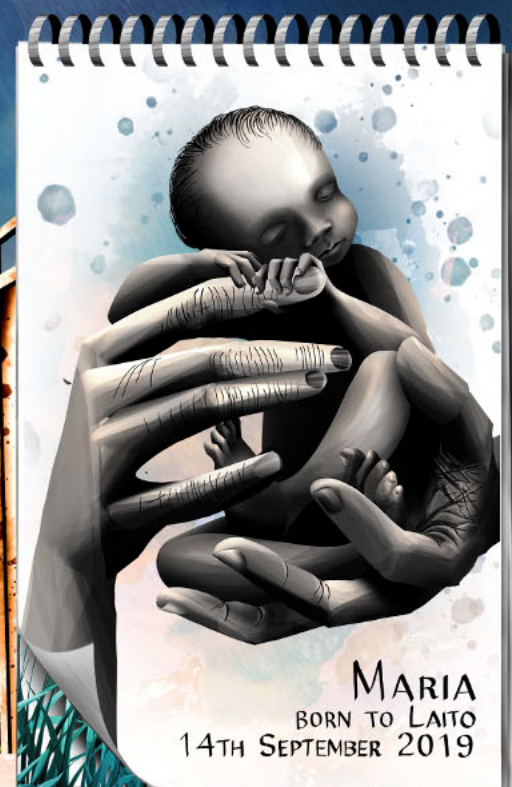
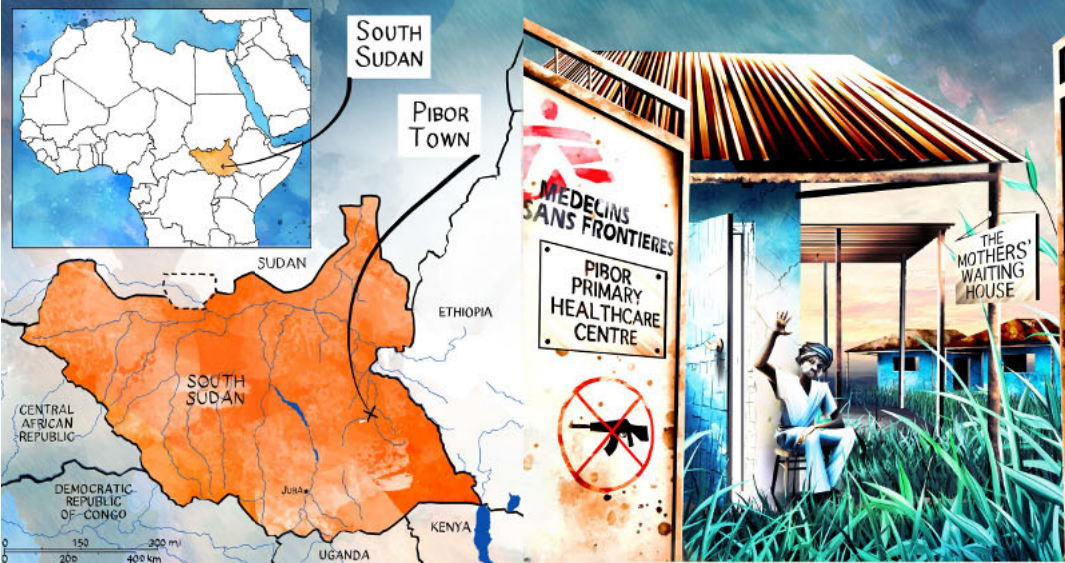


A NEVER-ENDING STORY IN SOUTH SUDAN

WRITTEN & DRAWN BY ELLA BARON
IN COLLABORATION WITH MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES



MARIA
BORN TO LAITO
14TH SEPTEMBER 2019

IN THE PIBOR REGION, SOME EXPECTANT MOTHERS TOWARDS THE END OF THEIR PREGNANCY LEAVE THEIR REMOTE HOMES AMONGST THE NOMADIC CATTLE HERDS TO SLEEP IN THE MOTHERS' WAITING HOUSE WHERE THEY ARE JUST METRES FROM MSF'S MATERNITY WARD. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE IN THE REGION IS SO LIMITED, THAT THIS IS ONE OF THE ONLY WAYS THEY CAN ENSURE THAT THEY'LL HAVE THE SUPPORT OF TRAINED MIDWIVES WHEN LABOUR BEGINS. MOST MOTHERS WHO TRAVEL HERE MUST WALK BAREFOOT THROUGH THE BUSH FOR DAYS.

