

ATLANTIC. - synopsis

In zijn verlangen naar vrijheid is de jonge visser Fettah vastberaden om op zijn surfplank via de Atlantische Oceaan naar Europa te reizen. Een poëtische en visueel overweldigende speelfilm over het verlangen naar vrijheid om te gaan en staan waar je wilt en te zijn wie je wil zijn. ATLANTIC. van regisseur (en surfer) Jan-Willem van Ewijk wordt geproduceerd door Bero Beyer (PARADISE NOW), de cast bestaat onder andere uit Thekla Reuten en de Marokkaanse acteur Mohamed Majid (INCENDIES, SYRIANA).

Nederland, België, Duitsland, Marokko | 2014 | 94 minuten

Fettah habite un village marocain du bord de mer, envahi chaque été par une horde d'Européens séduisants et branchés venus y faire de la planche à voile et profiter de la vie. Au cours d'un été particulièrement mémorable, le jeune homme se rapproche de la belle Alexandra. Après le départ de la jeune femme, Fettah décide de partir la rejoindre pour ne plus se sentir prisonnier dans son propre village, seul sur sa planche à voile, dans un périple des plus risqués en direction du continent européen....

Pays-Bas, Belgique, Allemagne, Maroc | 2014 | 94 minutes



ATLANTIC. - cast

Fettah Lamara	Fettah
Thekla Reuten	Alexandra
Mohamed Majd.....	Hakim
Boujmaa Guilloul.....	Boujmaa
Hassna Souidi	Rahma
Soufyan Sahli.....	Soufyan
Wisal Hatimi	Wisal
Driss Hakimi.....	oude visser / pecheur agé
Jan-Willem van Ewijk.....	Jan

ATLANTIC. - crew

regisseur / réalisateur	Jan-Willem van Ewijk
producent / producteur	Bero Beyer
scenario / scenario	Jan-Willem van Ewijk
.....	Abdelhadi Samih
director of Photography.....	Jasper Wolf n.s.c.
montage	Mona Bräuer
sound recordist	Christian Monheim
sound editor.....	Gervaise Demeure
sound mixer	Franco Piscopo
componist / compositeur.....	Piet Swerts
muziek / musique.....	Mourad Belouadi
line producers	Marianne Lambert
.....	Souâd Lamriki
associate producers	Nöelle Haitisma
.....	Steven Novick
.....	Aron Thompson
.....	Philip Meyers
.....	Karl Dillon
.....	Hans Oerlemans
associate producers for NTR	Marina Blok
.....	Sandra Beerends
.....	Astrid Prickaerts
co-producenten / co-producteurs.....	Marion Hänsel
.....	Fabian Massah
.....	Jan-Willem van Ewijk

This film was made possible in part with support from the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. Participant of the Binger FilmLab. Presented at Cinemart of the International Film Festival Rotterdam. Presented at Les Arcs Works in Progress. Recipient of NPP Kodak development award. Recipient of Filmmore Works in Progress award.



Fettah is a dreamer. For years he has watched the European windsurfers come and go. Every summer when the Northern winds start blowing, they visit his tiny fishing village on the Moroccan Atlantic coast where a stone reef creates the perfect waves. Fettah was quick to make friends with them and eagerly adopted their free way of speaking and their liberal views on the world. And he has become an incredible windsurfer himself, learning his skills on the old equipment they left behind.

But at the end of each summer, his European friends leave and during the long, empty winters he often finds himself longing to be with them, dreaming of a life far away. He knows he is stuck. He cannot afford to migrate to Europe and his aging father has become increasingly dependent on him. So over time, Fettah has learned to keep his dreams to himself.

Then one summer his Dutch friend Jan brings his girlfriend Alexandra to the village for the first time and they stay with Fettah and his father. Fettah is immediately taken by her mysterious, introverted nature and she clearly enjoys being around him. She reminds him of his mother, who drowned when he was a child, and he finds himself slowly falling in love. But he knows she is out of reach and will soon be off to Europe again.

When he watches her car disappear in the distance at the end of summer, something inside him breaks. For weeks, he aimlessly wanders the empty village streets. The generosity of his father, the jokes of his buddy Sufyan, the patient love of his cousin Rahma, even the complete admiration of his biggest little fan, Wisal, who is like a daughter to him... they no longer fill him with joy. Instead, they make the village feel like an inescapable prison.

