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# THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN

A FILM BY  
**WILLEM TIMMERS**

CAMERA MYRTHE MUSTERMAN SOUND JAAP SUIJEN ADDITIONAL SOUND JORIS SCHEUTEN, LEELENE LINDENBAAR  
EDITOR JOS OBIESSEN NCE FILM COACH JOOST SEELEN SOUND DESIGN & MIX VINCENT SINGERETTI  
COMPOSER JUKO NURMELA COLORIST SANDER VAN WIJCK MEDIA MONKS LINE PRODUCER ANJET BLINDE  
PRODUCER ILJA KOK COMMISSIONING EDITOR OMROEP BRABANT LOUÏ DONDERS PRODUCED BY COPPER VIEWS  
FILM PRODUCTIONS IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH OMROEP BRABANT AS PART OF THE BRABANTSE BEAUTIES  
WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE DUTCH CULTURAL MEDIA FUND AND VSBFONDUS



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# THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN

A film by Willem Timmers

Documentary | 52 minutes | 2018 | Anamorphic (2.35)

Spoken languages: Dutch, French, English, Soninké, Wolof and Arabic  
Subtitles: English, French and Dutch

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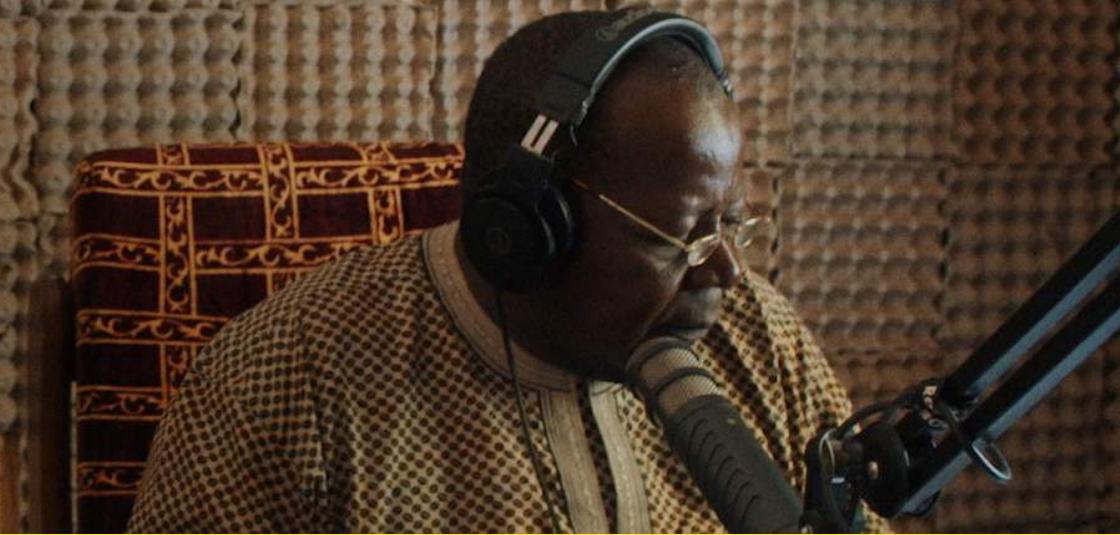
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Every person has the need to feel a sense of belonging. The place where you were born, where you live or where you feel most at home, makes such a place unique, different from all other places in the world. It also applies to the Bakel tribe, where one half lives in the Netherlands and the other half in Senegal. On one side the Bakelois is a unique creature. On the other side, there is a Bakelois in each of us.

*The Other Side of Town* is an investigation into the human psyche in relation to location, into the universal fear of inevitable change and into our biased views of the exotic other.

Willem Timmers





## SYNOPSIS

What if a parallel universe truly exists? This idea forms the starting point of *The Other Side of Town*, an observing documentary in which two villages are portrayed that are namesakes; Bakel in Senegal and Bakel in The Netherlands. The more than six thousand kilometres that separates the two places has allowed them to flourish into two analogous worlds. They however turn out to have more in common than just their village name. By mirroring analogous lives of a myriad of villagers in both Bakels, coincidence is put to the ultimate test. What initially seems to be a comparison of black versus white gradually becomes more colourful and nuanced.

In *The Other Side of Town* we enter a microcosm that bathes in nostalgia: two sleepy villages that slowly awake in the dawn of globalization, the great march of civilization. Through them we investigate what progress and modernity mean, developments that slowly make their appearance into both places. From the loss of religion and community values to the growing domination

of television and pop culture, more and more cracks gradually become visible in the otherwise utopian biotopes. Which coping mechanisms do people use when change arrives? And what does that say about us as human beings?

While some villagers entrain the train of modern day, others stick to their nostalgic ideas of what the village once was. What remains are two villages in similar despair, some desperately longing for the past, while others toxically dreaming of the other Bakel. And precisely through these constant comparisons it also reveals a universal portrait of humankind, playing with clichés and filled with paradoxes.



Willem Timmers (1985) finds his roots in the cultural anthropology spheres. In 2010 he made a first short documentary for his Master's programme:

*Framing the Other*, a film about the growing invasion of tourists at a tribe in southern Ethiopia. The entire filmmaking process was self-taught, and successful: the film screened at more than eighty film festivals worldwide and won several awards.

*The Other Side of Town* is his first mid-length film. Whereas his first documentary is mostly praised for its content, he increasingly tries to find the harmony between high-quality imagery, unconventional storytelling forms and an urgent underlying message that can serve as a starting point for broader social debate. His interest lies in themes as exoticism, culture clashes, globalization and inequality.

