Amazigh culture and media: Migration and identity in songs, films and websites
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Chapter IV: The Lost Donkey: The Subject’s Quests in the Realm of Fantasy and Desire

Introduction

While the previous film implies long waits in the country of origin, Morocco, *De Verloren Ezel* (*The Lost Donkey*) reveals the journey of migration and its implications. The *Lost Donkey* is directed by Said Essanoussi and shot in the Moroccan Rif region and the Netherlands. Many characters in the film are dressed as donkey puppets living among people. The main character Mustafa, performed by Said Essanoussi, wants to leave his village and travel illegally to the Netherlands where he hopes to achieve perfection. To fulfill his dream he starts his journey from the Rif region and crosses the Mediterranean to reach Spain and his final destination, the Netherlands. It becomes difficult for Mustafa to find a job and shelter in the new host country. After spending a short while working on a farm and finding himself unable to cope with the hard work, Mustafa quits his new job. Eventually, he ends up sharing shelter with the homeless in Rotterdam. Police catch him in the act of attempting to sell drugs and immediately deport him from the Netherlands. The film reveals various topics important to Imazighen of the Rif area and diaspora. First, it presents the Amazigh alphabet to Imazighen throughout the world. Second, it highlights the role of media vis-à-vis Imazighen and their culture. Third, it discourages Imazighen of the Rif from illegally immigrating to Europe. Finally, it encourages the inhabitants of the Rif region to accept repatriated illegal immigrants. *De Verloren Ezel* (hereinafter *The Lost Donkey*) is obviously the work of an amateur: the audiovisual style is of poor quality, and

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1 *The Lost Donkey* is filmed in Tamazight with Dutch subtitles.
2 Said Essanoussi cites these elements as the main reasons for making the film in my interview with him from 2011.
the imprecision in choreography, cuts, and changes indicate the filmmaker’s lack of experience. The use of puppets in the film and the simplicity of language indicate that the film targets mainly young Imazighen. In my study of this film I consider both form and content, critically engaging issues the film raises.

In this chapter I analyse *The Lost Donkey* using psychoanalytic theory (particularly Jacques Lacan’s and Slavoj Žižek’s articulations of the concepts of desire and fantasy). I argue that the experience of illegal immigration depicted in *The Lost Donkey* is the subject’s endless struggle with desires and fantasies. Regarding the implication of desires and fantasies, both Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek argue that desire realised in fantasy is, in fact, not the subject’s own desire but the Other’s desire (Žižek, *Plague* 118; Lacan, *Écrits* 345). Here the question of desire becomes an enigma the subject tries to comprehend using fantasy. Therefore, desire is not what the subject wants but what the Other wants from the subject. 3 Žižek tries to explain this scenario: the desire of the subject is the desire of the Other, and, he argues, there is a difference between female and male desire. While the masculine version is based on envy and competition, the female’s desire excludes envy and competition (*Plague* 118). What the two have in common is that an object is desirable as long as another desires it. This chapter demonstrates how it is the experience and process of migration that becomes desirable.

In the previous chapters I mainly used social and media theories to address the way an Amazigh identity of migrants has evolved in various settings and spaces (such as the journey of migration), and how various media depict the process of identity reconstruction. In this chapter I mainly use psychoanalytic theory in combination with media theories and the interview I conducted with Said Essanoussi to specifically highlight the emotional state of migrants as they move between various settings through the journey in search of the self, and how both the journey and the evolution of a migrant’s identity are pictured in *The Lost Donkey*. This chapter is a continuation of what I began in the previous chapters. That is, I consider how Amazigh media—here, a video film—portray an Amazigh

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3 In this chapter I use the term Other exclusively from the field of psychoanalytic theory. This Other should not be confused with the term Other, which has a completely different meaning in the field of postcolonial studies and anthropology. Although Lacan makes a difference between the small other that implies the imaginary, and the big Other which insinuates the symbolic order, here I use the term Other as an effect of the intermingling between the symbolic and the imaginary. I assume that the symbolic and the imaginary are not entirely separate; on this issue Žižek argues that imaginary identification occurs ‘on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other’ (*Sublime* 106).
subject as he or she tries to articulate his or her own identity. It is an identity affected by many experiences, and migration is one of the significant experiences present in *The Lost Donkey*. My focus in this chapter is not on desire *per se*, but on its implications vis-à-vis fantasy.

Mustafa, in *The Lost Donkey*, sees immigration as the way to the European paradise where he can lead an ‘ideal’ lifestyle. In fact, what he wants is exactly what makes this lifestyle exceptional, important, and desired. The thing that Mustafa seeks to acquire seems materialistic at first, but what Mustafa desires is certainly not an object. He is fascinated by the quality that makes the experience of migration and Western lifestyle special in the eyes of his compatriots within Rifian society; his fantasy is an endeavour to resolve his role within this intersubjective network he can hardly comprehend. His lack derives from his sense of acquiring something that has rendered the European lifestyle desperately desired by the Other.

In *The Lost Donkey*, the subject’s experience of lack is usually explained in terms of the experience of migration. Importantly, the field of the Other explains the subject’s desires and identifications. On the issue of the subject’s affiliation with the big Other, Žižek argues that the inconsistency of the symbolic order forces the subject into alienation. This ‘takes place when the subject realizes how the big Other is itself inconsistent, purely virtual, “barred” deprived of the Thing—and fantasising is an attempt to fill out this lack of the Other, not of the subject: to (re)constitute the consistency of the big Other’ (Žižek, “Da Capo” 253). Therefore, the lack here is not of the subject but of the Other. Accordingly, *The Lost Donkey* illustrates three important aspects. The first one is that the experience of illegal immigration in the film is the Other’s desire and not Mustafa’s own. This is reflected in the events of the film in general, and the acts of the main character in particular, as he tries to negotiate his identity within an intersubjective network. Second, the film is an attempt to highlight the reality of illegal immigrants in Morocco and Europe (‘paradise’). Finally, the film endeavours to raise awareness among the young generation of I Mizighen vis-à-vis the implications of the phenomenon of illegal migration for Amazigh society, culture, and identity.

Due to the fact that my topic in this chapter is the subject’s quest in the realm of desires and fantasies, I will try to briefly highlight these two concepts. Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, Sean Homer, and many other psychoanalytic theorists all agree that these two
concepts are fully interrelated. They argue that the subject’s desire is not its own but the Other’s, and fantasy becomes the surface whereupon desire is manifested or projected.

It is argued that desire is the Other’s desire, but the role of fantasy remains unaddressed yet. Various disciplines widely use the concept of fantasy, especially in the sub-fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. For instance, many theorists of developmental psychology argue that the role of fantasy is essential in the development and maintenance of a subject’s identity, especially among children (Piaget; Vygotsky). Others, like Sean Homer, argue that fantasy is a response to the question regarding the role of a subject in the Other’s desire (Homer 86). That is, Homer claims that fantasy is the immediate answer to the question regarding the subject’s role in the Other’s desire. In view of that, the question that arises concerns the way the subject’s fantasy functions. In this chapter I address the concept of fantasy exclusively in the field of psychoanalytic theory, because I want to emphasise fantasy’s implications regarding desire in my object of study, the film *The Lost Donkey*.

