

IN THE
WAKE OF
YESTERDAY

a film by
Babatunde Apalowo



In a drought-governed Sahelian settlement where belonging is a matter of record, the archive's designated successor refuses to falsify her own record and is exiled into the desert, where she discovers the system she was trained to maintain has been operating far beyond the village that built it.

SYNOPSIS

Dandaji is a Sahel settlement that has survived drought by making everything legible. Water is administered by marshals. Births are witnessed and filed. The Hikma complex keeps the records that keep the village alive. Inside this order, two people have learned each other's bodies the way you learn a room you have lived in for years: Zainab, the Hikma's designated successor in training, and Bashir, a junior water marshal. The future is a place they have already agreed to travel to together.

Bashir is chosen for the seasonal pilgrimage, the boundary crossing the marshals undertake to secure the village's water stores. He does not come back with the others. Zainab crosses into the desert to find him. She returns. In Dandaji, this does not happen. When you enter the desert, you do not come back.

Then her pregnancy is discovered. One question moves through Dandaji: who is the father. A name would allow the village to turn the impossible into the manageable. Zainab says nothing. She will not enter a false record into a village built entirely on the integrity of its records. Her life becomes a case. A writ is sealed. Her brother invokes Nasab Seal - an ancient kin declaration that stops the crowd at the compound gate but not the writ. A sealed basket wound in the standard cord is placed in her hands. She is delivered into the desert.

The desert does not behave like a desert. She marks her path and returns to find the marks gone, the sand smooth, as if she was never there. Then she discovers that certain moments hold: the wind stops, the light shifts, and in those windows she can move and the ground keeps her. She learns to read this place the way she was taught to read an unfamiliar ledger, looking for the rule of the surface before she writes inside it.

She encounters others. A man maintaining a boundary marker who reaches for certain words as if he has not needed them in some time. A hyena that comes not for her body but for something she is carrying, circling with the patience of an auditor until she opens her hand and gives it up. And below a ridge, Bashir alive at the edge of a cyan pool, moving with the attention of someone performing a task his body has fully absorbed. She calls his name, but he couldn't hear her. Every attempt to reach him returns her to the ridge. He does not look up.

She follows a lamp glow through the haze to a hut. Inside a woman waits with copper wire in her hands and water measured in a bowl, who looks up the way someone looks up when they have been expecting a delivery. It is Muna, sent into the desert at fifteen, the same age Zainab was when she watched her go. A grown woman now, stationed, time rearranged around her.

