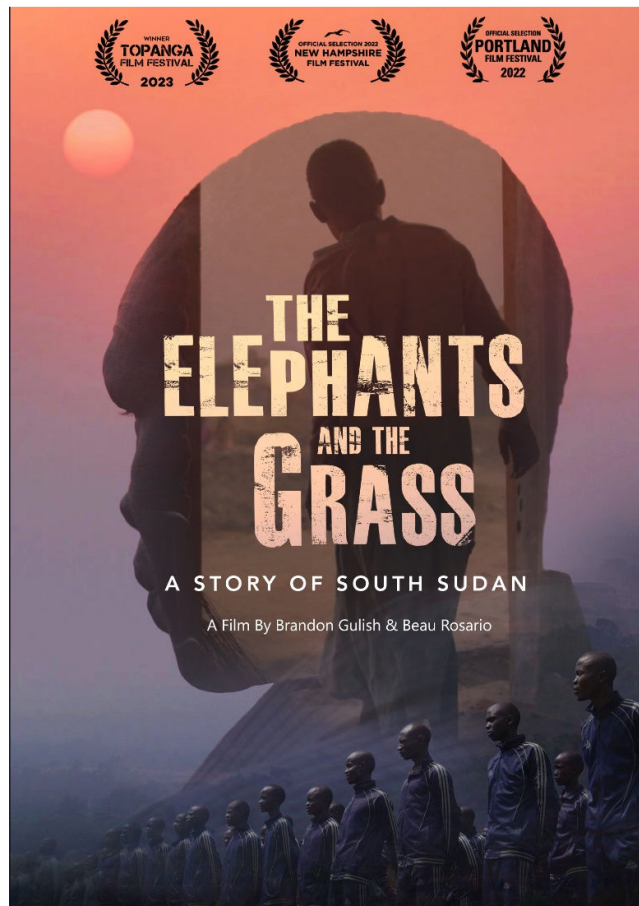


# THE ELEPHANTS AND THE GRASS



A FILM BY  
BRANDON GULISH & BEAU ROSARIO

103 mins / 2022 / English / U.S.



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## **FILM FESTIVALS & AWARDS**

Winner – Topanga Film Festival, US

Official Selection – New Hampshire Film Festival, US

Official Selection – Portland Film Festival, US

The Peloponnesus International Documentary Festival, Greece

“This film reveals how battles over the spoils of power have traumatized an entire population in South Sudan. It paints a portrait of not just South Sudan, but how traumatized peoples can be weaponized to serve those in power.” - John Prendergast, Co-Founder alongside George Clooney of The Sentry.

"A brutally intimate portrait of war and absolute epitome of the resilience of conflict survivors." - Quscondy Abdulshafi, Freedom House.

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“a nightmarish vision of the systemic failures of its would-be leaders amid a backdrop of equal parts monstrous cruelty and breathtaking courage.” - Piers Merchant, Arkansas Gazett

## **SYNOPSIS**

With only each other to depend on, 14-year-old Shamira and her mother flee tribal genocide. While they fight to escape South Sudan's violent civil war, experts and defectors challenge those in power. Global pressure mounts as these profiteers of war claim to seek peace. With unprecedented access, the film examines how politicians weaponize people's trauma to pillage nations. Considered the most corrupt place on earth, can the world's newest country overcome these issues and finally find peace?

## **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

South Sudan, the world's newest country, is marred by a violent history. The staggering rates of rape, assault, and murder among its citizens are alarming. Five years ago, we set out to understand why the world had seemingly forgotten South Sudan. What we found—a mother and daughter's story—transformed our perspective.

"The Elephants and the Grass" amplifies the voices of those most affected by the war, aiming to humanize South Sudan rather than sensationalize its violence. The film invites audiences to reflect on their own struggles with trauma, tribalism, and hatred.

We first heard Shamira's story while volunteering for an NGO that provided clean water in South Sudan. Stranded in Uganda as the conflict in Yei escalated, we documented local aid efforts in the Rhino refugee camp. During breaks, we listened to refugees' stories, particularly the women's, whose resilience deeply moved us. They deserved a platform to share their perspectives. To empower them without imposing our own agenda, we set up a microphone in a hut and left the room, allowing private storytelling. That night, Shamira's voice stood out, and her story changed us. Over the next five years, we supported Shamira and her mother, helping Shamira pursue her education. About a year later, we committed to making a feature-length documentary in Shamira's own words, with subtitles in her handwriting.

We knew we needed support to tell this story. We sought South Sudanese partners but often met with fear and reluctance due to the risk of government retribution. That's when we brought on Rwandan producers Andrew and Carley Bilindibigao. Andrew's experience of growing up amid Rwanda's civil war gave him a deep connection to our project. He introduced us to 100 Pixels, a Rwandan film crew that helped us approach this story with nuance and care. We also worked with other South Sudanese contributors, many of whom chose to remain anonymous.

Completing this film was challenging, but it was made possible by the contributions of many, especially our South Sudanese partners.

Brandon Gulish and Beau Rosario

## **DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES**

Brandon Gulish and Beau Rosario

Brandon Gulish and Beau Rosario are a dynamic filmmaking duo, blending their award-winning talents to create compelling stories that resonate globally. Brandon, an Emmy Award-winning director, and Beau, an acclaimed director and cinematographer, have combined their expertise to produce and direct projects in over 50 countries. Their work is known for its striking visuals, innovative storytelling, and a shared passion for capturing authentic and empathetic narratives.

Together, alongside Clint Rosario, they oversee Philamedia, a creative hub rooted in Philadelphia's rich cultural landscape. Under their leadership, Philamedia has become a respected collective, producing everything from independent films and documentaries to commercial projects.

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Directors	Brandon Gulish & Beau Rosario
Producers	Andrew Bilindabagabo, Carley Bilingdabagabo, Nico Giampietro, Brandon Gulish, Beau Rosario & Clint Rosario
Archival Producer	Emily Sorensen King
Cinematographer	Beau Rosario
Editor	Beau Rosario & Aidan Guynes
Composers	Brooke Blair & Will Blair