

## FOREWORD

‘**Y**OU MUST LAY yourself bare before the public gaze.’ A piece of advice from Philippe Labro when François Hollande was elected. Philippe is someone I have a lot of respect for – a writer, a media man – but I never found a way to be an open book, as he recommended. I could not bring myself to show who I really was. Unveiling aspects of my life, talking about my family and my relationship with the President was out of the question. I did the opposite, in fact – I locked everything up and drew the bolt.

Which didn’t prevent journalists from writing and talking – about a woman who bore very little resemblance to me. More often than not, they simply did not know the facts; at other times they were angling for a scandal. A

couple of dozen books, even more magazine covers, and thousands of articles were printed – distorting carnival mirrors that reflected second-guesses and hearsay, when they weren't pure fantasy. The woman in the mirror had my name and my face but she was unrecognisable to me. It felt like it was not just my personal life that was being stolen but my sense of identity.

Protected by my armour, I believed I could withstand anything and everything. As attacks became increasingly violent, I shut down further. The French saw my frozen, sometimes tense face. They did not understand. It came to the point where I could no longer bear to go out in the street – I could not handle the way passers-by looked at me.

Then – in just a few hours in January 2014 – my life was devastated and my future shattered into a million tiny pieces. Suddenly, I was alone, stunned and grief-stricken. It became obvious to me that the only way of regaining control over the narrative of my life was to narrate it. I was misunderstood – sullied, even – and I suffered from it.

I decided to smash through the dam I had built – I decided to put pen to paper and tell my story, the real story. Where I had once fought tirelessly to protect my privacy, I now had to relinquish that in part – to hand over the keys to unlock me and make sense of it all. Every

THANK YOU FOR THIS MOMENT

piece in this absurd puzzle fits. I was thirsty for the truth – I needed it to overcome this hurdle and move on. I owed it to my children, to my family, to those close to me. Writing had become a vital need. Night and day for months, I silently ‘laid myself bare’...