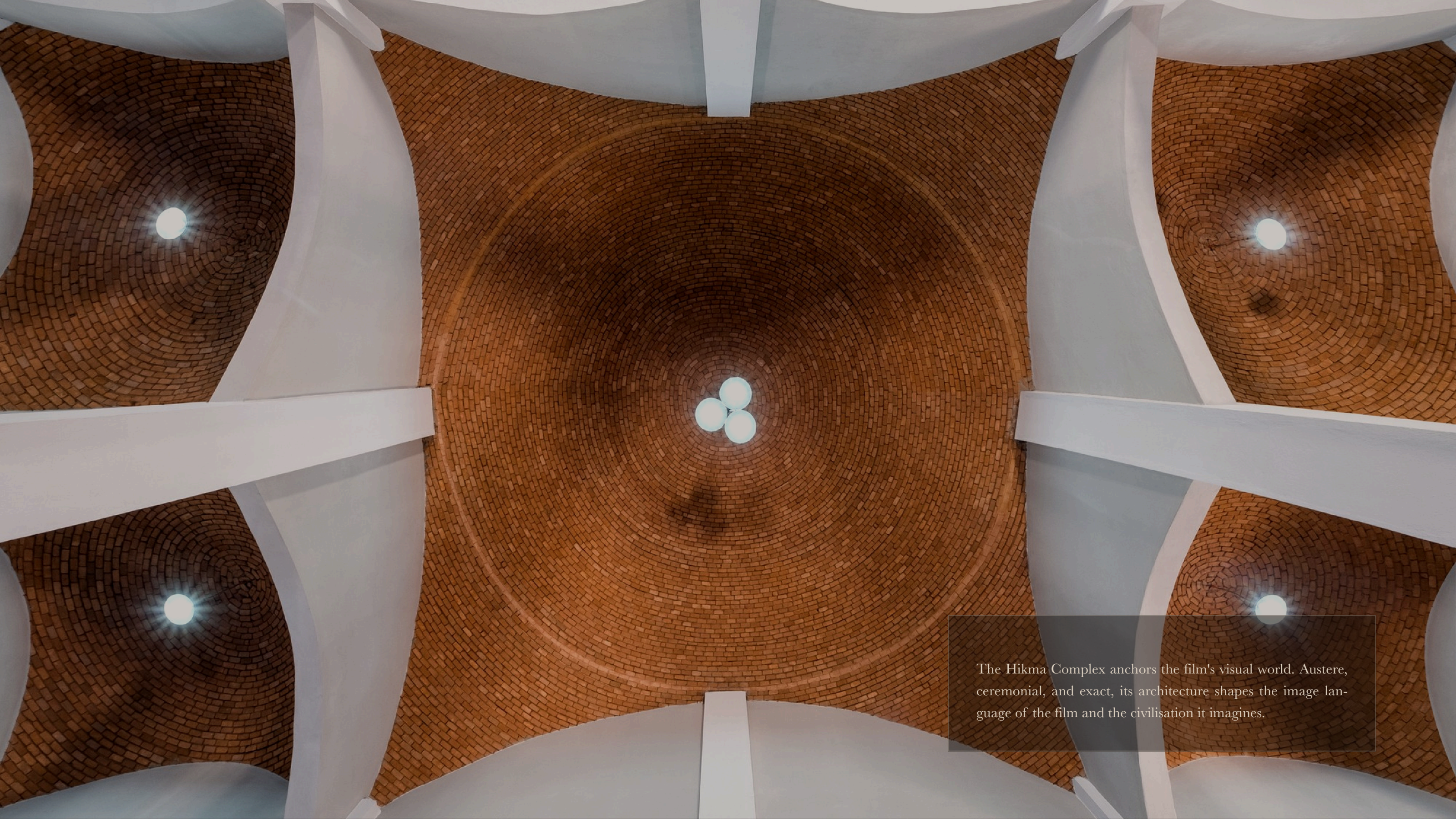
Labour begins, long and without ceremony. Afterwards Muna carries the child to the boundary marker, sets it down in the sand, and presses a clay seal fragment into the ground beside it.

Then the first drop falls. Then another. Then the sky opens over a landscape that has not felt rain in years, heavy rain on ochre walls and cracked courtyards and drought-split earth, rain the village will record as confirmation, as covenant, as proof that the system holds.



DANDAJI

Dandaji, in the Republic of Niger, provides a key visual anchor for the film: ochre walls, measured courtyards, hard light, and long horizons, where civic structure meets the desert.



The Hikma Complex anchors the film's visual world. Austere, ceremonial, and exact, its architecture shapes the image language of the film and the civilisation it imagines.



In Dandaji, architecture directs the body through shadow, sequence, and restraint. That sense of order informs the world of *In the Wake of Yesterday*.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up learning that belonging has conditions. In Nigeria and in diaspora, those conditions are often precise: the right paperwork, the right lineage, the right performance for the right room. Get it wrong and the system does not always confront you dramatically. It reclassifies you. The violence is procedural. It arrives wearing the face of order.

That recognition sits at the root of *In the Wake of Yesterday*. I wanted to make a film about a woman destroyed by taking the rules of her world seriously. Zainab does not stand outside the system in opposition to it. She belongs to its centre. She has been trained by it, trusted by it, and prepared to inherit its authority. She acts in good faith, with precision, and discovers that a system can honour its principles only until those principles threaten its survival.

The film is set in Dandaji, a Sahelian settlement shaped by drought and by the need to make life legible. Water is administered, births are witnessed and filed, and belonging depends on record. At the centre of this civic order is the Hikma, the archive through which the village knows itself. I am drawn to African civilisation at its most formal and most invented, to the systems communities build under pressure so that life can continue. I am equally drawn to the desert as fact: a landscape with its own logic, one that must be read before it allows movement. This film grows where those two fascinations meet.