But the human spirit often shines most brightly in its darkest hour and the pain and desperation push Fettah to set in motion a bold and adventurous plan. When the Southern winds of autumn arrive, he packs his backpack, puts on his wetsuit, takes his windsurf board and sets sail for Europe.

The wind carries him North along the Atlantic coast, past Casablanca and out onto open water, as he attempts to circumvent the heavily guarded waters around Gibraltar. Soon he is surrounded by the endless ocean; the mother of all life but also the mirror behind which his own mother disappeared, the mirror in which Alexandra's image is fading, the mirror in which he now sees himself clearer and clearer. Far from land, alone and disoriented, Fettah finds that the pursuit of his dream does not come without sacrifice.

This film was made possible in part with support from the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.



Born in Holland and raised partly in California, Jan-Willem van Ewijk became fascinated with spaceships after seeing Star Wars as a child. He went on to study aerospace engineering and graduated as an airplane designer from the Delft University of Technology. He worked for Airbus in France, Beechcraft in the US and Bombardier Aerospace in Canada, before being lured away to the world of big business and big money in London, where he worked as a business consultant and investment banker.

But he felt something essential was missing from his life. At the age of 33, he decided to quit his job, sell his apartment and pursue another passion that had been with him ever since he saw Star Wars. He wrote a script, bought a video camera, casted his friends and family as actors and crew and made his first feature film NU. Shot on a shoestring budget of \$20,000, the film won awards for best debut feature at the Dutch Film Festival, best feature at the European Independent Film Festival and was selected to compete at the Montreal World Film Festival and the Seattle International Film Festival. Variety called it "A small gem."

Jan-Willem was invited to join the Sundance Lab with his second feature Atlantic., about a Moroccan windsurfer going on a long ocean journey. Atlantic was awarded the Kodak / NPP Development Award and the Filmmore Works In Progress Award at the Dutch film festival. Jan-Willem has just finished shooting and editing this film, which features non-actors in the lead, alongside experienced actors like Thekla Reuten (THE AMERICAN / IN BRUGES) and the late Mohamed Majd (SYRIANA / INCENDIES).



Director's statement

In the spring of 2002, I visited Morocco for the first time and was immediately taken by this beautiful country. In search of good windsurf spots, I ended up in the small fishing village of Moulay Bouzarqtoune. There was a group of children and young men hanging around us most of the day. Some of them had learned how to windsurf exceptionally well, sharing old, damaged equipment left behind by the tourists. Years later, I returned to Morocco and became friends with several of these local windsurfers. The better I got to know them, the clearer it became how confusing their living circumstances were. On the one hand they lived in this beautiful surfer's paradise. On the other hand they lived on the brink of poverty in the face of all our wealth and freedom. They were better surfers than we were but could not afford good equipment. They were friends with European women who wore bikinis on the beach, but they were too poor to marry the women from their village. Western culture had infiltrated every aspect of their lives, yet they could never truly be part of it. They watched us come and go, but for them the borders were closed.

It was during this visit that I first had the idea to make a film about these Moroccan windsurfers. I imagined what would happen if one of them would windsurf to Europe.

I worked with my friends from the village to come up with a story which I then developed into a script at Robert Redford's Sundance Lab and the Binger Filmlab. I also knew that I wanted people from the village to act in the lead roles as much as possible, and was extremely lucky to find that the person who had been the inspiration for the main character, Fettah Lamara, had a real, raw acting talent.

Together with an international crew of Moroccans, Dutch, Belgians and Germans we set out on the epic journey to shoot the film. I wanted everything to feel as real as possible, so we spent three weeks chasing Fettah on his windsurf board through the gigantic waves of the Atlantic. It was a gruesome adventure that pushed everyone to the edge of what they could take and beyond, but it was also an incredibly deep and rewarding spiritual experience that led to a very special film.

"When I felt the sea under my feet for the first time I forgot about everything. It was incredible."

ATLANTIC.'s leading man Fettah Lamara was born in Rabat, Morocco's in 1974. As a young boy, Fettah was interested in everything but school.