Fantasy is not a desire for something, but a platform whereupon desires are manifested and a screen that prevents the intrusion of the Real. In his comment on the relationship between desire and fantasy Slavoj Žižek writes:

> The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed—and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject’s desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. (*Looking* 6)

Here fantasy creates desiring subjects and teaches them how and what to desire. In addition, fantasy assumes a second role and regarding this function: Žižek argues that fantasy is a cover or a screen that prevents the intrusion of the Real (*Plague* 65). Therefore, fantasy assumes a twofold role: it serves as a space whereupon desire is manifested and a cover that prevents the subject from any confrontation with the Real. In the symbolic reality fantasy

4 In *The Ego in Freud’s Theory*, Jacques Lacan defines the Real as that which precedes language, exceeds the symbolic and the imaginary, and emerges as the impossible (119-20). In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, he describes Freud’s death drive as the void of The Real. In his definition of the Real, Slavoj Žižek writes, ‘It erupts in the form of a traumatic return, derailing the balance of our daily lives, but it serves at the same time as a support of this very balance’ (*Looking* 29). Indeed, The Real remains an intricate concept in Lacan’s world.
seems to produce satisfaction not by achieving something but by projecting desire. Thus fantasy always remains incomplete. At this stage another ingredient plays a major role in sustaining the subject’s desire. Although Homer argues this ingredient is, objectively speaking, ‘nothing’, its function is noteworthy (88). This ‘nothing’ is called the objet petit a. Highlighting its role Žižek writes, ‘Objet [petit] a is a kind of “positivization”, filling out, of the void’ (Tarrying 122). There are two central components in this quote: positivization and the void. Here object petit a is the void that, at the same time, it tries to fill. For this reason it is called object-cause of desire. The objet petit a remains an illusive thing, a filling of the void and lack that causes desire. Objet petit a is an imaginary element, but its absence is exactly what renders it wanted. It is that constant sense of lack in the subject that sustains his or her life and drives a subject to always be in search of the supposed missing object. In the process of seeking to find, to possess and acquire, the subject may achieve few demands. Then, new demands and goals to be attained emerge, and this keeps the subject continuously desiring. It is almost an endless process in which the subject is entangled.

I have chosen to study the film The Lost Donkey in light of particular North African films which address the issue of migration and highlight aspects of the concepts of fantasy and desire and their implications on subjects. Because this chapter follows the subject’s trajectory as he goes through the journey of migration it will include three sections.

The first one is ‘Moroccan Candidates for Illegal Immigration and Fantasies’. In this part, I examine The Lost Donkey in light of another Moroccan film I addressed in the previous chapter, Leila Kilani’s Tanger, Le Rêve des Brûleurs (hereinafter Tangier: The Burners’ Dream, 2003). My focus is mainly on the fantasies of candidates for illegal immigration in their country of origin, and I build on the idea that fantasy assumes a twofold role, since it serves as a space whereupon desires are manifested and a cover that prevents the subject from any confrontation with the Real.

The second section is ‘Migrant’s Struggles for Identity in a Muddle of Desires and Fantasies’. Mustafa in The Lost Donkey, Rahal in Mohamed Ismail’s film Here and There (2005), and Ahmed in Karim Traida’s Onmacht (1991) all try to find the illusive paradise. When they cross the sea and arrive in Europe, they still feel the void and lack. Consequently, they start to feel that they are caught in a dilemma difficult to understand
and handle. In this part I study the point in which subjects fail to articulate their fantasies and how it affects them.

The third section is ‘Amazigh Identity and Symbolic Constraints’. Here I reveal a few implications of illegal immigration for Amazigh identity. Family and society usually regard Amazigh illegal immigrants repatriated back to Morocco disgracefully. Nonetheless, in The Lost Donkey, his father welcomes back Mustafa with festivities and joy. In this part I examine the acts or the performances of the filmmaker in The Lost Donkey and the implications of his individual political acts for the entire society. To highlight this point I use also Merzak Alloauche’s film Harragas (Burners, 2009).

Moroccan Candidates for Illegal Immigration and Fantasies

Moroccan mass media have manufactured Europe as a paradise worth sacrifice for and a place where Moroccan migrants lead a luxurious lifestyle. Canal Atlas, Nojoum El Hijra (The Stars of Migration), Qantara (Bridge), and Biladi (My Homeland) are a few examples of regular programs broadcast on national Moroccan television. These programs depict the world of migrants as ideal, and all the participants in the programs are ‘successful’ international migrants. The majority of the characters have succeeded in creating businesses in Europe and gathering substantial amounts of money. The programs highlight either the luxurious lifestyle of a few Moroccan migrants in Europe or illustrate examples of migrants who have invested their savings in Morocco. In fact, the majority of Moroccan migrants do not lead a luxurious lifestyle. Unlike the official media in Morocco, the film The Lost Donkey shows a different image of migrants.

The relevance of the title of the film The Lost Donkey is noteworthy. The donkey in the title hints at the main character Mustafa, who is dressed in a donkey puppet costume and makes the journey between Morocco and the Netherlands. The word donkey is used worldwide as an insult to indicate stupidity. In the Rif region, the use of the word donkey as an insult is common. Nonetheless, a donkey is essential to the livelihood of Rif inhabitants because it is used as means of transport in remote mountainous villages; without it, life might be almost impossible in these areas (Essanoussi, interview). In addition a donkey is known as a stubborn and cunning animal, and therefore, the use of the animal donkey in the title of the film enfolds a paradox of stupidity and cleverness. The term lost in the title

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5 Many Moroccan migrants live in dire conditions, especially in southern Europe (Geiger).
initially seems unclear because Mustafa is able to reach his destination (the Netherlands) and find his way to his uncle’s house, but the events of the film unfold its meaning. Mustafa appears to be lost in himself and his fantasies. He is neither capable of channelling his desires and fantasies, nor able to articulate his identity.

The use of puppet costumes and the narrator’s first statement in *The Lost Donkey* entails a presentation of elements from the fantasy world. The filmmaker Said Essanoussi comments on the choice of puppet costumes and states ‘generally speaking, the idea to use puppets is based on the fact that the film addresses children’ (Interview). Ostensibly, for a film to address children, it therefore has to include elements from the fantasy world. Similarly, at the beginning of the film the narrator addresses the audience and says, ‘I am going to show you ḥṭajit of the lost donkey’ (my trans.). Nonetheless, as the film develops, indications that the ḥṭajit in the film may be a real story begin to compile. For instance, the film reveals many factual elements, such as the high scale of immigration from Northern Morocco to Europe as well as the creation of small businesses in the Rif region by immigrants. At this point the audience is perplexed because they do not know whether the ḥṭajit of *The Lost Donkey* is factual or fictitious. Speaking of the intermingling of the imaginary and the real in discourse, Robert Ferguson writes, ‘The line between fiction and non-fiction can, in the field of discourse, sometimes appear blurred’ (59). Since many elements in the field of discourse are unclear the meaning of the word ḥṭajit becomes a riddle. Questions are raised as to whether that ḥṭajit is a fable or dream. The example of a festivity in honour of a deported illegal immigrant is one of those dreams. In effect, *The Lost Donkey* allows the audience to see and experience a real dream, a blend of reality and fantasy.

Similar to *The Lost Donkey*, the importance of the title of Leila Kilani’s film *Tangier: The Burners’ Dream* is notable. The word dream reflects the fantasy aspect, which is an important mark in the film. The title of the documentary film underscores the fact that the film is a representation of fantasies of candidates for illegal immigration. Throughout the film the audience may notice that the main goal of the film is to depict the thoughts, ideas, and dreams of the candidates for illegal immigration. There is no single shot in the documentary wherein we witness an attempt of migrants to cross to Europe. We can only hear about these attempts through the stories that candidates for illegal immigration recount.

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6 The word ḥṭajit is an Amazigh term that means ‘fable’. All quotes from *The Lost Donkey* reproduced in this chapter from the original spoken Tamazight.
in front of the camera. Thus the film is an attempt to depict the stories of those who intend to immigrate illegally to Europe. Even though The Lost Donkey and Tangier: The Burners’ Dream are different in genre, they both emphasise fantasy as an important constituent in making, shaping, and sustaining the identity of candidates for illegal immigration.

