

A social critique and satirical coming-of-age story

The Reward

FIKRY EL AZZOUZI

The Flemish-Moroccan Zakaria, also known as Skidmark, Abu Batman, Jihad and bunny rabbit, is taught by his mother that good manners are essential if he wants to get ahead in life. But life does not take much notice of that. In fact, life is a real struggle for Zakaria. His family falls apart after his father dies and his mother is admitted to a psychiatric hospital. His romantic escapades come to nothing either. Zakaria does not seem to fit in anywhere, until he meets Tupac Shakur. Following an act of aggression against an elderly Flemish man they flee to Morocco together. There they plan their return to Belgium. Under the influence of drugs and the wrong friends, Zakaria starts to see radicalisation as a more and more attractive way out.

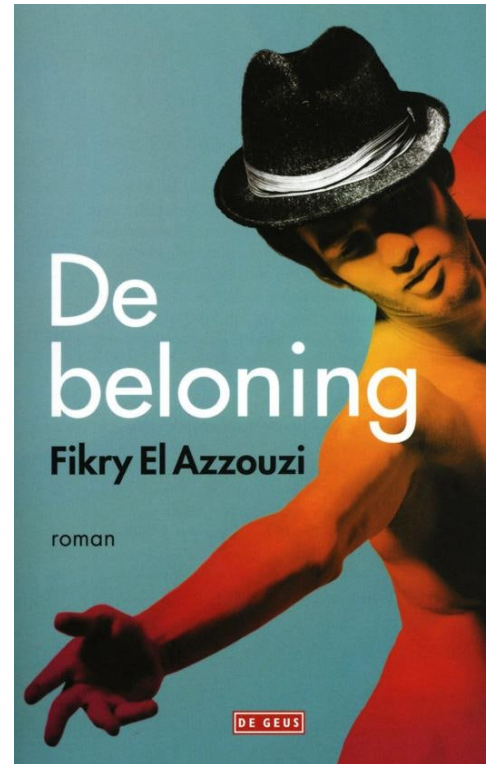
El Azzouzi wields humour like a socio-critical scalpel.

KNACK

In order to address several hot topics, Fikry El Azzouzi opts for all-out satire in 'The Reward'. With acerbic wit and absurd humour he writes the coming-of-age story of a boy in search of both his sexual and national identity. Although Zakaria is torn between Morocco and Flanders, he does everything he can to be accepted as a Belgian. In a rite of passage that is as hilarious as it is painful, he is put to the ultimate test. El Azzouzi portrays him as an insecure follower, someone who craves assurance and only finds it in the identity of a suicide terrorist. The author steers well clear of preachiness but delivers a challenging and funny literary work with 'The Reward', full of sparkling dialogues and wonderful magic-realist elements.

A beautiful, intriguing and at times shocking book.

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AUTHOR



Fikry El Azzouzi (b. 1978), a Flemish-Moroccan author, writes novels, columns and plays. He debuted in 2010 with 'The Feast of the Sheep'. For his novel *Drarrie in the Night* and his play 'Jihad Travels', he was awarded the 65th Arkprijs van het Vrije Woord. *She Alone* is the love story of a Flemish woman and a Moroccan man, and at the same time a dystopian warning about Europe and its growing fear of everything that is different.

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ORIGINAL TITLE *De Beloning* (2019, De Geus, 256 pp.)

TRANSLATION RIGHTS Jolijn Spooren - j.spooren@singeluitgeverijen.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Elise Vanoosthuyse - elise@flandersliterature.be, Marieke Roels - marieke@flandersliterature.be