When he was about twenty years old, his uncle decided to arrange a job for him at the local sailing club. The minute Fettah discovered the ocean he was hooked. It wasn't long until Fettah became a sailing star, winning the top Moroccan youth sailing award several years in a row. He soon discovered windsurfing and it changed his life. "When I felt the sea under my feet for the first time I forgot about everything. It was incredible." At twenty-two, Fettah moved to Essaouira, Morocco's windsurf capital, and then to the village of Moulay Bouzerktoun, a dedicated, hard core windsurfing spot on the Atlantic coast known for its gigantic waves.

Fettah trained hard and won several Moroccan wave windsurfing championships. He also started his own restaurant and inn, the Lawama, and this where he met Jan-Willem van Ewijk for the first time in 2008.

Jan-Willem frequently visited Moulay to set up his film project and soon he involved Fettah, who by that time had become a close friend. During the casting for ATLANTIC. Jan-Willem started including Fettah in the auditions and rehearsals it soon became evident he had found his man.

None of the more experienced actors had the emotional baggage needed for the role, nor could they pull off the intense physical acting involved, let alone the actual windsurfing on the ocean. ATLANTIC. will be Fettah's feature film debut.



Immediately after completing her studies, Thekla Reuten was assuming leading roles in major national and international film and theatre productions.

With her extraordinary acting talent, the actress navigates with great ease between the cultural distinctions of different productions. She speaks five languages (German, English, French, Dutch and Italian) and is currently one of the most well-known actresses in Europe. Since the beginning of her career, the actress has demonstrated a special, authentic way of acting and an intuitive ability to transform. Her characters in film and theatre are multi-faceted expressions of human motives. Her sublime and intelligent acting testifies to an above average intuition for the essence of the figures. With a deep understanding for the idiosyncrasies of the characters, Thekla Reuten creates her own approach to work out the contradiction, humanity and ambiguity of the figures genuinely, and to lend them authenticity and a closeness to real life. Her outstanding performances have made her an internationally sought after actress for film and television. Thus, she appears in many major and ambitious television productions such as BELLA BETTIEN (AVRO, Netherlands), HIDDEN (BBC, Great Britain), RESTLESS (BBC, Great Britain), and SLEEPER CELL (Showtime, USA). In film, she has captivated both audiences and the press in successes such as DA GEHT NOCH WAS (There is More to Come), HET DINER, HOTEL LUX, IN BRUGES or THE AMERICAN, as well as the Oscar nominated films EVERYBODY'S FAMOUS! and TWIN SISTERS. Coming next, she can be seen in the Dutch movie ATLANTIC.

and the British movie production THE LEGEND OF LONGWOOD in the role of Lisa Miller. Thekla Reuten actively supports the organizations 'The Green Film Making Project' and 'Terre des Hommes'.



ATLANTIC. – Bero Beyer (producer)

Bero Beyer is an independent producer based in the Netherlands. Through his company Augustus Film (created in 2000) he has produced and co-produced a number of award winning films, like RANA'S WEDDING, which premiered in the Semaine de la Critique of the Cannes film festival 2002 and the first Palestinian Oscar nominated feature film PARADISE NOW (2005). In 2008 Bero co-produced the Un Certain Regard entry and Palestinian Oscar submission SALT OF THIS SEA by director Annemarie Jacir, which was lead produced by JBA, France.

Other co-productions include Lifelong by director Asli Ozge (MEN ON THE BRIDGE) set in Istanbul, produced by the Turkish Bulut Film with the German Razor Film and with ZDF/ARTE. The film had its international premiere in the Panorama section of the Berlinale 2013. The Indian- European coproduction QISSA by director Anup Singh set in Punjab was produced with Cologne based production house Heimat Film, coproduced by Thierry Lenouvel's CineSud, NFDC and ARTE. The film starring Irrfan Khan won the NETPAC award after its premiere at TIFF 2013.

As of January 2013 Bero has commenced a three-year term as Film Consultant for the Dutch Film Fund, with priority Arthouse films and International Co-productions.