It is important to underscore the content of fantasies of candidates for illegal immigration, and the way this content affects and sustains the identity of these subjects. Discussing the function of fantasy Slavoj Žižek states, ‘The way fantasy space functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires: the fascinating presence of its positive content does nothing but fill out certain emptiness’ (Looking 8). A fantasy is almost a continuous process and the content that keeps it operational—filling the emptiness in it—is as important as the fantasy itself. In both The Lost Donkey and Tangier: The Burners’ Dream characters fantasise about Europe. Mustafa, in The Lost Donkey, dreams of driving a new car and leading a luxurious lifestyle in Europe, while one of the candidates for illegal immigration in Tangier dreams of touring Europe by train. In both films we see that the fantasies of the two subjects serve as a surface whereupon their desires are projected. Interestingly enough, at the time of dreaming both subjects are not migrants. Nonetheless, in their dreams they see themselves as migrants leading a new life in Europe. Although the two individuals live in Morocco, they have opted to take on a migrant’s identity and live accordingly in their (day)dreams. That is, these two subjects are physically still living in Morocco, but they live out a fantasy in which they have acquired the identity of a happy Moroccan migrant living in Europe (paradise). This highlights how the fantasy of migration affects the identity of candidates for illegal immigration in Morocco and how the content of this fantasy sustains this identity.

Media usually enrich the content of the fantasies of candidates for illegal immigration. Mustafa learns about the outside world, particularly Europe, through television. In a scene in The Lost Donkey, the camera frames Mustafa from behind while watching television. Then the camera zooms in on the TV screen, where we see a nice car circulating in a street, accompanied by Mustafa’s voiceover. He sounds astonished by the beauty of the car. This scene reveals the role of media in the making and enhancing of subject’s fantasies. In addition, it draws attention to the way information in general—and fantasies in particular—circulate among communities. Regarding the parameters of fantasies, Sean Homer claims that fantasies are not private. They circulate among the public through media such as films, literature, and television (85). The depiction of the television
set in *The Lost Donkey* is to demonstrate the dual function of media as they spread fantasies among the public in the Riffian countryside, and their roles as representations that assist in the creation and constitution of identities. After watching television Mustafa begins to dream of becoming a migrant because he wants to acquire a car like the one he saw on TV.

Media not only help the spread of fantasies but also teaches the masses how to use other media. At the beginning of the film we see a personal computer the narrator uses to present the story of Mustafa. He invites the audience to watch the film on the computer screen. This scene is significant, since it accentuates the increasing use of computer-mediated technology among Imazighen in the 1990s (when the film is set). In his comments on this scene, Said Essanoussi argues that the use of the computer in the film has two goals: it encourages Amazigh children to access and use computer-mediated technology to exploit and share information in general, and download and watch Amazigh films in particular (Interview). The film teaches the masses to use other media that might enable them to access new fantasies. Providing that fantasies ‘Teach us how to desire’, media help to spread these fantasies throughout regions and countries quickly (Žižek, *Plague* 7). Most importantly, the film *The Lost Donkey* reveals how media like television and the Internet contribute to the exodus of Imazighen from the Rif region.

The element of fantasy in both *The Lost Donkey* and *Tangier: The Burners’ Dream* alludes to escapism, but also serves as a reminder for the audience. Many characters in the two films live in hard and unforgiving conditions. Consequently, they chose the element of fantasy to console themselves. Mustafa is depicted at the beginning of *The Lost Donkey* as an indifferent character. Still, he unenthusiastically helps his brother Abdul to perform work in the fields. In *Tangier* many characters struggle to survive in the streets of Tangier. They sleep in streets and can hardly afford to buy food. Both films make use of fantasy to escape an unforgiving present. Vicky Lebeau comments on Freud’s understanding of the role of fantasy in social reality: ‘fiction, daydreams are conjured by a subject who feels the need for protection. Fantasy intervenes. It comes between the self and its history, consciousness and reality—making use of things seen, heard, and experienced to rework the world’ (29). Here fantasy is depicted as a barrier that intercedes between subjects and their history and Real. It is a talisman that protects subjects in a ruthless,

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7 Žižek comments on the barrier separating reality and Real and argues that it is a thin line—or what he calls ‘minimum normalcy’—and that madness takes over when the Real takes over reality (*Looking* 20).
unforgiving present from becoming mad. Nevertheless, fantasy in both films denies the audience of such escapism, because it places them in front of serious social problems like migration, unemployment, and poverty.

*The Lost Donkey* depicts Mustafa’s daydreams or fantasies as a platform whereupon his desired objects are manifested. The film makes use of fading in and out to represent the beginnings and the ends of Mustafa’s daydreams. At the beginning of the film Mustafa is depicted dreaming in a wrecked car near his house. In this shot we see Mustafa sitting in an old car frame and thinking about Europe. At this point we see the image fade out, indicating the beginning of a daydream. Then we see Mustafa in a comfortable new car driving. For a moment he feels the comfort of his new car. In fact, the price he pays for this comfort is the loss of continuity between ‘the inside’ and ‘outside’ (Žižek, *Looking* 15). That is, there is comfort inside his new car but this cannot be enjoyed in the reality outside of his fantasy. The windowpane of his new car acts as a barrier between the comfortable reality in ‘the inside’, or in his dream, and ‘the outside’ harsh reality which seems distant. When this barrier falls down, indicted by fading in to signal the end of Mustafa’s daydream, we notice that Mustafa wakes up in the wrecked car, which has no glass windows or windshield. Both the fade in technique and disappearance of the glass windows of the car indicate that Mustafa is back again in a reality where he has to survive.

Fantasy plays a central role within and outside the symbolic order with regard to objects of desire. Mustafa’s daydreams in *The Lost Donkey*, for instance, are concerned with commodities related to migration and Europe. He believes his dreams cannot be achieved unless he emigrates elsewhere. In a monologue he claims that immigration is the answer to all his dreams: ‘I want a new car and a house, I want to go to Europe’. Indeed, Mustafa desires a new lifestyle, and to realise it he intends to immigrate in Europe. Here fantasy reconciles the symbolic order and the allure of the objects Mustafa encounters in his daily life, like cars, houses, and businesses of migrants. Regarding the role of fantasy in reality and the symbolic order, Slavoj Žižek comments, ‘It provides a “schema” according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the symbolic structure’ (*Plague* 7). Žižek illustrates the fact that the symbolic order opens certain empty gaps in the reality of a subject and in order to fill that emptiness he or she has to employ fantasy to teach him or her how to turn ordinary objects into objects of desire. In the case of Mustafa, fantasy turns elements, such as cars, houses, lifestyles, places, and the experience of migration, into desired objects.
Both *The Lost Donkey* and *Tangier* allude to the discourse of migration as the substance that fills in the content of fantasy. Indeed, fantasy offers an idealistic solution to problems of characters in the two films. Immigration in *Tangier: The Burners’ Dream* becomes the main goal for all characters. The burners believe that living in the dream or fantasy of migration facilitates their daily living in Morocco. The burners spend most of their time recounting experiences of successful migrants who succeed in crossing the sea and leading an ideal life in Europe. In her analysis of *Tangier*, Pisters argues that the images and personal stories of the characters in the film find each other in a free indirect discourse that creates a modern political film (Pisters, “Arresting” 189). This film highlights the way so-called ‘accented cinema’ addresses the subject of immigration and marginality. The point of depicting various stories and conditions candidates for illegal immigration may have is to show that the subjects share the same dream regardless of their differences. They want to immigrate to Europe and lead a lavish lifestyle. Their daily routine and their whole existence in Tangier are nothing but attempts to illegally immigrate to Europe. The main topic that the subjects discuss in all the shots of the film is immigration and the way to accomplish it.

