



THE KEEPSAKE

Directed by Adaeze Elechi

Release Year: 2024

Running Time: 32 min

Country of Production: United States

Language: Igbo (Nigeria) and English with English subtitles, Igbo closed captions available

Shooting Format: 1080P HD

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Film Sound: 16-bit, 48kHz

THE KEEPSAKE: twonewsreel.org/film.aspx?rec=1552

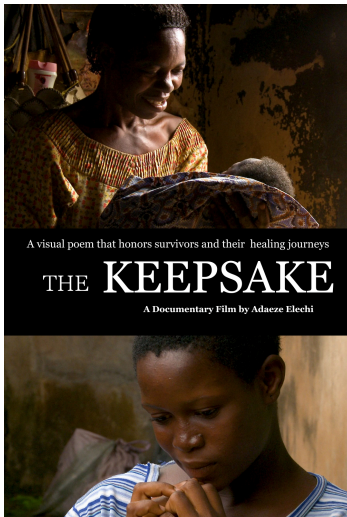
THE KEEPSAKE Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/908375367>

Adaeze Elechi is available for talks

Website: <https://www.aelechi.com/>

Press Kit: <https://twonewsreel.org/catalog/guides/keepsake-press-kit.pdf>

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THE KEEPSAKE

One sentence synopsis

When Ikechi's teenage daughter Amarachi returns home pregnant due to rape, the pair begins an emotional journey to heal and save their estranged relationship.

One paragraph synopsis

When Ikechi's 14-year-old daughter Amarachi returns to her home village from Lagos City, pregnant due to rape, the pair begins an emotional journey to heal from their traumas and save their estranged relationship. **THE KEEPSAKE** is a visual poem that honors and bears witness to survivors and their individual and collective healing journeys.

Two paragraph synopsis

After living with relatives in fast-paced Lagos City, Nigeria, 14-year-old Amarachi returns to her home village to live with her mother Ikechi for the first time in eight years. When Ikechi learns Amarachi is pregnant due to rape, the pair begins an emotional journey to heal from their individual and collective traumas, save what is left of their estranged relationship, and learn to live as a family. **THE KEEPSAKE** traces the transformations of a family of women and girls determined to possess and live their lives despite the trauma they endured. This complex story traces the transformations of a family of women and girls through the subtleties of their everyday interactions. It takes place against the backdrop of a quiet village in southeast Nigeria that is steeped in tradition and Christian morals – a world alive with color and dreams that flows in tandem with nature's gentle undulations.

In a country that neither protects girls nor delivers justice for the one-in-four girls who will be victims of sexual violence before the age of 18, the burdens of trauma, shame, healing, and continuity are left at the feet of the victims and their families. **THE KEEPSAKE** is a visual poem that honors and bears witness to the process and contours of healing in a country where justice, protection, therapy and rehabilitation of girls remain absent.

BIOGRAPHY OF DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER



Adaeze Elechi is an award-winning filmmaker and writer of Igbo heritage whose works are motivated both by a desire to explore healing, and to interrogate the ways our individual and collective histories shape our present and future understanding of ourselves. She distills extensive journalistic and historical research through Igbo cultural tenets to create poetic interpretations and expressions of the world around her with the hope and goal of etching pathways to justice, healing, and deeper self-knowledge for herself and others.

Her films have screened at film festivals across the U.S. and Canada. She is a Logan Nonfiction Fellowship alumna, and her collection of short stories and poetry *Harmattan* was published in 2019 by Bottlecap Press. The eponymous short story from this book was a finalist for the 47th New Millennium Award for Fiction. She has performed her poetry at various literary festivals including the New York City Poetry Festival. Her work has appeared in *Guernica Magazine*, *mindbodygreen*, and *stylelikeu*. She lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.



THE KEEPSAKE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In my home country Nigeria, much like the rest of the world, the rate of sexual abuse of girls is staggering. One in four Nigerian girls has been a victim of sexual violence before the age of 18, and less than 5 percent of these victims receive any form of support. Additionally, between 2015 and 2019, there were just 33 convictions in reported rape cases. Girls and women who openly accuse their male assailants also face the risk of legal and societal backlash, and retaliatory police investigations. These data reflect the reality for Nigerians, however, globally, women and girls continue to be the least protected demographic. Meanwhile, mired in a patriarchal society, the burdens of shame, social scorn, and trauma, and the work of healing, and continuity are left at the feet of the victims and their families to navigate on their own.

Amarachi, who is 14 years old, falls squarely into these devastating statistics.

I wanted to understand what happens to the vast majority of girls, the millions who have experienced rape or other sexual assault, and must go through life without governmental or therapeutic support or justice served. How do they cope? How do they carry out the remarkable act of putting one foot in front of the other and continuing through life? And how does this trauma affect them, their communities, and their families?

