and objects. The choice of documents has been articulated around three axes: their historical, scientific or artistic interest, their uniqueness or the fact that they are unpublished, and the diversity of the sources — international and public archives (National Archive and Library of Madagascar, ANTA Agency, National Overseas Archives of Aix-en-Provence, National Library of France, INA…), works by photographers (Dany Be, Pierrot Men, Nantenaina Rakotondranivo, Franck Sanse…) and designers (Doda, Mek, Pov, Claude Serre, Michel Iturria). The exhibition consists of a set of vastly different objects and documents: photographs and press cartoons, works of art or archives, sound and audio-visual documents (films), posters, match tickets, books, newspapers, letters, balls, T-shirts, trophies (cups, medals), flags and pennants, etc. Places (stadiums), clubs and people (players, coaches, referee, and manager) are also presented to the public for a better understanding of the spirit of Malagasy rugby.

Part of zone 0 of the exhibition, September 2021, Antananarivo.

Summary in figures:

1 catalogue (180 pages); **2** locations: Espace Rarihasina (350 m2) and a public garden in Antananarivo (Madagascar); **3** months (September-November 2021); **9** works: 5 drawings, 2 watercolours and 2 installations; **10** audio-visual documents: including 1 sound film made for the exhibition (43 minutes) displayed on a giant screen, reports (INA, TVM, etc.) and 2 films projected with headphones; **33** explanatory panels (120 × 160) showing the exhibition itinerary; **50** objects: 10 balls (including balls made and used by children), 5 T-shirts, books, magazines, newspapers, banners, flags, a medal; **200** pictures; **8,500** visitors (not counting those in the public garden!).

Itinerary:
Zone 0: Introduction, presentation of the itinerary, definitions, chronology. Traditional physical activities and games/*lalao* in Madagascar: examples of dancing, combat sports (wrestling and boxing), zebu racing and bullfighting.
Zone 1: The colonial period (1896-1960), the introduction of gymnastics and athletic sports by the military and settlers.
Zone 2: Dark and red years for the Makis (1960-2021).
Zone 3: Ovalie girls in Madagascar - Women's sports in Madagascar: dance, tennis, and basketball (1970, champions of Africa) - Women's rugby (1993-2022).
Zone 4: audio-visual space devoted to Malagasy rugby and its audience.

Future:
- Tour of the exhibition in the 6 main cities of Madagascar through the French Alliances.
- Exhibition at the Hémispher, May-July 2022, and edition of the catalogue version in France.
- Exhibition at the National Overseas Archives, Aix-en-Provence, 2023.

2. Rugby in Madagascar: the history of a practice that became victim of its own popular success

The birth and development of athletic sports at the turn of the 19th century belong to a wide spectrum: the will to protect young people, as well as the new relationship between men and their bodies thanks to the progress of science, medicine, and hygiene. In a colonial setting, "sport is paradoxically presented both as an instrument of colonisation (an instrument of education, distinction, integration, assimilation, etc.) and as a starting point for decolonisation (a space for association, assembly, action, identity expression, etc.)".[1]

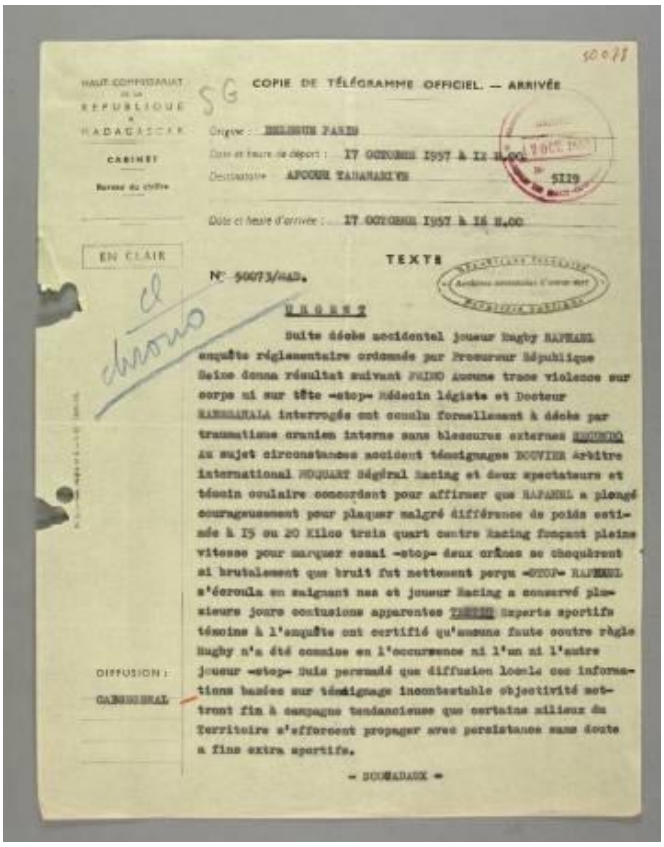
[1]Evelyne Combeau-Mari, *Colonial sport in Madagascar 1896-1960*, Paris, French Colonial Historical Society, 2009, 241 p.

