Introduction

by Larry Siems

In the summer and early fall of 2005, Mohamedou Ould Slahi handwrote a 466-page, 122,000-word draft of this book in his single-cell segregation hut in Camp Echo, Guantánamo.

He wrote it in installments, starting not long after he was finally allowed to meet with Nancy Hollander and Sylvia Royce, two attorneys from his pro bono legal team. Under the strict protocols of Guantánamo's sweeping censorship regime, every page he wrote was considered classified from the moment of its creation, and each new section was surrendered to the United States government for review.

On December 15, 2005, three months after he signed and dated the manuscript's last page, Mohamedou interrupted his testimony during an Administrative Review Board hearing in Guantánamo to tell the presiding officers:

> *I just want to mention here that I wrote a book recently while in jail here recently about my whole story, okay? I sent it for release to the District [of] Columbia, and when it is released I advise you guys to read it. A little advertisement. It is a very interesting book, I think.*[1]

But Mohamedou's manuscript was not released. It was stamped "SECRET," a classification level for information that could cause serious damage to national security if it becomes public, and "NOFORN," meaning it can't be shared with any foreign nationals or intelligence services. It was deposited in a

secure facility near Washington, DC, accessible only to those with a full security clearance and an official "need to know." For more than six years, Mohamedou's attorneys carried out litigation and negotiations to have the manuscript cleared for public release.

During those years, compelled largely by Freedom of Information Act litigation spearheaded by the American Civil Liberties Union, the U.S. government released thousands of secret documents that described the treatment of prisoners in U.S. custody since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Many of those documents hinted at Mohamedou's ordeal, first in the hands of the CIA, and then in the hands of the U.S. military in Guantánamo, where a "Special Projects Team" subjected him to one of the most stubborn, deliberate, and cruel interrogations in the record. A few of those documents contained something else as well: tantalizing samples of Mohamedou's voice.

One of these was in his own handwriting, in English. In a short note dated March 3, 2005, he wrote, "Hello. I, Mohamedou Ould Slahi, detained in GTMO under ISN #760, herewith apply for a writ of habeas corpus." The note concluded simply, "I have done no crimes against the U.S., nor did the U.S. charge me with crimes, thus I am filing for my immediate release. For further details about my case, I'll be happy for any future hearings."

Another handwritten document, also in English, was a letter to his attorney Sylvia Royce dated November 9, 2006, in which he joked, "You asked me to write you everything I told my interrogators. Are you out of your mind? How can I render uninterrupted interrogation that has been lasting the last 7 years? That's like asking Charlie Sheen how many women he dated." He went on:

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Yet I provided you everything (almost) in my book, which the government denies you the access to. I was going to go deeper in details, but I figured it was futile.

To make a long story short, you may divide my time in two big steps.

(1) Pre-torture (I mean that I couldn't resist): I told them the truth about me having done nothing against your country. It lasted until May 22, 2003.

(2) Post-torture era: where my brake broke loose. I yessed every accusation my interrogators made. I even wrote the infamous confession about me planning to hit the CN Tower in Toronto, based on SSG [redacted] advice. I just wanted to get the monkeys off my back. I don't care how long I stay in jail. My belief comforts me.[2]

The documents also included a pair of transcripts of Mohamedou's sworn testimony before detainee review boards in Guantánamo. The first—and the first sample of his voice anywhere in the documents—is from his Combatant Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) hearing; the date is December 8, 2004, just months after his so-called "special interrogation" ended. It includes this exchange:

Q: Can I get your response to the very first allegation that you are a member of the Taliban or al Qaida?

A: The Taliban, I have nothing to do with them whatsoever. Al Qaida, I was a member in Afghanistan in 91 and 92. After I left Afghanistan, I broke all my relations with al Qaida.

Q: And you've never provided them money, or any type of support since then?

A: Nothing whatsoever.

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Q: Ever recruited for them?

A: No, not at all; no trying to recruit for them.

Q: You said that you were pressured to admit you were involved in the Millennium plot, right?

A: Yes.

Q: To whom did you make that confession?

A: To the Americans.

Q: And what do you mean by pressure?

A: Your honor, I don't wish to talk about this nature of the pressure if I don't have to.

Q: Tribunal President: You don't have to; we just want to make sure that you were not tortured or coerced into saying something that wasn't true. That is the reason he is asking the question.

A: You just take from me I am not involved in such a horrible attack; yes I admit to being a member of al Qaida, but I am not willing to talk about this. The smart people came to me and analyzed this, and got the truth. It's good for me to tell the truth, and the information was verified. I said I didn't have anything to do with this. I took and passed the polygraph, and they said I didn't have to speak of this anymore. They said please don't speak of this topic anymore, and they haven't opened it up to this topic for a year now.

Q: So no U.S. authorities abused you in any way?