*The Lost Donkey* illustrates the way discourse feeds the desire to immigrate among Amazigh community in the Rif area. Some of Mustafa’s comments seem absurd, but ironically, reflect the thoughts that circulate among people in the Rif regarding immigration. In one scene, we see Mustafa travelling in an expensive luxurious car from Spain to the Netherlands and asks the driver, ‘How much time it will take me to buy a car like yours ... one week?’. While the car is worth a fortune, Mustafa thinks that he can afford it by working one week in the Netherlands. Said Essanoussi comments on this scene and argues that it reflects the mistaken perception of migration and life in Europe. That is, there are many incorrect ideas that circulate among the inhabitants of the Rif region regarding migration and Europe. People believe that by crossing the sea they will arrive in paradise (Essanoussi, interview). People in Morocco in general and the Rif region in particular believe that Europe is a paradise and the stories they exchange about successful migrants and the images they see on television strengthen their decisions to immigrate. Both

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8 Media theorist Hamid Naficy first coined the term ‘accented cinema’. He defines it as the cinema made by the filmmakers who came to live and work in the West, and, because of their displacement, have earned the right to speak. In his mapping of this cinema, he divides it into three categories: exilic, diasporic, and ethnic films (10-11).
Tangier: The Burners’ Dream and The Lost Donkey try to highlight these false ideas or fantasies that contribute to the exodus of many young Moroccans.

Notably, fantasy offers temporary protection from any confrontation with the Real. Fantasies not only contribute to the phenomenon of migration, but also act as barriers that prevent subjects from becoming crazy. Regarding the kind of protection that fantasy offers Žižek explains, ‘Fantasy … serves as a screen against the direct intrusion of the Real’ (Plague 65). The actions of characters in The Lost Donkey and Tangier highlight the way fantasy works. Characters in both films are content to live under harsh conditions, believing that one day they will reach Europe (i.e., paradise). They do not want to face reality on the ground and acknowledge the fact that there is a real possibility that they will spend the rest of their lives in Morocco. Mustafa, in The Lost Donkey, admits that if he fails to immigrate he will become crazy. Similarly, many candidates for illegal immigration in Tangier: The Burners’ Dream acknowledge the fact that their failure to cross the Mediterranean means madness. For the candidates for illegal immigration in these two films, fantasy not only provides temporary relief against socio-economic problems but also serves as a talisman that protects them from insanity. Fantasy is both a desire for something and a shield that prevents the intrusion of the Real.

Migrant struggles for identity in a muddle of desires and fantasies

The Lost Donkey indeed portrays a paradox. The character Mustafa feels miserable despite the fact that his mode of life in the Riffian countryside does not seem overly harsh. Mustafa and his older brother Abdul live together with their father in a traditional clay house in the Riffian countryside. They own cows and sheep and live mainly by growing their own food. They cultivate vegetables and fruits in the fields. They seem to be a happy family and usually go together on vacations, but Mustafa is never satisfied with his lifestyle. He feels that something is missing in his life and is obsessed with a lifestyle he sees on television. Believing that Europe is the key to his delight Mustafa is prepared to sacrifice everything in order to attain this paradise. One particular place—the Netherlands—becomes his favourite destination. Mustafa decides to sell the jewelleries of his family to pay for his journey to the Netherlands, which holds out the promise of his happiness and satisfaction.

In the film Et Après (2002), many characters view Europe as a paradise where life is wonderful and without worries. They feel unsatisfied with their lives in Morocco and intend to immigrate in Europe to realise their dreams. All of those who want to immigrate
in the film *Et Après* want to lead the life of Mustafa’s older sister who lives and works in Spain. She owns a red car, has a considerable amount of money, and is an example of enacting the role of the Other in the symbolic reality. The subject desires the Other’s secret, which only appears to be a secret. The subject believes that the discovery of the unknown desires of the Other might fulfil its own desires, but it is wrong. Although subjects may know the secret of the Other, they may still desire another secret in the Other. In *The Real Gaze* (2007), Todd McGowan writes about the subject and the Other’s desire:

> The subject’s desire focuses on what it believes is the secret of the Other, but this secret has no positive content. It is merely an effect of language itself, the form in which the Other’s demand arrives. If the Other told us its secret and revealed its hidden desire, we would find this dissatisfying and posit another desire beneath this revelation. The Other cannot satisfy the subject’s desire simply by revealing what the subject appears to have. (97)

McGowan articulates the impossibility of subjects to satisfy their desires, because there might always be other secrets associated with the Other. This intricate relationship between the subject and the Other can be illustrated in the film *Et Après*. The Mustafa’s older sister initially appears to be a wealthy and happy immigrant. However, the audience and her brother Mustafa later learn she is working with criminals and the money she collects is the price for her collaboration with them. Her only desire is to settle down in Morocco and raise her one child. Mustafa and his young sister are not deterred by the facts they discover about their older sister, nor are they satisfied by the revelation of her desire. They ignore their older sister’s situation and continue to plan to immigrate to Europe. They believe—despite what they know—that there is still something positive waiting to be discovered when they immigrate.

The journey, or what is known as *ḥrigg* (*‘burning’*), becomes a desired object or experience in *The Lost Donkey, Tangier: The Burners’ Dream*, and *Et Après*. Given that desires are usually hidden and associated with the darkness of the unconscious, the film *Et Après* pictures the revelation of desires through a nighttime beach scene. It is only at that moment Mustafa discovers that his young sister, who is still a student at a secondary school, wants to burn/immigrate illegally, and she discovers her brother wants to immigrate too. When Mustafa discovers his sister’s dreams, he tries to deter her. Nevertheless he succumbs under the pressure of her persistence. That is to say, when she insists that she
wants to realise her dream of crossing the sea like others she knows, Mustafa realises that her dreams are like his own. The camera zooms in on Mustafa’s face as he digests the words of his young sister and tries to make a decision in the seconds remaining before the fishing boat leaves. He then takes her hand and they both jump in the boat bound for Spain. Here, we notice that the film depicts the journey as a magic trip where subjects solve their problems and live joyfully thereafter. While The Lost Donkey and Et Après depict characters embarking a boat, the film Tangier only shows characters and boats in the background docked or at sea. Many characters in Tangier state that they wish to burn at any cost.

In The Lost Donkey, Mustafa wants to immigrate to the Netherlands because the journey itself lures him, and not because he is short of money or unemployed. Thus the journey becomes an aim in itself, an alluring experience that has the potential to ‘satisfy’ subjects. These films represent the paradox knotted in the psychoanalytical notion of drive, created by the interaction between the drive’s aim and goal. On this point Slavoj Žižek argues that the real purpose of drive is not its goal but its aim or the reproduction of drive itself; this is achieved by returning to its circular path and continuing on this path to and from the goal. Therefore, the movement in this closed circuit remains the actual source of joy (Looking 5). The journey in the three films is the closed circle and we see that this closed circle entangles many characters in these films. Few managed to escape it and others are still entwined in it.⁹ For the characters in Et Après, the fishing boat takes them to their death, the characters in Tangier are still entwined in the closed circle enjoying the free ride in their daydreams, and only Mustafa is able to go to Europe and back to his village in The Lost Donkey.

The film’s depiction of Mustafa as he reaches the Netherlands is intriguing. At this phase, Mustafa in The Lost Donkey and Rahal in Mohamed Ismaïl’s film Ici et Là (Here and There, 2005) try to find the illusive paradise where happiness and joy are everlasting.¹⁰ Yet, after realising their dream of living in Europe, they still feel a void and lack. They begin to realise that their exploration to find the satisfying paradise may be an illusion, a fool’s errand. This conclusion not only shows how fantasies and desires shift, but also

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⁹ Candidates for immigration in Morocco are not the only ones caught in this circle, for those living as migrants in Europe are as well. See footnote 24 in chapter one, where Elwalid Mimoun compares the life of the Moroccan migrants in Europe with Sisyphus: migrants may neither return to Morocco nor feel at home in their host country.

