**OPINION**

# A Boy to Be Sacrificed

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Paris

IN the Morocco of the 1980s, where homosexuality did not, of course, exist, I was an effeminate little boy, a boy to be sacrificed, a humiliated body who bore upon himself every hypocrisy, everything left unsaid. By the time I was 10, though no one spoke of it, I knew what happened to boys like me in our impoverished society; they were designated victims, to be used, with everyone’s blessing, as easy sexual objects by frustrated men. And I knew that no one would save me — not even my parents, who surely loved me. For them too, I was shame, filth. A “zamel.”

Like everyone else, they urged me into a terrible, definitive silence, there to die a little more each day.

How is a child who loves his parents, his many siblings, his working-class culture, his religion — Islam — how is he to survive this trauma? To be hurt and harassed because of something others saw in me — something in the way I moved my hands, my inflections. A way of walking, my carriage. An easy intimacy with women, my mother and my many sisters. To be categorized for victimhood like those [“emo” boys](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/12/world/middleeast/killings-strike-fear-in-iraqi-gay-and-emo-youth.html?scp=1&sq=emo%20iraq&st=cse) with long hair and skinny jeans who have recently been turning up dead in the streets of Iraq, their skulls crushed in.

The truth is, I don’t know how I survived. All I have left is a taste for silence. And the dream, never to be realized, that someone would save me. Now I am 38 years old, and I can state without fanfare: no one saved me.

I no longer remember the child, the teenager, I was. I know I was effeminate and aware that being so obviously “like that” was wrong. God did not love me. I had strayed from the path. Or so I was made to understand. Not only by my family, but also by the entire neighborhood. And I learned my lesson perfectly. So deep down, I tell myself they won. This is what happened.

I was barely 12, and in my neighborhood they called me “the little girl.” Even those I persisted in playing soccer with used that nickname, that insult. Even the teenagers who’d once taken part with me in the same sexual games. I was no kid anymore. My body was changing, stretching out, becoming a man’s. But others did not see me as a man. The image of myself they reflected back at me was strange and incomprehensible. Attempts at rape and abuse multiplied.

I knew it wasn’t good to be as I was. But what was I going to do? Change? Speak to my mother, my big brother? And tell them what, exactly?

It all came to a head one summer night in 1985. It was too hot. Everyone was trying in vain to fall asleep. I, too, lay awake, on the floor beside my sisters, my mother close by. Suddenly, the familiar voices of drunken men reached us. We all heard them. The whole family. The whole neighborhood. The whole world. These men, whom we all knew quite well, cried out: “Abdellah, little girl, come down. Come down. Wake up and come down. We all want you. Come down, Abdellah. Don’t be afraid. We won’t hurt you. We just want to have sex with you.”

They kept yelling for a long time. My nickname. Their desire. Their crime. They said everything that went unsaid in the too-silent, too-respectful world where I lived. But I was far, then, from any such analysis, from understanding that the problem wasn’t me. I was simply afraid. Very afraid. And I hoped my big brother, my hero, would rise and answer them. That he would protect me, at least with words. I didn’t want him to fight them — no. All I wanted him to say were these few little words: “Go away! Leave my little brother alone.”

But my brother, the absolute monarch of our family, did nothing. Everyone turned their back on me. Everyone killed me that night. I don’t know where I found the strength, but I didn’t cry. I just squeezed my eyes shut a bit more tightly. And shut, with the same motion, everything else in me. Everything. I was never the same Abdellah Taïa after that night. To save my skin, I killed myself. And that was how I did it.

I began by keeping my head low all the time. I cut all ties with the children in the neighborhood. I altered my behavior. I kept myself in check: no more feminine gestures, no more honeyed voice, no more hanging around women. No more anything. I had to invent a whole new Abdellah. I bent myself to the task with great determination, and with the realization that this world was no longer my world. Sooner or later, I would leave it behind. I would grow up and find freedom somewhere else. But in the meantime I would become hard. Very hard.

TODAY I grow nostalgic for little effeminate Abdellah. He and I share a body, but I no longer remember him. He was innocence. Now I am only intellect. He was naïve. I am clever. He was spontaneous. I am locked in a constant struggle with myself.

In 2006, seven years after I moved to France, and after my second book, “Le rouge du tarbouche” (the red of the fez), came out in Morocco, I, too, came out to the Moroccan press, in Arabic and French. Scandal, and support. Then, faced with my brother’s silence and my mother’s tears on the telephone, I published in TelQuel, the very brave Moroccan magazine, an open letter called “Homosexuality Explained to My Mother.” My mother died the next year.

I don’t know where I found the courage to become a writer and use my books to impose my homosexuality on the world of my youth. To do justice to little Abdellah. To never forget the trauma he and every Arab homosexual like him suffered.

Now, over a year after the Arab Spring began, we must again remember homosexuals. Arabs have finally become aware that they have to invent a new, free Arab individual, without the support of their megalomaniacal leaders. Arab homosexuals are also taking part in this revolution, whether they live in Egypt, Iraq or Morocco. They, too, are part of this desperately needed process of political and individual liberation. And the world must support and protect them.