Jan-Willem van Ewijk's *Atlantic.* tells the story of a man so spellbound by the lure of greener pastures that he tries to windsurf 300 miles to get there. There are some mesmerizing technical feats along the way, and *Atlantic.* is both beautifully mythical and existential.

Cineuropa: There are some stunning aerial shots in *Atlantic.*; could you tell us how you achieved them?

Jan-Willem van Ewijk: Well, windsurfing is really fast, so I knew we'd need a helicopter to capture stable wide shots. We didn't have a big budget, so we crowdfunded \$35,000, and that gave us one day with a helicopter. You can imagine how stressful that was. But yeah, the camera was mounted on a "Stab C" camera mount, which keeps everything really fluent and steady. It was expensive, but we wanted the best.

Then you have some jerky, intimate footage right in amongst the waves, too.

Yes, there, Jasper the cameraman was using a "Scubacam", a sort of rubber bag. So we had the Alexa in this bag. It was pretty epic - I mean, he's really in the waves. We also had a "Dobber", which is like a special rubber tire with a little metal frame that holds the camera above the water.

Were you trying to emulate extreme sports films in these scenes?

Yes: windsurfers have a rich culture of film. They're often filming themselves with GoPros, so I wanted to capture that feeling for sure. But I wanted it to be cinematic. Actually, the shots where they're flying overhead are done with a huge camera: Jasper would operate the camera, and I'd point him in the right direction. So the two of us would be in these giant waves. We both lost about ten kilos doing it! It really gives a feeling of being in the action, though. Then, with this cinematic quality and the story, I believe we transcended the sports film.

Were you also trying to blend fiction with documentary by acting in your film and using non-professional actors?

Very much so. I love fiction and write scripts; but when I shoot, I look for real things, which are not in the script. Or I look for some sense of reality by casting real people. And Fattah, the lead actor, was amazing. He was essentially the king of the village, because he'd started this little restaurant where surfers would come. But whenever I saw him, he'd be staring out to sea, and there was this absence in his eyes that I loved. He inspired the script a lot, so I was super happy when I saw he could act.

Your film is quite focused on your Moroccan lead and Moroccan culture, but it's funded by the Dutch Film Fund. Do you think the DFF is now promoting diversity on the big screen?

I think they are more and more. It's still difficult to make a non-Dutch-language film and get it funded mainly by the Dutch Film Fund. They obviously want to invest primarily in Dutch culture, but I hope the Dutch Film Fund will start focusing more on investing in Dutch talent, and not just on telling Dutch stories.

What made you tell the story of an African émigré?

We always said this was not an immigration or migration narrative. I wanted to make a movie about the boys in this village and their dreams (which are mostly about Europe because they'd heard about it so much). I find people who come to Europe were often doing okay, but they just have this incredible desire for another life or place. I wanted to explore this.

That seems like a very fundamentally human story. Were you influenced by classical mythology in this respect?

That's a nice question because it makes me realise that I haven't spoken about this in a long time. But my co-writer, Abdelhadi Samih, who I met in the village we shot in, loved classical stories. He knew all the classics and would often speak about Icarus or *The Odyssey*. So that definitely must have made its way in.

You also developed the film in conjunction with the Sundance Lab. There does seem to be something of the American Dream in *Atlantic.*; do you think it has potential to sell to the American market?

[Laughs.] Of course, I should tell you, "Yes." But yes, there is quite a heroic, American aspect to it, with the guy following his dream until the very end. The film is definitely influenced by the Sundance Lab and my own background of living in America as a kid, too.

Atlantic., de Jan-Willem van Ewijk raconte l'histoire d'un homme qui rêve d'une vie meilleure et tente de parcourir 500 km en planche à voile pour y arriver. Il réalise des prouesses techniques incroyables en chemin. Atlantic. est une histoire profondément existentielle qui a des accents de mythe.

Cineuropa : Il y a dans Atlantic. des plans aériens stupéfiants. Comment les avez-vous réalisés ?

Jan-Willem van Ewijk : En fait, la planche à voile est un sport très rapide, c'est pourquoi je savais que nous aurions besoin d'un hélicoptère pour obtenir des images larges et stables. Nous n'avions pas un gros budget, alors nous avons organisé un financement participatif en vue de récolter 35 000 dollars, ce qui nous a permis de louer un hélicoptère une journée. Vous pouvez imaginer à quel point c'était stressant. La caméra a été placée sur un pied Stab C, de sorte qu'elle a pu enregistrer des images fluides et stables. Ce matériel nous a coûté cher, mais nous voulions le meilleur qui existe.

