

Healing the pain through comedy

By Waakhe Simon Wudu

JUBA – South Sudan would seem like the hardest place in the world to get people to laugh.

The 12 million South Sudanese are, after all, dealing with such decidedly non-funny things as civil war, famine, flight, poverty, and the poisoning of their water by greed-blind oil companies, to name but a few of their plights.

One of these victims: Mading Ngor, whose childhood was spent fleeing the massacre that wiped out his village and killed his father, and then surviving the ensuing ten bitterly-hard years as a child refugee.

After getting the opportunity to go to high school and university in Canada, Mading Ngor returned to South Sudan, to report on the country for the prestigious BBC, Bloomberg, Huffington Post and other international media.

He then deployed his expertise in South Sudanese politics and life by becoming the - highly outspoken - host of Wake Up Juba, South Sudan's most hard-hitting and thus widely-listened morning radio show. Mading now has his own YouTube channel – the aptly entitled “Fixing South Sudan”, whose videos are put together by his Dolku Media Company.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KnW5bmxy2o>.

One of his remedies for fixing South Sudan would seem surprising, especially in view of his own harrowing childhood: comedy.

“We looked for the one thing that could build bridges across the deep divides that rack our country, and we came up with comedy,” says Mading.

And specifically, neighboring Kenya's Eric Omondi, whose international popularity recently earned him a star turn on Jimmy Fallon's Tonight Show.

Ngor recently staged and hosted a string of shows in Juba by Eric. They were attended by thousands, with their ranks apparently including top governmental officials. It was Eric's second such 'tour' of South Sudan.

In the photo on the following page: Eric Omondi (central) and his team upon arrival at Juba International airport from Kenya. He is flanked by Mading Ngor (left) dressed in a grey shirt. Photo by Dolku Media on May 10, 2018.



Healing hearts and remediating hate

Mading's objective: "If we can get people who are stuck in their religious and political strife to come together to laugh together, we can start putting the country back together. We can start healing broken hearts and finding cohesion," he says.

His views are shared by Peter Biar, who heads the South Sudan Young Leaders Forum, and who helped sponsored Eric's comedy shows.

"War has divided us. War has killed us. War has sometimes even made us hate our country itself. We need something to reweave our national fabric. One of those things could well be comedy," Peter says.

Doing by laughing

Deng Gai Gatluak agrees with Ngor and Peter. Deng was one of the many fans who attended the comedy shows.

“Just excellent. The event itself, and seeing people laughing alongside each other. At the shows, it occurred to me that this could be a way of bringing peace,” he adds.

“I think there should be lots more of these shows,” Deng states. “We hear a lot of talk these days about dialogue, and this is actually one of the best ways to get people communicating - ‘dialoguing’ - with each other,” he concludes.

Eric Omondi himself is a strong believer in comedy’s ability to unite, which he has repeatedly seen work in his native country of Kenya, itself riven by many differences, some incited by local politicians.

“Joy turns out to be the most powerful instrument of unity and togetherness,” Eric states. “And that’s because – as we all have seen in our families – we human beings are structured to forget our differences and troubles when we are happy.”

Eric was by no means the only comedian appearing at the recent shows. He shared the billing with such up-and-coming South Sudanese comedians as Rasta Commando and VIP (Very Idiotic Person”.

“And that was one of our main objectives in staging these shows: to kick start South Sudan’s comedy sector into being,” says Mading.



Waakhe Simon Wudu is a South Sudanese journalist who has been reporting for the last seven years on politics, business, gender issues, and entertainment in the country.