In addition to directing documentaries and journalistic programmes for Dutch broadcasting channels VPRO, KRO-NCRV and AVROTROS, Willem has extensive experience in the development sector. As a communication designer he creates educational materials, social campaigns and (new) media formats for development organizations. He also trains local media professionals in various African and Asian countries for Butterfly Works Foundation.



## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A question that seems so crucial in this day and age is: how unique am I? What is our desire in constantly wanting to distinguish ourselves from one another and at the same time wanting to belong to a group? And what if you were to meet an exact copy of yourself, would you disassociate yourself from it or would you rather embrace it? Having grown up in a village that also has a namesake elsewhere in the world, I have often been curious about that other side. How would the other place be different and at the same time be the same? And whose life on that other side would resemble most to mine?

This paradoxical relationship of connecting and distancing formed a breeding ground for *The Other Side of Town*. I thought it would be an interesting experiment to impose a parallel universe on the basis of just one single resemblance: the name of a town. The film needed to become an attempt in the forced comparison of livelihoods, as well as in the stoic ignoring of coincidence.

Although there are many towns and villages in the world that have namesakes, I wanted to choose the two places that seemed to be the most contrasting at first glance. I wanted black versus white, to be able to identify the grey areas in between. Looking for similarities where there only appear to be differences seemed more challenging than finding differences in quasi-copies. After days of Googling, Bakel in Senegal and Bakel in the Netherlands seemed the most suitable arenas.

On a first visit to the Senegalese Bakel, it met many African clichés that prevail in the West. Poverty is explicitly visible in the streets, for example because of the dilapidated houses, the lack of basic services such as water and electricity and the seemingly hopelessness of daily life. Young and old hang out on the streets every day whereby they drink tea in groups and discuss the news of the town. A handful of people has a steady job. These Bakelois seemed to live in a very traditional community, in which religion and interactions with family, friends and neighbours determine the daily rhythm. On the other side, the Dutch version of Bakel also met many clichés that dominate Dutch (or even Western) villages. Aging and loss of religious and cultural values are clearly visible and form much-discussed topics.

But it wasn't that simple. As time passed, I got more and more glimpses of the Bakels behind the cliché façades. The cracks in these vacuum worlds gradually surfaced. The influences of the big world outside of Bakel started to reveal. Whereas the original (and mostly old) inhabitants of Bakel try to hold on to the nostalgic ideas of what their village once was, it's the young people and the newcomers (the so-called 'strangers') whom are seen as threats. Everyone has their own idea of what Bakel was, is and should be. The relationship with the outside world is complex and often paradoxical. This diversity of perspectives and emotions created an interesting dynamic that I could use as a structure for the film.





Clichés proved to be a very useful tool for researching the themes of my film. The film starts with portraying two contrasting places that fit in the obvious, well-known African and Western clichés: a poor and colourful village where everyone seems to live happily and in harmony versus a rich and pale village where everyone constantly has something to moan about. It confirms what we as an outsider already knew (or thought we'd know) about these places and people. But by constantly weaving the two Bakels together, these places and people gradually take on a different meaning. The Dutch is no longer only Dutch and the Senegalese no longer only Senegalese. The connections and similarities between the two Bakels sometimes break through those clichés. The danger of this is that, as a viewer, you quickly realize that the conclusion of the film is that we all look alike and are the same. But the power of the cliché lies precisely in the fact that there is indeed a core of truth in it. Older people *are* generally less open to change than young people. Villagers *are* generally more fearful towards strangers than city dwellers. The Dutch *are* generally more individualistic than Senegalese. But by constantly refuting this truth and then confirming it again, I tried to play with the elasticity of these clichés in the film, in order to allow the viewer to decide for themselves how much or little we differ from each other. The role of the comparison of both Bakels is that it will ensure that clichés will never be *completely* clichés.

Making this film has changed my way of observing. Throughout the filmmaking process I have often cursed the restriction that I had imposed on myself of searching for a story and characters in two very demarcated arenas. I first had to go beyond the cliché way of observing both Bakels in order to find a narrative for a cinematographic film. By finally removing both Bakels from their exotic coat, I came closer to the inhabitants. Only then could I see connections and similarities. This was the key to making this film a success. After all, the exotic view lies in the eye of the observer.



# CREDITS

**Produced by:** Copper Views Film Productions

**Written & directed by:** Willem Timmers

**Camera:** Myrthe Mosterman

**Sound:** Jaap Sijben

**Additional sound:** Joris Schouten, Leleane Lindenaar

**Editor:** Jos Driessen NCE

**Sound design & mix:** Vincent Sinceretti

**Composer:** Juho Nurmela

**Additional music:** Ella van der Woude

**Musicians:**

Clarinet, Bass clarinet: Matthías Sigurðsson

Accordion: Kristján Martinsson

Cello: Alistair Sung

Harp: Laura Lotti

Marimba: Olli Kari

**Film coach:** Joost Seelen

**Foley artist:** Vladimir Rakic

**Foley mixer:** Vera Galesev

**Colorist:** Sander van Wijk - MediaMonks

**Graphic design:** Amira Daoudi

**Post-production:** Rob Maas - Postready

**Subtitles:** inVision Ondertiteling

**Commissioning editor Omroep Brabant:** Lout Donders

**Production assistant:** Chayenne Lokker

**Line producer:** Anjet Blinde

**Producer:** Ilja Kok

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