First Malagasy rugby teams (Lieutenant Antoni's camp in Betongolo, Antananarivo), circa 1900. (Photo: FR ANOM 44PA156/6)

Less than ten years after the landing of French troops, the Malagasy were already playing rugby. This sport grew remarkably fast (founding of several clubs, spectators, press, etc.). The first Malagasy club, the SOI (Stade Olympique de l'*Imerina*), was founded in 1909, although in 1911 it became the SOE (Emyrne). Until 1957, rugby was everyone's favourite sport. It participated in the origin of nationalist struggles. The Malagasy people saw in the practice — or the spectacle — of rugby a space and a medium that allowed the expression of their bodies and their feelings, for the players as well as for the spectators, coaches, and journalists.

The Stade Olympique de l'Emyrne rugby team in 1912. (Photo: AGENCE ANTA SP2-N. 1201)

1957 marks the culmination of Malagasy rugby. It is the year of the famous tour of the "representative" team of Madagascar in France, where they played four games against Nice, Toulon, Toulouse de Languedoc and RCF (Racing Club de France) in Paris. In the field of sports, unfortunately, after some brilliant victories in the first three games, this glorious episode ended tragically in Paris. The Malagasy lost the match, but above all, they mourned the death of one of their players during the match: Raphaël Randriambahiny, known as Mbahiny. The player died after a tackle from Arnaud Marquesuzaa, who was going for a try. The scene was emotionally intense. A crowd approached the player's vigil with great pain: all the inhabitants of Tana, and beyond, gathered to pay tribute to this player of the Jeunesse Sportive Tananarivienne d'Ambondrona. Rugby has gone hand in hand with Malagasy nationalism, and this tragic tour will forever be an important symbol of the political significance of the sport.



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT DE LA REPUBLIQUE A MADAGASCAR
CABINET
Bureau du chiffre

SG COPIE DE TÉLÉGRAMME OFFICIEL. — ARRIVÉE

Origine : DELEGUE PARIS
Date et heure de départ : 17 OCTOBRE 1957 A 12 H.00
Destinataire : AFOUBE TANANARIVE
5129
Date et heure d'arrivée : 17 OCTOBRE 1957 A 16 H.00

EN CLAIR

TEXTE

N° 50073/HAD.

URGENT

Suite décès accidentel joueur Rugby RAPHAEL enquête réglementaire ordonnée par Procureur République Seine donna résultat suivant PREMO Aucune trace violence sur corps ni sur tête -stop- Médecin légiste et Docteur RAMBARALA interrogés ont conclu formellement à décès par traumatisme crânien interne sans blessures externes RAPHAEL au sujet circonstances accident témoignages DOUVIER Arbitre international MOQUART Général Racing et deux spectateurs et témoin oculaire concordent pour affirmer que RAPHAEL a plongé courageusement pour plaquer malgré différence de poids estimée à 15 ou 20 Kilos trois quart centre Racing fonçant pleine vitesse pour marquer essai -stop- deux crânes se choquèrent si brutalement que bruit fut nettement perçu -STOP- RAPHAEL s'écroula en saignant nez et joueur Racing a conservé plusieurs jours contusions apparentes TROIS Experts sportifs témoins à l'enquête ont certifié qu'aucune faute contre règle Rugby n'a été commise en l'occurrence ni l'un ni l'autre joueur -stop- Suis persuadé que diffusion locale ces informations basées sur témoignage incontestable objectivité mettront fin à campagne tendancieuse que certains milieux du Territoire s'efforcent propager avec persistance sans doute à fins extra sportifs.

- DOUMADAUX -

DIFFUSION :
GABINETRAL

A copy of the official telegram, received on 17.10.1957, following the death of Raphaël Randriambahiny, known as Mbahiny, produced during the match against RCF at the Jean Boin Stadium. (Photo: FR ANOM 2HCM 96)

After independence, the Malagasy rugby was followed by the Black Years and then the Red Years (1960-1990): the players came almost exclusively from the most disadvantaged social backgrounds, the results of the international matches were disappointing, the journalists were less interested in the practice and the politicians used the athletes. Between 1960 and 1970, the two main political parties, the PDS (Social Democratic Party) and its main opponent, the AKFM (Congress Party for the Independence of Madagascar), fought hard for control of rugby, some supporting rugby with 15 players and the others rugby with 13 players, until this sport was banned in 1970.

At the Malacam Stadium in Antanimena (Antananarivo), in the foreground, a group is falling apart; in the background, the spectators on the edge of the grass and on the roof of the stands watch the match between the JSTA (Maxime, Dezy, Jean Be, etc.) and the UASC, circa 1970. (Photo: DANY BE)

The acronym for *Tanora Tonga Saina*, TTS, means "young people with awareness". TTS (from the late 1970s to 1985) was born from the young Second Democratic Republic of Madagascar, then led by Didier Ratsiraka. The Ministry of Population launched a vocational rehabilitation programme (mainly through carpentry training) for former convicts and unemployed young people who, for the most part, were also rugby players. But the experience degenerated very quickly and transformed these young people into criminal militiamen of the revolutionary youth who sowed terror throughout the capital through violent extortions and robberies (deaths, kidnappings). In response, the people of Antananarivo started massively learning martial arts, especially kung fu. Between 1984 and 1985 there were deadly clashes between both factions, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and required the intervention of the army.

During the most recent political crises (2001-2002, 2008-2009), rugby players were also present alongside law enforcement or protesters...

A penalty, a moment of tension, the spectators and the players watch the ball between the posts during a match between the FTM and the USA at the Makis Stadium in Antananarivo, 2016. (Photo: NANTENAIANA RAKOTONDRANIVO)