IN MY CASE, IT WAS A PLANE, HELICOPTER, 4x4 & PAIR OF GUMBOOTS THAT CARRIED ME FROM MY HOME IN THE UK TO THE MOTHERS' WAITING HOUSE IN SEPTEMBER 2019

MANY OF THE WOMEN IN THE WAITING HOUSE HAVE HAD LITTLE INTERACTION WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGY. THEY MAY NEVER HAVE ENCOUNTERED FOREIGNERS & VIEW US & OUR CAMERAS WITH ANXIETY.



MSF INVITED ME & MY SKETCHPAD TO THE MOTHERS' WAITING HOUSE IN THE HOPE THAT WE'D BE MORE WELCOME...

BABY MARIA'S MOTHER LAITO & GRANDMOTHER CHACHA WERE CURIOUS TO SEE ME SKETCHING, & SOON HAPPY FOR ME TO DRAW THEM.

AS I SKETCHED, THEY TOLD ME THE STORY OF MARIA'S BIRTH...



IT WAS THE MIDWIFE WHO DELIVERED MARIA WHO TRANSLATED THE STORY OF HER BIRTH FOR ME. LOCAL TO PIBOR, SHE TRAINED WITH MSF TO BECOME A MIDWIFE.

HELLO! WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU, I SEE YOU'VE ALREADY MET LAITO & CHACHA



I'M MIDWIFE MARIA

THEY NAMED HER MARIA AFTER ME!

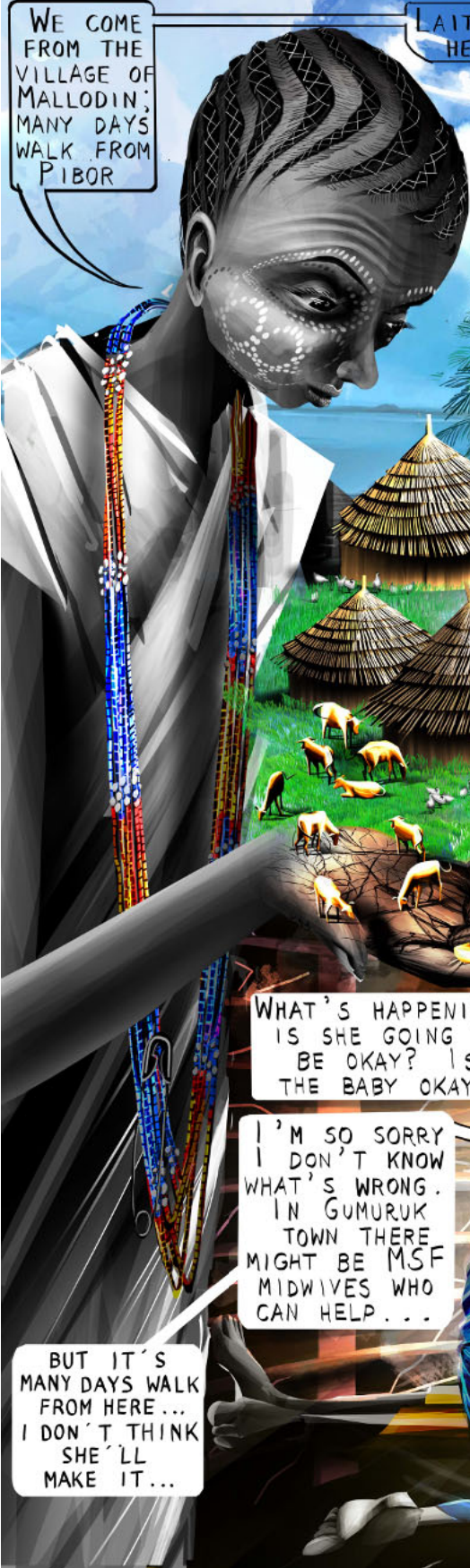


ISN'T THAT THE BABY'S NAME?

COME! SIT WITH US! LISTEN! I'LL TRANSLATE FOR YOU



WE COME FROM THE VILLAGE OF MALLODIN; MANY DAYS WALK FROM PIBOR



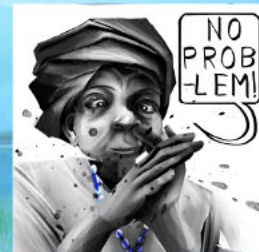
LAITO WAS PREGNANT WITH HER FIRST CHILD...

MARIA, I'M SORRY BUT THE SWATTING SOUND IS DISRUPTING MY RECORDING...

WHEN HER CONTRACTIONS BEGAN I CALLED OUR NEIGHBOUR WHO IS SKILLED WITH BIRTHS-



QUIETER?



NO PROBLEM!