Vous avez aussi tourné des séquences saccadées au milieu des vagues.

Oui, Jasper, le caméraman, utilisait une Scubacam, qui est une sorte de sac en caoutchouc dans lequel on a pu loger notre caméra Alexa. L'opération a été vraiment incroyable : il était vraiment dans les vagues ! Nous avions également une Dobber, qui ressemble à un pneu de caoutchouc entouré d'un cadre métallique qui maintient la caméra à la surface de l'eau.

Avez-vous tenté d'imiter les films sur les sports extrêmes dans ces scènes ?

Oui, les véliplanchistes ont une tradition de films très riche. Ils se filment souvent à l'aide de GoPro, c'est pourquoi je voulais absolument capturer cette sensation. Mais je voulais que ce soit cinématographique. Les scènes surplombantes ont donc été tournées avec une caméra énorme : Jasper la maniait et je lui disais dans quelle direction la tourner. Nous étions au milieu de vagues énormes (nous avons tous les deux perdu environ 10 kilos pendant le tournage !), mais le résultat est qu'on a vraiment le sentiment d'être immergé dans l'action. Du fait de l'approche cinématographique et de l'histoire, je pense que nous avons largement transcendé le film de sport.

Est-ce pour mélanger fiction et documentaire que vous jouez dans le film et avez décidé de faire appel à des acteurs débutants ?

Tout à fait. J'adore la fiction et j'adore écrire des scénarios, mais quand je tourne un film, je recherche le vrai, qui ne se trouve pas dans le scénario. J'essaie aussi de reproduire la réalité en choisissant des hommes et des femmes de la vie de tous les jours. Celui qui joue Fettah, le personnage principal, a été incroyable. C'est en quelque sorte le roi du village, depuis qu'il a ouvert ce petit restaurant dans lequel les surfeurs viennent manger. À chaque fois que je le voyais, il était en train de fixer la mer, avec dans son regard une absence que j'adorais. Il m'a beaucoup inspiré pour écrire le scénario. J'ai donc été totalement ravi de voir qu'il pouvait jouer la comédie.

Votre film se concentre sur ce personnage principal marocain et sa culture, et pourtant il a été financé par le Fonds hollandais pour le cinéma. Le fonds a-t-il une politique de soutien de la diversité ?

Je pense que c'est de plus en plus le cas. Il reste difficile de faire un film dans une langue autre que le néerlandais et d'avoir pour source de financement principale le Fonds hollandais pour le cinéma, car l'idée du fonds est avant tout d'investir dans la culture hollandaise, mais j'espère qu'il va tenter d'investir davantage dans les talents locaux au lieu de se concentrer sur les intrigues hollandaises.

Pourquoi avez-vous choisi de raconter l'histoire d'un immigrant africain ?

Nous avons toujours dit qu'il ne s'agissait pas d'un récit sur l'immigration ou la migration. Je voulais faire un film sur les garçons de ce village et sur leurs rêves (qui portent principalement sur l'Europe, car ils en entendent beaucoup parler). Mon impression est que ceux qui arrivent à rallier l'Europe sont ceux qui s'en sortaient bien dans leur pays, mais c'est leur désir de construire une nouvelle vie, leur envie d'ailleurs, qui est incroyable. C'est cela que j'ai voulu explorer.

Cette histoire est fondamentalement humaine. Avez-vous été influencé par la mythologie antique ?

C'est une question intéressante parce qu'elle me rappelle que cela fait longtemps que je n'ai pas abordé ce sujet. En effet, mon co-scénariste, Abdelhadi Samih, que j'ai rencontré dans le village où nous avons tourné, adore les récits mythologiques : il les connaît tous et parlait souvent, pendant le travail, de l'Odyssée et du mythe d'Icare. C'est certainement pour cela que ces motifs se retrouvent dans le film.