¹⁰ The film Here and There is in Arabic with French subtitles.
demonstrates the effect of the experience of migration on a subject’s identity. Both Rahal and Mustafa undertake a journey in search for the self and try to articulate their identity in an unstable setting.

After reaching Europe migrants may achieve some of their objectives, but their desires always remain unsatisfied. Collected in *The Ego in Freud’s Theory*, Lacan lectures that desire is not fulfilled by effective satisfaction, but by introducing a new fantasy (212-13). In this way the new fantasy makes of everyday things desired objects again and completes the circle. In Karim Traid’a’s film *Onmacht* (1991), the life and condition of the character Ahmed (who is an immigrant living in France) abruptly changes. He dreams of leading an ideal lifestyle, but when he becomes impotent his only dream is to regain his masculinity in order to be able to face his family. Ahmed’s impotence metaphors the failure of many migrants to materialise their desires. They can neither return to their country of origin nor successfully integrate in their host country. The unattainability of desires can also be observed in the film *The Lost Donkey*. As explained above, Mustafa used to see cars, houses, migration, and a new lifestyle in the Netherlands as objects of desire. Nevertheless, when he succeeds at crossing the sea and arriving in the Netherlands he forgets about these objects: overwhelmed by the difficulties he faces in his new host country, he loses interest in owning a house or a car and his desires remain unsatisfied. Shocked by what he discovers in ‘paradise’, he starts to dream of a job and shelter. Here we see how subjects manage their desires. Mustafa’s objects of desire keep shifting from specific objects to other things. In this way, as he fails to achieve his initial goal that held the promise to satisfy him, he sets a new goal to be attained. In fact, subjects continue to desire by projecting their desires on things that promise satisfaction.

The Moroccan film *Ici et Là (Here and There)* depicts the failure of objects of desire to satisfy subjects. Mohammed Ismaïl released the film in 2005. It is a feature film that revolves around the life of a Moroccan immigrant in France, Rahal Benaissa, performed by Hmidou Bensaid. Rahal was married to a French woman but his marriage ends in divorce. Believing that a successful marriage is the key to his happiness, he remarries a Moroccan woman, Fatima (Mouna Fattou). They have three children, Rachid, Samira, and Elbashir. Yet, the new marriage fails to provide Rahal with any happiness. After forty years in Europe Rahal decides to take his family with him and return to Morocco. Convinced they are going on vacation, the family accompanies Rahal to Morocco. After a period of time Rahal’s children and wife begin to realise that Rahal
intends to remain and keep them in Morocco permanently. They take their passports and return to France. Rahal chooses to return to Morocco believing that he will be happier in his birthplace than in Europe. Nonetheless, Morocco fails to provide any happiness for Rahal and his stay is marred by problems caused by his brother (M’barek), performed by Mohamed Elkhalfi, and his own family. Neither his second marriage nor his stay in Morocco satisfies Rahal, but, among these disappointments, he gets a moment to contemplate and seek satisfaction again. Here we see how desired objects fail to provide any satisfaction for subjects, but the failure becomes essential in the constituting of new desire.

The story of Rahal illustrates the failure of a subject to satisfy his or her desires, and how this failure shapes his or her new desires and identity. The film *Here and There* focuses on the intricate relationship between Rahal and his children. The character Rahal reveals the way a relationship between a migrant father and his children can affect the dreams and desires of both parents and children. At the beginning, the film presents Rahal as a character born in Morocco who strives to achieve a balance between his traditions and conditions in France. He respects his Moroccan origins and desires to see his children successful in France. Since all his children are brought up in France, they are exposed to French culture more than Moroccan culture. His son Rachid becomes a criminal and was arrested in a hold up. When his daughter Samira tries to live and act as a French woman, Rahal feels betrayed. He assumes she does not respect Moroccan traditions. In a rage one day, Rahal beats Samira and is sent to jail as a result. After his release he begins to change and so do his desires. He interprets the conduct of his daughter as his own failure to balance between his Moroccan culture and French lifestyle. At this point, Rahal becomes an egocentric character not interested in the success of his children in France anymore. His new desire is to deceive his family and take them to Morocco. He starts to dream about a new lifestyle in Morocco and a way to prevent his family returning to France. At the end of the film, the audience can hardly recognise the Rahal from the beginning of the film. He has completely changed and adopted a new identity in Morocco.

Coincidentally, the failure to achieve any satisfaction is the factor behind the subject’s persistence in seeking desire. Regarding the failure of objects of desire to provide any satisfaction for subjects, Sean Homer writes, ‘Although the desire of the Other always exceeds or escapes the subject, there nevertheless remains something that the subjects can recover and thus sustains him or herself. This something is the *objet petit a*’ (87). Sean
Homer highlights the role the *objet petit a* performs vis-à-vis subjects and desire. Therefore, *objet petit a* not only represents an absence in the subject as indicated above, but also the failure of object of desire to satisfy the subject. In *The Lost Donkey* and *Here and There* nothing seems to satisfy Mustafa and Rahal, yet for these subjects failure, or the *objet petit a*, that represents it still creates the illusion of satisfaction. That is, the *objet petit a* (or the object-cause of desire) can never be attained, and both Mustafa in *The Lost Donkey* and Rahal in *Here and There* have spent a great deal of their time running behind luck and happiness in vain. Still, this *objet petit a* makes of both Mustafa and Rahal desiring subjects, and this act grants temporary ‘hallucinatory satisfaction’ (Lacan, *Ego in Freud’s 212*). Thus the act of desire becomes itself an objective.

Both film narratives of *The Lost Donkey* and *Here and There* underscore the struggle of migrants within a maze of desires to discover the self. The protagonists’ deep desire is to articulate their own identity. Both Mustafa and Rahal are portrayed in *The Lost Donkey* and *Here and There* consecutively as subjects who are lost in a setting they cannot understand. They have dreamt of Europe, but when they realise that they are indeed in Europe they feel bewildered. Mustafa searches for a job, but when he finds one he abandons it. He has struggled hard to arrive in the Netherlands. Once there he becomes a criminal, whose unexpressed wish is to be captured and returned to Morocco. Likewise, Rahal wanted to come to France, but after a while his sole dream becomes his return to Morocco.¹¹ These two examples illustrate the paradox knotted in the experience of migration and its subjects. It is worthwhile to reveal how the desires of migrants sometimes collide and contradict. These desires show the state of mind of many migrants. Both *The Lost Donkey* and *Here and There* illustrate the position of migrants within the journey. They are depicted as miserable and confused subjects who try to make opposites meet and articulate their identity within this absurdity.

Fantasies resemble media to an extent, since they both interconnect with the symbolic order and reality. That is, media operate within a blurred field that endeavours to reflect reality, yet phantasmatic. Correspondingly, fantasies have strong links with both reality and symbolic structure. Fantasies outline the map according to which certain concrete ordinary objects can function as objects of desire in imagination. It is through media that certain fantasies circulate. Similarly, fantasies function as screens whereupon

¹¹ Rahal is an Arabic word that means traveler or migrant. This name indicates that migration forms an important part of this subject’s identity.
desires are manifested and disseminated. In effect *The Lost Donkey* aims to shed light on the phenomenon of illegal immigration from the Rif region as well as the discourse that feeds it.