SHE CAME TO OUR HOUSE

& FOR 3 DAYS WE TRIED TO HELP LAITO TO DELIVER

BUT STILL THE BABY WOULD NOT COME

WHAT'S HAPPENING? IS SHE GOING TO BE OKAY? IS THE BABY OKAY

I'M SO SORRY I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG. IN GUMURUK TOWN THERE MIGHT BE MSF MIDWIVES WHO CAN HELP...

BUT IT'S MANY DAYS WALK FROM HERE... I DON'T THINK SHE'LL MAKE IT...



LAITO IS STRONG- WE'LL GET THERE

"BEFORE

SUNRISE

WE STARTED WALKING
THE CONTRACTIONS
WERE SO BAD
THAT LAITO
COULDN'T WALK
ALONE SO I HAD TO
SUPPORT HER ALWAYS.
IT IS RAINY SEASON,
& THE PATH WAS FULL
OF WATER SO THAT
SOMETIMES WE
WERE WADING
UP TO OUR
WAIST



"WHEN DARKNESS
CAME, WE WERE STILL
WALKING & I WORRIED
THAT WE'D HAVE
TO SLEEP BY
THE PATH."

"BUT
THEN
WE
SPOTTED
A HOUSE."

"THEY WERE
STRANGERS TO
US-BUT WHEN THEY
SAW LAITO WAS PREGNANT
THEY WELCOMED US INTO THEIR HOME."



THE NEXT MORNING

BY NOW WE WERE VERY WEAK.
FOR DAYS WE'D HAD NO FOOD

SINCE THE CONTRACTIONS BEGAN
LAITO COULDN'T DRINK MUCH
WATER OTHERWISE THE BABY'S
HEAD WOULD HAVE GROWN SOFT

HERE SHE GOES AGAIN
WITH THESE SILLY IDEAS

OUR HOST
BLESSED OUR
JOURNEY

THEY BLESSED
US LIKE THIS

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE? TO BE HUNGRY LIKE THAT?

YOUR HEAD BECOMES SO **HEAVY**

LIKE THIS, EVERYTHING SPINS OUTWARDS

DOTS DANCE
IN YOUR EYES

THE
GROUND
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BUT WE
ARE NO
STRANGERS
TO HUNGER

I REMEMBER
HUNGER
WHEN
LAITO
WAS A
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WHEN LAITO FAINTED, WE'D STOP
TO REST IN THE SHADE OF A TREE

DESPITE LAITO'S WEAKNESS, I KNEW WE HAD TO KEEP WALKING

HOW WAS THE PATH?

NORMAL.

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

WELL...



CHILL!
THESE
ONES
DON'T
BITE!

"EVENTUALLY WE REACHED A RIVER TOO DEEP TO WALK.
I PAID TWO MEN TO HELP US CROSS.
THEY HAD NO BOAT - ONLY A PLASTIC CLOTH
THE MEN PLACED THE PLASTIC ON THE WATER & SWAM IT ACROSS-

WE ARE NOT ABLE TO SWIM-

ONLY THIS THIN SHEET
SUPPORTED US-

THERE WAS TOO MUCH WATER-

I THOUGHT THE
SHEET WOULD FOLD-
&
WE
WOULD
FALL-

THEN
THE
CROCODILES
WOULD
COME.

OR
WE'D
JUST
SINK
DEEPER
&
DEEPER
UNTIL

ALL THREE OF US DROWNED-

LAITO WAS SO AFRAID

No
I WASN'T!



MAYBE JUST
A BIT



IT TOOK US TWO DAYS TO WALK TO GUMURUK. BUT AT THE CLINIC-
THEY COULDN'T HELP US



I'M SO SORRY,
YOU HAVE TO
GO TO PIBOR
WHERE THEY
HAVE BETTER
FACILITIES.
IT'S POSSIBLE
SHE NEEDS A
C-SECTION

THE PATH'S FLOODED,
WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT.

I'LL MESSAGE MSF PIBOR
THEY'LL SEND A BOAT



ALL WE COULD DO
IS WAIT & HOPE



(PERHAPS THEY
WILL NOT COME

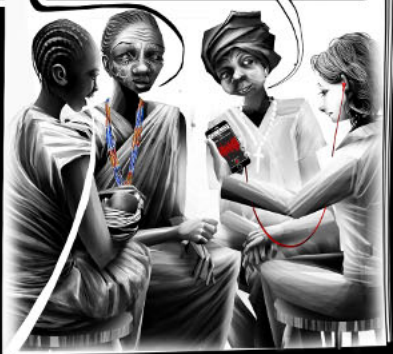
(PERHAPS THE BABY
IS ALREADY DEAD.