Vous avez également développé ce long métrage grâce au Sundance Lab, et Atlantic. renvoie aussi au rêve américain ; pensez-vous que ce film se vendra bien sur le marché américain ?

[Rires] Bien sûr, je devrais vous répondre "oui", car on retrouve en effet une dimension héroïque assez américaine dans l'histoire de cet un homme qui poursuit son rêve jusqu'à la fin. Ce projet a sans nul doute été influencé par le Sundance Lab et par ma propre expérience, étant donné que j'ai passé mon enfance aux États-Unis.

Logistics are extraordinary in the visually stunning ATLANTIC.

“Logistics are extraordinary in Atlantic., even by the photogenic standards of extreme sports. In the visually stunning ATLANTIC., the ocean is frame, medium and subject. It is also the barrier to a Moroccan windsurfer who seeks a life beyond his impoverished village. Jan-Willem van Ewijk’s hybrid feature in documentary style is a radiant essay and a reality check on the relative experiences of beauty.” - **David D’Arcy, ScreenDaily**

Incredibly Beautiful!

“Director Jan-Willem van Ewijk, who happens to be an experienced windsurfer as well, does a fantastic job of capturing Fettah’s lonely journey across the ocean in Atlantic. The vast landscape of ocean, and the backdrop of a setting sun, is incredibly beautiful. Fettah Lamara does an outstanding job of sharing his emotion with the audience, making sure that these silent moments still carry an emotional kick”

“This is a film where very little really happens, but at the same time, it has a lot to say. It’s certainly a beautiful film, but the very relaxed, and quiet nature of the story may turn some viewers off.” - **William Brownridge, Toronto Film Scene**

<http://thetfs.ca/2014/09/07/tiff-2014-review-atlantic/#.VOcX1flwtcR>

“With breathtaking cinematography and honest portrayals of love and poverty, ATLANTIC. provides a deep catharsis pulling the viewer further and further into its tied.” - **KJ Mullins, newz4u**

“The textures and images that I saw on the screen really resonated with me.” - **Howie Movshovitz / University of Denver/ Starz FilmCentre USA, Denver**

“Elegiac, Poetic Sea-Faring Adventure ‘Atlantic.’”

“Gorgeously shot and with a fine performance from Lamara, “Atlantic.” showcases an interesting community in a lovely part of the world, and creates a poetic and profoundly melancholy tale of one man’s onerous journey in seeking something more for himself. Is it adventure? Love? It’s hard to tell, but it’s lovely, if sad, to watch.” – **Katie Walsh, Indiewire**

<http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/marrakech-film-festival-review-elegiac-poetic-sea-faring-adventure-atlantic-20141210>



VARIETY

A sensitive and lyrical look at a Moroccan windsurfer who falls in love with long distances.

Jay Weissberg

Brief plot descriptions are often deceptive, which is why categorizing “Atlantic.” as a windsurfing movie, or even an immigration drama, fails to capture the sensitivity and lyricism that sophomore helmer Jan-Willem van Ewijk and d.p. Jasper Wolf bring to this engaging, generally restrained pic. Beautifully shot on the Moroccan coast, the film tells of a local windsurfer whose frequent association with Euro travelers adds a highly charged pull to the already palpable draw of departure. Atmospheric, at times impressionistic while still firmly tied to a discernible plot, “Atlantic.” is sailing smoothly in fest waters, and could see a small Euro release.

Perhaps there’s too much whispered voiceover from Fettah (Fettah Lamara), and the introduction of choral voices into Piet Swerts’ sweeping music is definitely unnecessary. Yet tangible rewards come from the way van Ewijk evokes the tug-of-war tension between a connection to place and a yearning for what lies beyond. He’s also fortunate in casting Lamara, a talented tyro whose professional training in windsurfing enabled him to meet the brutal demands of the waves while maintaining a sense of character.

Fettah is a fisherman during the off-season and a windsurfing guide when the tourists come, lured by the famed waves of his village, Moulay Bouzarqtoune. Each year he makes friends with the visitors, and each year they leave. Jan (van Ewijk) is there with his g.f., Alexandra (Thekla Reuten), and Fettah falls for the young woman, despite knowing her unavailability. When they depart, he feels it’s time for him to leave Morocco as well, training his mind and body to withstand what will be an arduous journey.