**Amazigh Identity and Symbolic Constraints**

Riffians in Morocco often immigrate in times of economic or political distress. It is useless to recite the individual reasons that have pushed many individual Imazighen to immigrate. Nevertheless, mentioning the general reasons that have driven many Riffians to immigrate is worthwhile. As indicted in the first chapter of this thesis, Riffians migrated in the past for two major reasons. The first one is economic, which was a major factor in the past. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, unemployment was high and famine common in the Rif region. This economic factor initially pushed many people to immigrate to Algeria and later to Europe. The second reason is a political one: fearing the persecution of agents of the Moroccan regime, many Riffians fled to Europe in the past. It was a wave of migrants or refugees that included artists, activists, and politicians struggling to achieve economic, political, and cultural rights in the Rif area. During that period the Moroccan regime imposed restrictions on Riffians acquiring passports. However, the Moroccan regime has recently realised that immigration is an important policy because it not only alleviates the pressure Riffians exercise on the Moroccan authorities, but it is also a treasure mine for the government. Migrants regularly send remittances—a valuable source of foreign currency—back to their relatives in Morocco. Currently, many Riffians immigrate not out of political havoc or famine, but because they believe that there is a ‘paradise’ overseas.

*The Lost Donkey* was released in 1996, a period when illegal immigration thrived. Although legal immigration was the rule during the 1990s, the scale of illegal immigration from the Rif region to Europe was high too. At the time, the European Union began to impose severe restrictions on legal immigration from outside Europe. Consequently, many Riffians tried to immigrate illegally in Europe. The film is not only a representation of the experience of illegal immigration, but also an exploration into the desires that feed it in the Rif area. The film, through the story of Mustafa, highlights how desires and media contribute to the exit of Imazighen from the Rif. To highlight this point in *The Lost Donkey* I have selected another North African film in which the experience of illegal migration and the functioning of media are central. The film *Harragas (Burners)* is a 2009 feature film
directed by Algerian filmmaker Merzak Alloauche. One of the main characters in the film, Rachid (Nabil Asli), narrates the film. *Harragas*, which I will present below, revolves around a group of friends who want to escape the boredom of their neighbourhood (situated in the Algerian coastal city of Mostaganem).

In *The Lost Donkey* Mustafa and Abdul are two brothers who represent two different ways of thinking. The first subject is full of energy and enthusiasm as far as learning new things is concerned; meanwhile, Abdul is content with his condition. Mustafa’s donkey ears are standing, which indicate his attentiveness and extroversion, while Abdul has a hat on his head that symbolises the limits he imposes on his spectrum of thought. The two brothers reflect two different identities: Mustafa changes and progresses continuously, and Abdul is fixed. Mustafa, regardless of his shortcomings, is eager to discover the world and himself through a journey; meanwhile, Abdul is unwilling to discover the world or himself.\(^\text{12}\)

A great deal of the Moroccan mass media is in the circle of *Almakhzan*, which makes use of media to affect the masses and suit its own interests. Many Moroccans are passive consumers of these media representations. *The Lost Donkey* unravels the influence of these media on Imazighen in the Rif region, as well as the implications of illegal immigration on Amazigh cultural identity. The messages the Moroccan media often spread about immigrants are overstatements. They also depict illegal immigrants—especially those who are repatriated—as a disgrace to their family and society. Being sent back means shame for Mustafa in *The Lost Donkey*. Indeed, illegal immigrants who are sent back usually feel useless vis-à-vis their friends, family, and society. Yet, in *The Lost Donkey*, his father receives Mustafa with festivities. In effect, the acts of the filmmaker, who performs the role of Mustafa (Said Essanoussi) in *The Lost Donkey*, are individual political acts with implications for the whole society. The film aims to shed light on the phenomenon of illegal immigration from the Rif area as well as the regime that encourages it.

The films *The Lost Donkey* and *Harragas* illustrate the way certain media bind the past with the present to validate phenomena like illegal immigration. In other words, the films expose the way media and the system that controls them bridges the past and present.

\(^{12}\) Essanoussi argues that Abdul represents a small category of Riffian society that live either in Morocco or in diaspora. This category is introverted and does not accept innovation and interactions (Interview).
to convince subjects of the smooth transition of events and as justification for the future. Here we see how state-controlled media mask and conceal the socio-historical contexts and present events as if they are natural. Interestingly, the idea of immigration to Europe is not only presented as a natural event but also as an important and fascinating experience, a ticket to paradise. Regarding the conditions required in any ordinary object in order to become and function as object-cause of desire, Žižek writes, ‘Although any object can function as the object-cause of desire—insofar as the power of fascination it exerts is not its immediate property but results from the place it occupies in the structure—we must, by structural necessity, fall prey to the illusion that the power of fascination belongs to the object as such’ (Looking 33). Žižek underlies the idea that the power and importance particular objects acquire is because of their position in the structural system, but this link between the two should be masked. For instance, the idea of migration is fascinating for many North Africans because they are made to believe it is a wonderful experience and a trip to heaven. The films do work to undermine this depiction by introducing the possibility of a disastrous immigration experience. In Harragas, Rachid, describing his decision to immigrate illegally to Europe, remarks, ‘We want to burn like others have before us and others will after us’. Likewise, the first scenes of The Lost Donkey depict migration as a habit Rifffians practiced in the past, and still perform presently. Accordingly, the decisions (of both Mustafa in The Lost Donkey and Rachid in Harragas) to immigrate seem reasonable because the films portray their actions as ordinary and conventional.

Intriguingly, The Lost Donkey reveals the socio-historical contexts of Riffian migration and therefore questions its logic, especially in the light of Moroccan state media. The narrator in The Lost Donkey repeats points out that Mustafa’s family is financially self-sufficient. The narrator also reveals that Mustafa’s family is well respected in his village. The narrator’s emphasis on these two points is meant to show that Mustafa’s family, like many families in the Rif region, leads a normal life. That is to say, while immigration as a consequence of dire socio-economic conditions seems rational, when the narrator claims that Mustafa’s social and economic conditions are comfortable, questions could arise around the role of state-controlled media in urging Imazighen emigration from the Rif area. Here the film depicts emigration from the Rif region as unnatural; consequently, it questions the symbolic authority embedded in the state-controlled media that disseminate

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13 Wealth in the rural community is usually weighed in terms of the possession of land, cattle, and crops.
the idea that the majority of the Rifian population have always migrated regardless of their socio-economic and cultural conditions.

*Harragas* reveals desires as the main reason stimulating people to immigrate, but the power behind it (the media) remains hidden. Ten individuals constitute the group of people who want to immigrate. Five of them originate from the Sahara and the rest from the same neighbourhood in the city of Mostaganem. The audience knows scant details about the reasons that encourage the five individuals from Mostaganem to leave. For instance, the audience knows that Hakim, who is from Mostaganem and a candidate for illegal immigration, is involved in an international network of Islamists. His exit is related to the activities of that network. Nevertheless, not much about the rest of the group is known. Containing a few clues, Rachid describes his neighbourhood as a ‘home for people life forgot, the neighbourhood of boredom, poverty, unemployment, trafficking, births and deaths everyday, where dreams stay just dreams, if you did a poll here 90% would say they want to leave’. Three phrases in this description may summarise the reasons for illegally immigrating: ‘the neighbourhood of boredom’, ‘births and deaths everyday’, and ‘where dreams stay just dreams’. The three phrases demonstrate the narrator’s view that the majority of Mostaganem inhabitants are convinced their own lives are nothing but deadly routine and impasse. In addition, the police officer that tries to immigrate with the group highlights the same point. He alludes to the socio-economic status of the two groups on board the boat and states, ‘it is funny, you all here together, the peasants and daddy’s golden boys’. This quote, in combination with the scenes depicting the friends from Mostaganem in Algeria, demonstrate that Rachid and his friends are educated and previously lead a relatively decent life in Mostaganem. Yet the group decides to immigrate. This group believes that Europe is a place where there is no routine, where dreams materialise instantly, and where even the sun is better than in Mostaganem.