The Keepsake combines my vocation as a trained journalist and documentarian, with my artistic journey as a poet and storyteller. Additionally motivated by explorations of healing connected to my losses and traumas, creating this project and being able to witness moments of intimacy and vulnerability was a healing experience for me by virtue of journeying alongside this family as they carve their paths forward.

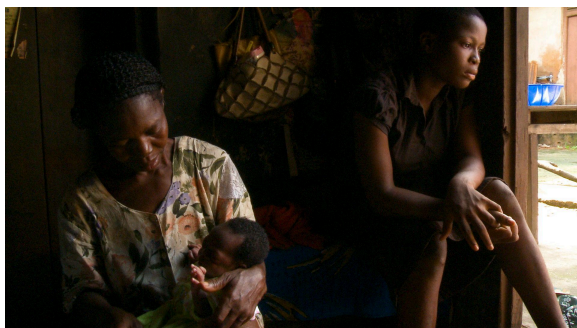
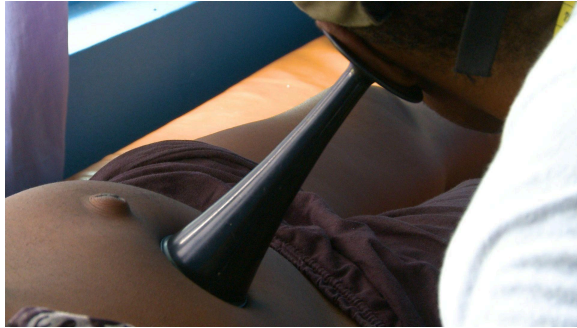
I decided to film in my maternal ancestral village in the scenic rolling plains of southeast Nigeria, which is a place of peace and safety for me, and a place where I felt trust could be built between me and the survivor I would be filming. My grandmother introduced me to Ikechi and her daughter Amarachi who was freshly back from Lagos and very pregnant. I explained what I was hoping to do with this project and they were on board.

I immersed myself in their day-to-day lives for the first year, give or take, of their reunion. As I observed this mother-daughter duo squeezed into their modest living space, it was impossible to miss the emotional canyon that yawned between them. They were like strangers, suffering separately, parallel to one another. It quickly became clear to me that I was witnessing the reality of life post-trauma, trying to rehabilitate themselves as best they could with what they had. What I also found was a shared strength that appeared in soft and subtle ways that were not always easily identifiable on the surface as strength: vulnerability, honesty, compromise, and a bravery and determination to keep living and keep going despite the violence, the losses, and grief they had experienced.

This greatly influenced how I filmed the project. Tonally, I wanted this film to feel as deeply intimate as a story whispered in one's ear. I wanted the quiet beauty of the village to come through, and the minimalistic, almost meditative rural lifestyle to be the serene backdrop against which the contrasting complexities of the family's life unfold. To achieve this contrast, I played with juxtaposing peaceful transitions of nature, architecture, and fauna (often shot on tripods), with the very intimate verité footage of the family passing through this turbulent time (often shot handheld). I used the repetition of daily routines (farming, tending to the baby, the turning seasons, etc.) as metronomic rhythm-keepers, while the family's life provided the melody of the story. The story is also told through the nuance of understated but striking body language. A lot of emotions between Amarachi, Ikechi, and the community are communicated silently. The pace of the film invites the audience to catch these unspoken volumes like another layer of language: a tiny flinch of a face, a subtle angling away of a body, or the quiet hint of a smile that means something that cannot be articulated with words.

Ultimately, I wanted to make a film about people who are part of a horrific statistic, but are more than the statistic and more than the trauma they endured. I wanted to make a film about mothers and daughters and show the power, depth, and beauty of the women and girls in the film. This is a complicated story in which there are no neat bows. Life is messy here, there are ups and downs where we don't always expect them. But what Ikechi and Amarachi showed simply by living, are the subtle, significant, and powerful ways survivors and their loved ones etch their paths towards healing and continuing their lives. Their assailants did not win: Amarachi pushes for the continuation of her education (something that can never be taken from her once she has it), while Ikechi searches for wholeness through motherhood. This film honors the remarkable ways survivors and their families, in defiance of the anguish they endured, say, "No, we will have our lives. We are not broken. What happened will not destroy us. We are still here, and we will keep going."

STILLS





PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director/Producer: Adaeze Elechi

Cinematographer: Adaeze Elechi

Editor: Adaeze Elechi

Composer: Dustin Ransom

Sound Mix: Onomatopoeia, Inc.

Text Graphics Designer: Craig Lowy

Production Assistants: Chidinma Onyeukwu; Adikwuru Onyeukwu

Igbo-to-English Translations: Linda Anyachebelu, Nnenna Elechi, Okechukwu Elechi, Chidimma Onyeukwu

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