That’s more or less it in terms of plot, but the director, together with co-scripter Abdelhadi Samih, fills the narrative with telling details that make the characters full-bodied figures even when they have little to do. For Fettah, his inner life is verbalized through voiceovers, addressed to young Wisal (Wisal Hatimi) whom he assures won’t be abandoned in thought, and whom he enjoins to watch over the village when he’s gone. Fettah can’t explain why he has this urge to leave: “You who live beyond the horizon, why do you have such power over me?” he asks himself.

Unlike numerous Moroccan films addressing the desperation of so many would-be emigrants, “Atlantic.” doesn’t identify economic or social reasons for Fettah’s need to move on (aside from a drop in fish stocks). Some may suggest that’s because the director is Dutch rather than a local, making him less connected to the pressing crisis in the country, yet by fashioning his protag as less of a stereotyped everyman, van Ewijk allows him to live and breathe as a person rather than a symbol. Certainly knowledge of the immigration issue is practically a prerequisite for a full appreciation, but since Fettah isn’t limited to a particular social problem, his desires are given the kind of free range one expects from a guy who spends a lot of time windsurfing.

Nevertheless, the film remains very site-specific, and its visuals are grounded in Morocco’s coastal landscape. Expansive scenes of nature alternate with shots of immediate intimacy, so that gliding camerawork — including stunning helicopter shots — gives way to closeups generally lensed above, or below, or to the side, but rarely straight-on. A large part of the film’s success comes from the way it captures the symbiotic relationship between Fettah and the waves, and the way he plays within nature’s rhythms. Exhilarating windsurfing shots won’t disappoint those expecting that sort of thing, yet there’s far more here than surfer thrills.

Music, often consisting of minor key strings, can be a touch overdone. The period in the title is unexplained (van Ewijk also used the punctuation in his debut feature, “Nu.”), and probably not worth the semiotic guesswork of wondering whether it has some deeper meaning relating to ending one stage of life and starting another.

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

The second feature of Dutch filmmaker Jan-Willem van Ewijk sends an enigmatic Moroccan fisherman on a windsurfing trip to Europe.

Boyd van Hoeij

A lovesick Moroccan fisherman in his thirties decides to windsurf to Europe in *Atlantic.*, the second feature of Dutch investment banker-turned-director Jan-Willem van Ewijk. Gorgeously photographed by cinematographer Jasper Wolf, the film provides a real sense of space and being lost in the great (and wet) wide open, though in terms of character, there's only a vague and very arty outline where a living and breathing human being should be. On account of its unusual and intriguing set-up and immersive visuals, the film managed to sneak into the lineup of the recent Toronto Film Festival, though *Fortissimo* will have a hard time selling this beyond the usual festival suspects.

Fettah (played by windsurfer Fettah Lamara) is the adult son of a fisherman from the southern Atlantic coast of Morocco. As it slowly emerges from a whispery and pretentious voice-over — almost as pretentious as that full stop at the end of the film's title — and what little dialogue the film has to offer, Fettah misses his late mother and falls one-sidedly in love with the bottle-blonde Alexandra (Thekla Reuten), the girlfriend of Jan (played by the director himself), a Dutch tourist who's renting a room at the home of Fettah's family and who, like Fettah, is besotted with windsurfing.

That's basically it in terms of plot. A basic skeleton is provided by van Ewijk and editor Mona Brauer's decision to chronologically follow Fettah's trip north along the Moroccan coast and then onto the wide-open ocean (some 180 miles) as he struggles with the elements, with his equipment and with a certain loneliness, which might be relieved by a passing fisherman who'll happily share his sardines with him. Several dreams and memories serve as flashbacks to fill in some missing bits and pieces of the story, though the all-present voice-over more often than not remains enigmatic. It takes a long time to figure out the identity of Wisal, to whom Fettah addresses himself several times, for example, and sentences such as "Who are you beyond the horizon and why do you have such power over me?" provide a sense of being artfully vague and affected but no real poetry or psychological insight.