At the symbolic level in *Harragas*, desires and media provide the subjects with an identity and fantasies that sustain this identity. That is to say, the symbolic order provides fantasies that keep Rachid and his friends temporarily ‘satisfied’ in Mostaganem. Rachid,

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14 The use of male and female characters from the northern coastal city of Mostaganem as well as characters coming from the Sahara is to show that international migration affects all of Algerian society.

15 When the boat’s engine breaks down, the group of illegal immigrants are stranded near Spanish shores. When the sun rises Rachid describes the scenery and swears that the Spanish sun ‘smells of paella’.
Nasser, and Iman believe that the paradise overseas might compensate for the deficiencies they think they experience in Mostaganem on a daily basis. They take solace in the future and forget the present. When Rachid arrives at the Spanish shore, he immediately removes his wet clothes and dresses in a suit. Still on the shore he uses his mobile phone and calls a friend in France. He notifies him that he may be there in few days and asks him to prepare beer for celebration. For a moment we believe he has achieved his fantasy. In the next shot we see Rachid sitting on the ground, handcuffed, with two Spanish coastguards at his side. The guards stand on a hill and observe Nasser and Iman swimming to the shore. At this point Rachid has realised that his fantasy has just evaporated. His friends, who are still at sea, are unaware of the Spanish coastguards observing them. They are also not aware that the policeman in Mostaganem observed them. They are oblivious to the fact that they are victims of their own desires.

In contrast to the Moroccan state-controlled media that produce programs that deny the majority of migrants the ability to express themselves, *The Lost Donkey* gives voice to Amazigh migrants and reveals their condition in Europe. There are many homeless Moroccan migrants in Europe who rely on alms to survive. These migrants are neither recognised by ‘host’ countries nor by their country of origin. *The Lost Donkey* draws attention to Mustafa’s case. He is an Amazigh illegal immigrant who shares a shelter with the homeless in Rotterdam. Here the film reveals important aspects of migration that the Moroccan national media ignore. It shows that many Imazighen, who used to lead a decent life in Morocco, end up living on the streets of European cities. What these immigrants imagine as paradise turns to be an illusion, a nightmare.

Throughout *The Lost Donkey* we see how desires, in combination with media, work. Desires promise subjects completion. People believe illegal migration in Europe is the way toward perfection. Mustafa is doing exactly what is expected of him to do: dream about immigration to Europe. Media become the engine for subject’s fantasies of migration. Notably, fantasies keep subjects alive and within the hold of their desires. For instance, the fantasy of migration keeps subjects satisfied with social reality (which is in fact an imaginary satisfaction). In the film we see that Mustafa’s private fantasies play an important role vis-à-vis symbolic authority and society as a whole. In his attempt to realise his fantasies he becomes a model figure other villagers follow. In *Harragas* Rachid, hours before leaving, describes the moment when he was packing his clothes in front of his young
brothers: ‘My brothers saw me a real hero; to them, I was Steven Segal or Bruce Willis.’

Adding to media messages, the private fantasies of subjects contribute significantly to the process of creating new candidates for illegal immigration and sustaining desires. Consequently, desire requires conformity and as a reward it provides subjects with fantasies.

_The Lost Donkey_ portrays the way media create desires that shape and affect Amazigh identity. Regarding the link between media, desires, and identity Mark Pizzato states, ‘children and adults play at becoming whole selves, through the Other’s desires, especially through the mirror-stage rites of today’s mass media screens’ (“Beauty’s Eyes” 85). The Other’s desires, present in mass media, are the engine of individual identities. In fact, media not only produce identities but shape and sustain them. Mustafa’s identity in the film is an example of a product of media. Mustafa decides to sells his family jewellery. The jewellery consists of traditional ornaments that represent Amazigh culture, and their symbolic value within the community is highly prized. Mustafa could have sold cows, sheep, or other commodities, but he sells his family jewellery instead. This act of selling family traditional ornaments is symbolic and it shows the devastating effect of media on Amazigh identity, as it changes their lives forever. Mustafa not only burns his Amazigh identity but also adopted an imaginary identity the media provides him with. He becomes an illegal immigrant, or a shadow, wandering European streets. That is, Mustafa changes his mode of life in the Rif region for the illusion of a paradise that does not exist. When his uncle, who lives in Rotterdam, learns about Mustafa’s selling of the family jewellery, he immediately expels him from his house. The film shows that media encourages people to burn, and the act of burning has made the Imazighen of the Rif area—who used to live in dignity within their community—anonymous subjects.

Reading allegorically, the film _Harragas_ depicts state-controlled media as a vehicle to exert almost total control over subjects in Algeria. Normally, the power of media remains unseen, but _Harragas_ personifies it. In a fantastic approach, the film tries to reveal the functioning of media through personification. From the beginning of the film, a bald man Mustafa (performed by Samir Elhakim), observes the activities of the group of candidates for illegal immigration. Neither the audience nor the characters know anything of this man. Initially, he observes the group from a distance and later he interferes by using

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16 Here the use of ‘brothers’ represents all Algerian brothers and sisters who regard illegal immigrants as heroes.
physical force to control the group. He gathers the group on the shore of Mostaganem and uses his handgun to control them. He is a policeman who becomes a criminal, indicative of the corrupt regime in Algeria. He addresses the group and says, ‘Have you heard of selective migration? Today I am doing the selecting’. Rachid responds, ‘All our life someone has chosen for us, even now’. Rachid’s response shows two important points. First, he is aware that he is under the control of the Algerian totalitarian regime and its media. Second, he fails to resist such control. That is, the unwariness of people to the functioning of media normally makes them vulnerable to their content. Nevertheless, Rachid is aware of the fact he is controlled by the Algerian regime through its media but, strangely, has not resisted or rejected it. The bald man then sends two men away: an old man and a mute disallowed to immigrate with the rest. Here the film shows the way state-controlled media works as far as targeting candidates for immigration is concerned. Only young, healthy people are encouraged to immigrate. On the one hand, the Algerian regime sees no threat in an old man and a mute; on the other hand, European countries only need healthy and cheap labour. Consequently, the weakest have to stay in Algeria.

The Lost Donkey is a political gesture that aims to draw attention to the implications of desires on subjects. Mustafa, in The Lost Donkey, succeeds in immigrating but discovers that there is no paradise. The Dutch authorities repatriate him to Morocco, and when he arrives at his village children start to surround and insult him, shouting, ‘Mustafa is a donkey, Mustafa is crazy’. He becomes the village mockery. In the eyes of the villagers Mustafa is a failure and disgrace for the community. This incident, which occurs at the village’s outskirts, illustrates few important points. First, in his journey in pursuit of the illusion of fame in paradise Mustafa fails to identify the fact that he is a donkey. That is, the insult incident designates Mustafa’s failure to recognise his weaknesses and lack as the source of his unhappiness. Second, Mustafa is portrayed as a donkey because he cannot see that he is under the control of others and their media who want him to immigrate. Thirdly, Mustafa is a donkey because he stops cultivating his land and culture, and assisting his family and society (Essanoussi, interview). Finally, the insult incident is self-reflective. The children insult a donkey by telling him that he is a donkey. The insult seems absurd. Nevertheless, this absurdity is used purposefully to highlight the way symbolic authority rehabilitates and disciplines subjects. If Mustafa were received without insults he would have informed the villagers about the non-existence of paradise. The information would have led the other subjects to question their own private fantasies regarding paradise. It is
an act that threatens the symbolic authority. As Mustafa is received with insults, he forgets to share the information about ‘paradise’. His main concern is his own disgrace and how to handle it, and the secrets of migration and paradise remain hidden within him for the moment.