Dandaji matters to me because it cannot be reduced to a simple image of oppression. It is beautiful, coherent, and necessary to the people inside it. In this world, procedure is emotional. A seal, a queue, a witness, a record entry: each one decides who remains visible, who is protected, and who can be given up. I want the audience to understand this world through pressure, repetition, and consequence rather than explanation. They should feel that every gesture has a history behind it, and that the village has been practising its own logic for generations.

Formally, the film is built in two parts that share one governing grammar. In Part I, the grammar is civic. The camera treats Dandaji as a living record. Frames are built around thresholds, courtyards, queues, walls, and hands at work. Procedure is given enough time to become strange. The village is always hearing itself function. That shared order is what makes life possible there. It is also what makes the place dangerous.

In Part II, the same grammar remains, but stripped of its civic surface. The desert is where the logic of the village becomes physically visible. The camera applies the same attention to a landscape that refuses to accumulate. Editing follows resets, loops, and permissions. A path can be walked and still return to its beginning. Progress happens only in brief windows of stillness, and those windows must be learned. Sound loses the reassurance of communal life. The layered civic field of Part I gives way to something more internal: pressure, breath, low frequencies, distant impacts, the acoustic register of a body rather than a settlement. I want Part II to feel womb-like without drifting into abstraction, as if Zainab has crossed not only into another landscape but into the interior of the process itself. If Part I carries order as structure, Part II carries order without mercy.

The child is returned. The rain comes. The village will read this as confirmation that the system holds. That completion is also the measure of its violence. Zainab's intelligence and competence are absorbed into the same order that destroys her. The child in the rain opens the smallest possible space outside it: for a brief moment, before classification begins again, a life exists without category. I want the audience to hold both truths at once: that the system works, and that its cost is unbearable.

I am not interested in condemning Dandaji. Dandaji works. Its people are not cruel. Its logic is coherent. That is the problem.

ZAINAB

HIKMA TRAINEE / DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR

Everything she does inside Dandaji, the training, the betrothal, the future she has planned with Bashir, comes from the same place: a belief that a life of accurate witness is a life worth living. She does not want to escape the system. She wants to practise it well.

That is what makes her expulsion structurally tragic rather than merely unjust. The village does not cast out a rebel. It casts out the person who took its principles most seriously. She was taught that an inaccurate record is worse than an incomplete one. She applies that principle to her own case. The Hikma's logic and the Hikma's survival mechanism share the same instrument, and it turns against her the moment it is asked to protect her.

In the desert she does not become someone else. She uses what she was given. The facility carries the Hikma's grammar and she can read it because she spent her life being trained to read exactly this kind of record. Her competence is not rewarded. It is absorbed.

What the story does not cost her is her integrity. That is the central fact the film cannot soften.



SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

BASHIR

Bashir is the kind of man drought produces: steady, practical, trained to treat survival as routine. His love for Zainab is real, but his identity is built around function and duty. He measures himself by whether he performs his role correctly. That is both his flaw and his tenderness.

The film never turns him into a moral lesson. It places him where the system places him. The audience's anger has nowhere clean to go, because nothing he does is malicious. He is a product of a civilisation that trains people to become instruments.

IDRIS

He built his life on the belief that the record is the closest thing available to justice, and discovers too late that the record can also be a weapon. He does not sign the writ out of weakness. He signs it because he has lived too long inside a logic he cannot disown in the moment it turns on the person he loves most. He taught Zainab the principle she uses against herself. He cannot offer her a different one without collapsing the entire foundation of his life.

His suicide is not despair. It is the last precise act left to him. He contaminates the well, the village's oldest water source, older than the Hikma, older than the current authority structures. He makes the cost of what the system did visible in the one register Dandaji cannot ignore. It is the last record he makes.





MUNA

She entered the desert prepared, which is different from resigned. Someone held her and told her the truth before she went. That steadiness is still present in the woman she becomes.

In the hut she works with competence stripped of softness. She does the task the way someone does a task they have done too many times. If she has any private feelings about it, it never becomes language. She offers completion. That makes her both victim and a function.

SANI / SAIDU / SALISU

Zainab's three brothers are not a unit. They are three different theories of how to survive inside a system that has turned against your family. Sani is the eldest. He has spent his life understanding that order is the only thing standing between Dandaji and catastrophe, and he has made his peace with what that costs. When the crowd reaches the compound gate he invokes the Nasab Seal because procedure is the only language the assembly cannot override.