Even more problematic is the fact that the answer to this question, as well as the many others that Fettah asks himself, aren't even clear at the end of the film. The windsurfer's ostensibly chasing an idea of Alexandra, but the quiet if obviously resourceful and resilient Fettah hardly seems delusional enough to want to attempt the near-impossible and defy nature simply to be on the same continent as a woman who might remind him of his mother but who's already taken and lives somewhere unknown.

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it's all the things that *Atlantic.* is not that are refreshing. It's not simply a story of a man whose brain has been taken over by his penis, nor a tale of an African immigrant escaping to Europe in the hope of a better future. It's also not a realistic survival-at-sea story à la *All Is Lost*, or a fantasy-filled one, à la *The Life of Pi*. But the fact that it's almost impossible to pin down what it actually does want to be doesn't help matters — quite the contrary, as its arty longueurs and vague faux-philosophizing only seem to underline how shallow and devoid of meaning the entire enterprise is if one starts listing the very few concrete elements that the film provides. The fact that Lamara is such a blank slate doesn't help either.

Thankfully, the gorgeous cinematography provides plenty of eye candy, with masterful overhead shots and plenty of between-the-waves action that showcase Lamara's windsurfing prowess. A few shots annoyingly draw attention to the camera operators as they bob on different waves than the subject they are filming but overall, *Atlantic.* provides a you-are-there sensation that very few films set on vast expanses of water can rival. Mourad Belouadi's songs provide some welcome local flavor without becoming too clichéd, though the same cannot be said of Piet Swerts' score, which aims for something transcendental but includes some very odd passages, notably a bit with what sounds like a choir, which very inappropriately threatens to turn Fettah into a kind of Christian martyr in a wetsuit.

SCREEN DAILY

In the visually stunning *Atlantic*, the ocean is frame, medium and subject. It is also the barrier to a Moroccan windsurfer who seeks a life beyond his impoverished village. Jan-Willem van Ewijk's hybrid feature in documentary style is a radiant essay and a reality check on the relative experiences of beauty.

David D'Arcy

The hymn to the grace of windsurfing on the open ocean should find all sorts of exposure after a long journey on the festival circuit. The film's oblique and unique perspective on the immigration crisis on the high seas between North Africa and Europe will also help get it attention. *Atlantic's* long lyrical introduction as a ride on the wind into the open ocean belies the film's complexity. This is extreme sport with a conscience.

At its core is Fettah, a 30-something windsurfer, living at the water's edge, who befriends the Europeans who migrate annually to surf the big waves on Morocco's windy coast and leave gear behind for him when they depart. Too poetic and ethnographic for a conventional sports slot, *Atlantic* will win over audiences with its extraordinary cinematography by Jasper Wolf.

Fettah ventures miles offshore (as does Wolf's camera) and somersaults over enormous waves. He finds kindred spirits in that corps of white surfer-pilgrims from Europe. Van Ewijk and cinematographer Jasper Wolf find a dazzling aesthetic in their sport, which overlaps with the radiant beauty of the water. But *Atlantic* aims at more than a pure aesthetic.

This visual tour de force has a story. Fettah makes his meager living on the water, helping his father fish from a tiny boat. Desperately poor, smitten with the blonde girlfriend (Thekla Reuten) of a windsurfer comrade (played by van Ewijk), he sets out for Europe on a board with a sail.

His journey ends in grim frustration - adrift without water, far from home. The Moroccan friend (and a host) to the outsiders who surf for fun is just another African when he sets out to reach another land.

Atlantic could have made its argument about the ocean as a boundless beautiful horizon and a unbreachable enclosure in a short film, but van Ewijk seizes on the feature length to explore the world of Fettah and his family, reflecting on their decades of wisdom about the sea. The film also observes the young man's closeness to a young woman in the village whom he would have married, if he had an income and if he weren't dreaming of Europe.

Every shot in *Atlantic* carries the emotions of hope and longing, without pitying the man who sacrifices himself to the goal of reaching a place that, for better or worse, promises to offer more than home does. This every-athlete is also the every would-be immigrant - a different Moroccan from the one who drowns trying to make a similar journey, yet still doomed to a lower status because of his origins.

Logistics are extraordinary in *Atlantic*, even by the photogenic standards of extreme sports. Van Ewijk's team proves that this genre can be about far more than turning graceful somersaults in magnificent waves.