The insult incident is the act that leads Mustafa to traverse his fantasy. As the children escort Mustafa to his father’s house, Mustafa walks in shame and humiliation. Slavoj Žižek argues that in order to topple the domination of the master, the subject must traverse the fantasy that has established this relationship of domination (Plague 48). Mustafa must traverse his own fantasy and encounter a piece of the traumatic Real in order to break the control imposed on him. To achieve that Mustafa must abandon his dream of achieving perfection in Europe, and recognise that paradise is an imaginary product disseminated partly in Moroccan media and sponsored by Almakhzan. Mustafa must also recognise that paradise can be enjoyed within his village and country. His father observes him from a window. He sees his own son dragging his tail with defeat and embarrassment. This event becomes an embarrassment for the father as well. It is not only Mustafa who traverses the fantasy but his father too, and he does not succumb to the pressure of the villagers. Instead, he decides to organise a feast in honour of his son, an innovative idea in a society used to punishing deported illegal immigrants. The father’s act reveals his disagreement with the idea of denigrating and belittling repatriated illegal immigrants. For him, these returned immigrants are heroes who have broken free from a fantasy and overcome their illusions.

Migration as a journey exposes subjects to the traumatic Real, and consequently teaches them to resist and channel their desires. Near the end of Harragas, the boat’s engine breaks down just before reaching Spain. The group on board have no food or water left. They have no chance of leaving the boat to swim to the shore because they are still under the control of the policeman. They begin to despair, and under the dark of the night one of them attacks the corrupt policeman. Grappling, the two fall overboard and drown in the Mediterranean. Facing part of the traumatic Real pushes these subjects to raise resistance against domination and control. Only under these circumstances does this group react. The political act of the filmmaker is to raise awareness among young Algerians to resist the control of the regime and its media.
There are two subjects in Harragas who traverse their own private fantasies but cannot bear the drive’s monotony. The first one is Omar, who we learn about through his left-behind letter. He is the brother of Iman, who has attempted to immigrate illegally to Europe many times and failed. Omar’s letter reflects the state of mind of a subject who traverses fantasy and moves from desire to the drive’s deadly monotony. In the letter he writes:

At last I am leaving … writing these words I have a strange feeling, I don’t know how it got into my head, my country has become a black spot, that has grown and taken my brain … if I leave I will die, and if I don’t leave I will die, so I am leaving without leaving and I will die, it’s simple that way.

In this letter we see that Omar loses hope completely. Omar tries to leave but he is caught and returned to Algeria. He is caught in a circle of drive, and unable to face the drive’s monotony he commits suicide. The case of Ali, one of the five peasants on board the boat leaving to Spain, is somehow different. Ali cannot swim and feels he is imprisoned in the damaged boat. He recognises that he will not achieve his dream. Facing the traumatic Real overwhelms him. He becomes mad, jumps into the sea, and drowns. Luckily for Mustafa in The Lost Donkey things take a more positive turn.

The last scene in The Lost Donkey is indeed significant. It summarises one of the messages the film aims to reveal. In this scene we see Mustafa sitting together with his brother, father, friends, and villagers enjoying a feast in his honour. This scene shows that joy and pleasure can be found at home (the Rif region) and in one’s own country (Morocco). In his comments on joy, Žižek writes, ‘We always find ourselves in the same position we have tried to escape, which is why, instead of running after the impossible, we must learn to consent our common lot and to find pleasure in the trivia of our everyday life’ (Žižek, Looking 8). Here Žižek alludes to the way subjects experience pleasure believing that something has changed in their lives, which positively affects their existence. Nothing, in fact, has changed, but what creates this joy is what he calls ‘the elusive make-believe’ that drives people to seek change. Therefore, the best way to experience delight is to learn to enjoy what one has and does in one’s daily life. Mustafa, by making the journey, believes he has completely become another subject. He feels reborn and not interested in leaving his family and village again. He is pleased to see his family welcome him.
This scene shows that the acts of characters are individual political acts with implications for the whole community. Speaking of the individual and group and the ethical dimension of psychoanalysis, Lacan claims that ‘there is no satisfaction for the individual outside of the satisfaction of all’ (Ethics 292). Mustafa’s act, staged by the filmmaker, tries to convince people to accept repatriated migrants, with a deterring message for new candidates for illegal immigration. That is to say, the film demonstrates that there is no paradise overseas. It is better for those who try to illegally immigrate to Europe to remain in their village or city and try to take care of their land and culture where the actual paradise is.

I argue The Lost Donkey not only reflects the filmmaker’s views of illegal immigration but also reveals his own limitations. Regarding the role of the filmmaker in what Hamid Naficy categorises as ‘accented films’, Naficy argues that many accented-cinema filmmakers focus on social and political issues to show their political commitment, and this approach may contribute to the decline of the quality of films. There are filmmakers who believe that shooting a few scenes is enough to prove their point, but their carelessness leads to the diminishing of creativity, analysis, and depth (Naficy 127). Here the filmmaker Said Essanoussi performs his identity, which becomes public and political. As a migrant himself, he chooses to address the issue of illegal immigration that has led to a Rif exodus. I do not read Essanoussi’s case as carelessness: his shortcomings in the film are derived from the fact that he was and still is an amateur filmmaker. Examining the quality and content of the film corroborates Naficy’s analysis of films that filmmakers create merely to make a political point. Yet Said Essanoussi, as with many other accented-cinema filmmakers, makes use of his experiences and interactions with both homeland and host country to create a performance with political implications within his community and society.

Conclusion

In addition to its entertainment, The Lost Donkey tries to show young Riffian Imazighen the effects of immigration on the Amazigh community and its cultural identity. Importantly, it highlights the role mass media in the Rif region play in the recruitment process of illegal immigration. The film also reveals that it is better for Imazighen of the Rif area to live in
dignity and respect in their own village rather than leaving illegally to Europe to live as anonymous subjects continuously hiding from the police.

Given that many migrants live in the uncertainty brought on through the phenomenon of migration, many Amazigh films try to highlight this ambiguity and observe its implications. The example of Mustafa in The Lost Donkey is a case familiar to many Imazighen who are lured by the experience of immigration depicted by the Moroccan mass media. As they start to dream of Europe, candidates for illegal immigration start to feel the daze. They do not know what they want, and if they do have a goal they forget it on their way to obtaining it. The film portrays how Amazigh migrants succeed to burn their identity and cross the Mediterranean, but they usually fail to escape the anonymity of being immigrants. They become nameless and forgotten individuals wandering Europe.

The film shows another side of the process of immigration. Migration can take subjects on a journey where they face themselves and their psyche. They traverse fantasy, face the traumatic Real, and reconcile themselves with their deficiencies and lack. That is, the subject who ventures into the journey of migration does not articulate his or her fantasy, but learns a way to live with lack. Mustafa, as a Riffian Amazigh, starts his journey as a foolish young man who desires to leave to Europe. At the end of a long journey that takes him from the Rif region to Europe and back he becomes wiser and cleverer, living happily among his family in his village.

I offer an interpretation of the film The Lost Donkey to highlight how many candidates for immigration endlessly struggle with desires and fantasies when trying to achieve the illusion of an ideal life. I shed light on the emotional state of Amazigh migrants as they involved themselves in the process of migration, especially illegal immigration. I draw attention to the way their identity evolves in and during their journeys and the way these subjects learn to comprehend and contain their uncertainty.

While Harragas is mainly political, as it highlights the corrupt regime that pushes people to emigrate from Algeria, The Lost Donkey is more didactic, since it informs Imazighen in the Rif and diaspora about issues like Amazigh cultural identity and migration. Nevertheless, The Lost Donkey also has political aspects, because it highlights the role of media in the process of migration and the powers that control these media. While The Lost Donkey was released more than 15 years ago, the rise in popularity of other media
(especially the Internet) shapes the experience of migration and its impact on Imazighen’ cultural identity into other meanings and other dimensions.