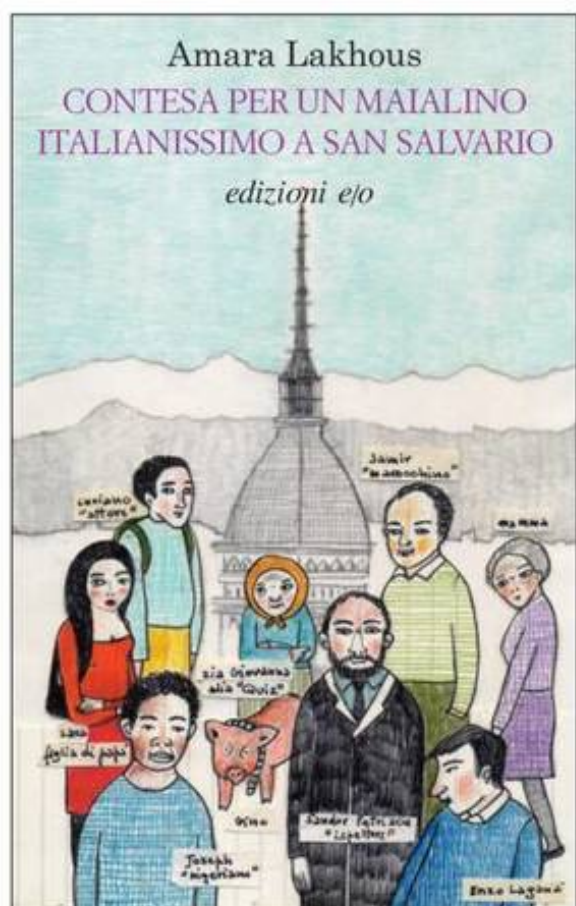


## Amara Lakhous: Tackling the Issue of Immigration a Novel at a Time

Natasha Lardera (November 26, 2015)



Amara Lakhous is an Algerian/Italian writer whose novels are a literary sensation in Italy. He presented his work at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò, in an enlightening conversation with the Casa's director Prof. Stefano Albertini.

"In 2011, I moved to Turin, in Northern Italy, to write my new novel that takes place in San Salvario, a multiethnic district located near the central train station. Turin has been in a transitional phase for many years now.

In the past, it was the destination for Italian migrants from the south, and recently it has become a city of new immigrants that arrive from all over the world.

In this current literary phase, I have begun to experiment with new contexts and have taken the



perspective of a southern Italian man as my main character to understand the issues surrounding old and new immigration in Italy.

In two years I wrote two novels: *A Dispute Over a Very Italian Piglet*, published in an English translation by Ann Goldstein last year, and *The Hoax of the Little Virgin in Via Ormea*, which came out last year in Italian and will be published in English by Europa Editions in May 2016."

The narrator, or rather, the author of these words is Amara Lakhous, an Algerian/Italian writer who presented his work at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò, in an enlightening conversation with the Casa's director Prof. Stefano Albertini.

Lakhous is currently working, in addition to researching his next novel, at the Department of Italian Studies at NYU, where he is teaching a course on Narrating the Immigrant Experience.

Immigration, a phenomenon that has played a major role in Lakhous' life, who has moved from Algeria to Italy, to New York and who knows where to next, is the main character in the writer's novels. "I believe that emigrating is an act of rebellion and courage as well as a new birth," Lakhous told the audience.

"You leave the place where you were born, where your parents raised you for a new place, with a new language, different people and culture. I have had three births and my multiculturalism makes me the person I am today."

Amara Lakhous' novels have become literary sensations in Italy. Among them, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* is a murder mystery set in Rome where, with humor, different people from different countries give their private version of the truth about Italian life (the Iranian refugee hates pizza while the Milanese professor thinks southern Italians are barbarians).

*Dispute over a Very Italian Piglet*, is also multiethnic mystery that uses the issue concerning Gino, a small local pig who has been brought to the neighborhood mosque, to tell a larger story. The unique titles of Lakhous' novels definitely attract the readers' attention, but what keeps them reading are the equally unique worlds they describe. Worlds that at times may seem absurd but are actually based on reality.

Italy is a magnet for immigrants from all different countries. There are the Senegalese, the Moroccans, the Albanians, Croats, Bangladeshis, Egyptians, Syrians and Tunisians, and Lakhous uses them all to tell his unique accounts, between literature and immigration. "I was mostly influenced by the *Commedia all'Italiana*," Lakhous explained to the audience at Casa Italiana, "Brilliant comedies, often set in a middle-class setting, which tackled most serious issues.

I find it more effective than drama, with a laugh you can tell much more and analyze serious but real issues. But I was also influenced by mystery novels and above all by the work of Sciascia, with the difference that my stories are always left with an open ending."

Lakhous writes in both Arabic and Italian at the same time, he does not translate one into the other but writes two texts that mirror each other. "I am obsessed with being original and this is my unique way of writing," he confessed, "Now that I am in the States, my 'American Dream' is to begin writing in English as well, and in the future I want to write in Berber, the language I used growing up.

A language I can speak, but I cannot write in yet. I will have to study. I have used the metaphor of a walking tree to describe myself... with roots going everywhere." And the roots keep growing.

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