(PERHAPS I WILL
LOSE LAITO TOO

WE WAITED TWO DAYS
& THEN MARIA CAME!



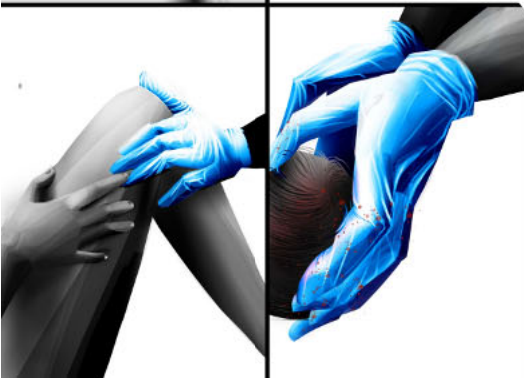
MSF SENT ME INCASE LAITO
DELIVERED ON THE JOURNEY.
THE RIVER WAS TOO THICK
WITH WEEDS-THE ONLY WAY
WAS BY HELICOPTER



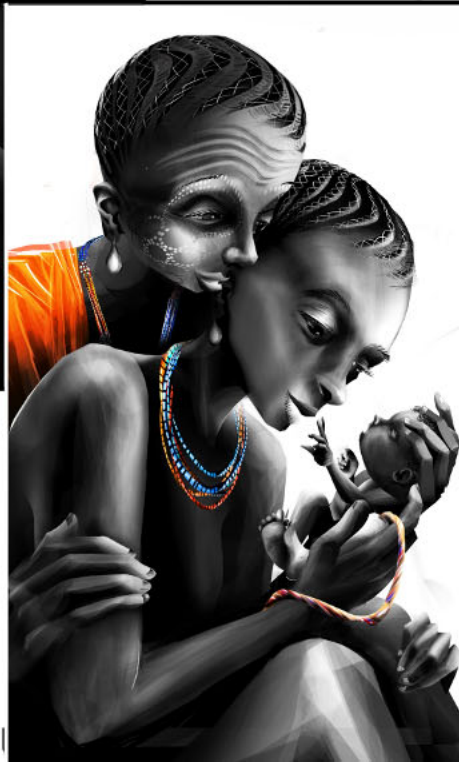
AFTER THE
HELICOPTER
ARRIVED, MANY
THINGS STARTED
TO HAPPEN
VERY FAST



THEN, WHEN
IT SEEMED THE
CONTRACTIONS
HAD LASTED
EIGHT SEASONS
INSTEAD OF
EIGHT DAYS



EVERYTHING
CAME TO
A STANDSTILL-
EXCEPT FOR
HER-& SHE
WAS THE ONLY
THING THAT
MATTERED.



ICK! ENOUGH WITH THE MUD!

AFTER 8 DAYS OF CONTRACTIONS THE ACTUAL BIRTH WASN'T SO BAD!

BUT NOW WE HAVE TO GO HOME



LAITO IS MY ELDEST, BUT I ALSO HAVE 6 OTHER CHILDREN. MY CO-WIFE IS LOOKING AFTER THEM (ALONG WITH HER OWN 4) BUT MY YOUNGEST CHILD WILL BE NEEDING MY MILK



I ALSO NEED TO GO HOME NOW. I'D LIKE YOU TO KEEP THESE

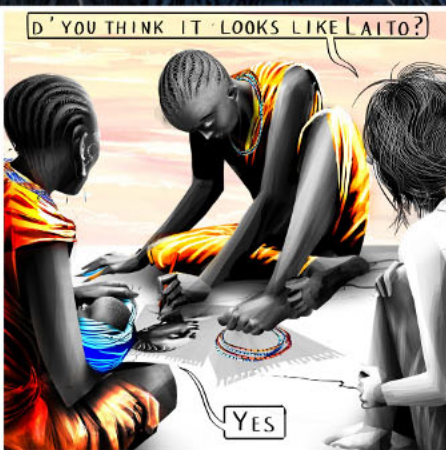


BUT LAITO'S BEADS ARE NOT THE RIGHT COLOURS



HERE! YOU DRAW IT... I DON'T KNOW HOW

I CAN DO IT!



D'YOU THINK IT LOOKS LIKE LAITO?

YES



& LIKE ME TOO. SHE IS MY DAUGHTER

ALL OF HER IS ME.