Saidu believes the right arrangement of words can still change an outcome. He negotiates at every stage, with the brothers, with the elders, with anyone who will listen. He is still speaking as Zainab is led away, his sentences running ahead of events that have already concluded. His faith in language is the last form of love left to him.

Salisu is the youngest. He does not try to fix anything. He sings, or he did. Music is how he holds the world together.

The World in Ten Laws

I

Belonging is filed. A person exists inside the village to the extent that the Hikma holds their record. What cannot be recorded cannot be accommodated.

III

The desert is not the opposite of the village. The desert and the village share one grammar. When you enter the desert, you do not come back.

V

The desert assigns labour. It uses what you already know how to do. Your previous function becomes your station.

VII

The system does not punish; it processes. Any entity that cannot be classified is treated as an error until it is either resolved, reassigned, or purged.

IX

Each path through the desert is singular. What is learned cannot become a shared map.

II

Every transaction requires a witness. Every witness requires a seal. Every seal requires a record. The chain does not hold if any link is missing.

IV

The desert resets distance. A path can be walked and still lead back to its beginning. Progress occurs only in permitted windows, and the windows must be found.

VI

Every gift requires an offering. Every delivery requires a seal. The system accepts nothing without taking something in exchange.

VIII

The covenant is biological. The system's output is human. The village receives it as a gift. The ledger records it as delivery. Both are accurate.

X

Time inside the facility is measured in cycles, not years. Each cycle ends when the transaction completes. What feels like days may be decades.

SOUND AS GOVERNANCE

- No score. The film does not editorialise.
- In Part I, authority is audible: clay seals pressed and drying, horns certifying dispatch, ledger pages turning, water measured and poured, crowd rhythm that knows its own order. Sound confirms procedure.
- In Part II, the civic layer falls away. Dialogue becomes sparse and functional. What remains is operational: wind, breath, footfall, distant work, the clatter of clay, hooves on packed earth. The sound design is densely layered and precisely orchestrated so it carries the emotional weight a score would carry in another film, without becoming one.
- Beneath that layer, Part II carries a continuous low frequency. Not music. Something closer to the interior register of a body. A womb tone. The facility is felt before it is understood.
- Permission windows are audible before they are visible. Wind drops. Insects stop. The hush is the cue.
- Dolby Atmos is not a technical flourish here. It is a narrative instrument. The movement of sound from village to desert, from controlled civic surround to vast directional space, is part of the film's argument. The audience should register the system in their body before they name it.
- The crystalline sound occurs once, late, without source or explanation. It is not repeated.



SPEC

TITLE	In the Wake of Yesterday
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Babatunde Apalowo
FORMAT	Feature film
RUNTIME	~90 minutes
LANGUAGE	Primarily Hausa, with regional languages
SUBTITLES	English and French
ASPECT RATIO	1.66:1
SOUND	Designed for Dolby Atmos, with 5.1 and stereo deliverables
LOCATIONS	Shot on location in and around Dandaji, Niger (village, desert corridor, hut)

PRODUCTION APPROACH

Built around a real Sahel landscape. One village. One desert corridor. One hut. Minimal company moves. The geography is evidence.

Professional leads with a controlled ensemble of local non-professionals. Primarily Hausa, with regional languages.

The production is designed around real light transitions, with precise, limited atmospheric effects to carry the desert's shift toward permanent night. It operates at the scale the story requires: contained, exact, and fully present in the world it evokes.



ABOUT

Babatunde Apalowo

WRITER / DIRECTOR

Babatunde Apalowo is a Nigerian writer-director whose work explores intimacy under systems of control and the ways communities administer belonging. His filmmaking is defined by formal restraint, architectural observation, and sound as structure rather than decoration. *In the Wake of Yesterday* extends those concerns into a Sahelian civilisation story, where governance becomes physical procedure and surrealism is treated as law.

SELECTED CREDIT

All the Colours of the World Are Between Black and White (2023)
Teddy Award, Berlinale

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS

Hikma Complex, Dandaji
Photography by James Wang

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