Hey Ella, all ok? has the rain stopped? will the heli be able to land to take you home? drink lots of water! love Mama xxx

WOW. THE WIFE IS BACK

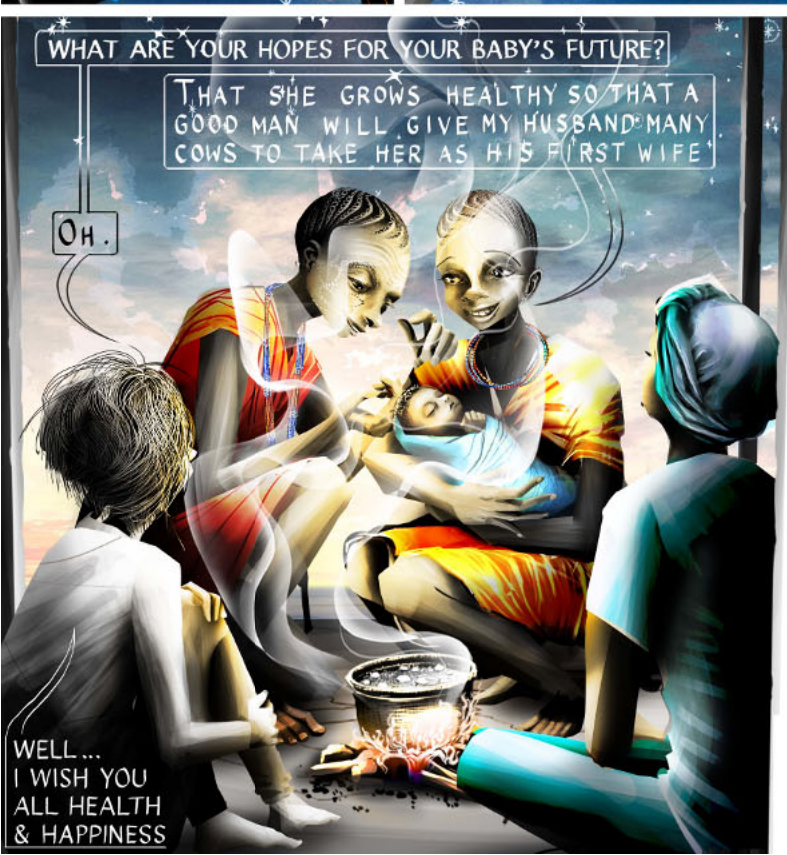
MY MUM USED TO SING TO ME WHEN I COULDN'T SLEEP



WE DO THIS TOO



I WILL SING YOU ONE OF OUR LULLABIES



WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR YOUR BABY'S FUTURE?

THAT SHE GROWS HEALTHY SO THAT A GOOD MAN WILL GIVE MY HUSBAND MANY COWS TO TAKE HER AS HIS FIRST WIFE

Oh.

WELL... I WISH YOU ALL HEALTH & HAPPINESS



YOU'LL ALWAYS BE WELCOME IN OUR VILLAGE JUST ASK FOR LAITO & CHACHA...

YOU'VE JUST READ
WHAT WAS
INTENDED AS
THE LAST
PAGE IN
THIS
STORY.

BUT AS I WAS
DRAWING IT, I
RECEIVED AN
MSF FIELD
UPDATE:

THE WORST FLOODS IN
LIVING MEMORY HAD
HIT PIBOR, SWEEPING
THROUGH MSF'S CLINIC
& TAKING MY ENDING
WITH THEM.

IN THE
AFTERMATH
OF MY FIELD VISIT,
I'D TRIED SO HARD TO
SHOW PIBOR AS I'D
REALLY SEEN IT,
BUT FOR WEEKS NOW
I'D BEEN DRAWING
A PLACE THAT
NO LONGER
EXISTED,
LISTENING
TO RECORDINGS
OF PEOPLE WHO,
PERHAPS GOD FORBID,
NO LONGER
LIVED.

MARIA
INFORMED US
THAT CHACHA, LAITO
& THEIR BABY SAFELY
RETURNED TO GUMURUK 3
DAYS BEFORE THE FLOODS.

BUT AFTER THAT...
WHO KNOWS.



PIBOR TOWN
WAS ENTIRELY SUBMERGED
LEAVING ALMOST EVERYONE
TO SEEK SHELTER ON THE ONLY
REMAINING ISLAND OF HIGH LAND. INCREASINGLY
CONGESTED, WITH ONLY ONE BOREHOLE & NO
LATRINES, LIVING CONDITIONS RAPIDLY DETERIORATED

WHEN THE FLOODS EVENTUALLY RECEDE, A
RESURGENCE OF INTERCOMMUNAL TENSIONS WOULD
SPARK A NEW WAVE OF VIOLENCE, FORCING LOCAL
COMMUNITIES TO FLEE THEIR HOMES AGAIN



REAL STORIES DON'T HAVE ENDINGS -

AT A CERTAIN POINT WE JUST STOP TELLING THEM.