A: I'm not willing to answer this question; I don't have to, if you don't force me to.[3]

The other transcript comes from the 2005 Administrative Review Board hearing where he announced he had written this book. A year had passed since the CSRT hearing, a year when he was finally allowed to meet with attorneys, and when he somehow found the distance and the stamina to write down his experience. This time he speaks freely of his odyssey, not in fear

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or in anger, but in a voice inflected with irony and wit. "He was very silly," Mohamedou says of one of his interrogator's threats, "because he said he was going to bring in black people. I don't have any problem with black people, half of my country is black people!" Another interrogator in Guantánamo known as Mr. X was covered head to toe "like in Saudi Arabia, how the women are covered," and wearing "gloves, O.J. Simpson gloves on his hands." Mohamedou's answers are richly detailed, for deliberate effect and for an earnest purpose. "Please," he tells the board, "I want you guys to understand my story okay, because it really doesn't matter if they release me or not, I just want my story understood."[4]

We do not have a complete record of Mohamedou's effort to tell his story to the review board at that hearing. Just as he begins to describe what he experienced in Guantánamo during the summer of 2003, "the recording equipment began to malfunction," notes a boldface interruption in the transcript. For the lost section, in which "the detainee discussed how he was tortured while here at GTMO by several individuals," the document offers instead "the board's recollection of that 1000 click malfunction":

> *The Detainee began by discussing the alleged abuse he received from a female interrogator known to him as* [redacted]. *The Detainee attempted to explain to the Board* [redacted] *actions but he became distraught and visibly upset. He explained that he was sexually harassed and although he does like women he did not like what* [redacted] *had done to him. The Presiding Officer noticed the Detainee was upset and told him he was not required to tell the story. The Detainee was very appreciative and elected not to elaborate on the alleged abuse from* [redacted].
>
> *The Detainee gave detailed information regarding the alleged abuse from* [redacted] *and* [redacted]. *The Detainee*

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stated that [redacted] *and* [redacted] *entered a room with their faces covered and began beating him. They beat him so badly that* [redacted] *became upset.* [redacted] *did not like the treatment the Detainee was receiving and started to sympathize with him. According to the Detainee,* [redacted] *was crying and telling* [redacted] *and* [redacted] *to stop beating him. The Detainee wanted to show the Board his scars and location of injuries, but the board declined the viewing. The Board agrees that this is a fair recap of the distorted portion of the tape.*[5]

We only have these transcripts because in the spring of 2006, a federal judge presiding over a FOIA lawsuit filed by the Associated Press ordered them released. That lawsuit also finally compelled the Pentagon, four years after Guantánamo opened, to publish an official list of the men it was holding in the facility. For the first time, the prisoners had names, and the names had voices. In the transcripts of their secret hearings, many of the prisoners told stories that undercut claims that the Cuban detention camp housed "the worst of the worst," men so dangerous, as the military's presiding general famously declared as the first prisoners were landing at the camp in 2002, they would "gnaw hydraulic lines in the back of a C-17 to bring it down."[6] Several, like Mohamedou, broached the subject of their treatment in U.S. custody.

The Pentagon doubled down. "Detainees held at Guantánamo are terrorist trainers, bomb-makers, would-be suicide bombers, and other dangerous people," a military spokesman again asserted when the transcripts became public. "And we know that they're trained to lie to try to gain sympathy for their condition and to bring pressure against the U.S. government."[7] A year later, when the military released the records of Guantánamo's 2006 Administrative Review Board hearings, Mohamedou's transcript was missing completely. That transcript is still classified.

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Mohamedou's manuscript was finally cleared for public release, and a member of his legal team was able to hand it to me on a disk labeled "Slahi Manuscript—Unclassified Version," in the summer of 2012. By then, Mohamedou had been in Guantánamo for a decade. A federal judge had granted his habeas corpus petition two years before and ordered him released, but the U.S government had appealed, and the appeals court sent his petition back down to the federal district court for rehearing. That case is still pending.

Mohamedou remains to this day in the same segregation cell where he wrote his Guantánamo diary. I have, I believe, read everything that has been made public about his case, and I do not understand why he was ever in Guantánamo in the first place.

Mohamedou Ould Slahi was born on December 31, 1970, in Rosso, then a small town, now a small city, on the Senegal River on Mauritania's southern border. He had eight older siblings; three more would follow. The family moved to the capital, Nouakchott, as Mohamedou was finishing primary school, and his father, a nomadic camel trader, died not long after. The timing, and Mohamedou's obvious talents, must have shaped his sense of his role in the family. His father had taught him to read the Koran, which he had memorized by the time he was a teenager, and he did well in high school, with a particular aptitude for math. A 2008 feature in *Der Spiegel* describes a popular kid with a passion for soccer, and especially for the German national team—a passion that led him to apply for, and win, a scholarship from the Carl Duisberg Society to study in Germany. It was an enormous leap for the entire family, as the magazine reported:

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Slahi boarded a plane for Germany on a Friday in the late summer of 1988. He was the first family member to attend a university—abroad, no less—and the first to travel on an airplane. Distraught by the departure of her favorite son, his mother's goodbye was so tearful that Mohamedou briefly hesitated before getting on his flight. In the end, the others convinced him to go. "He was supposed to save us financially," his brother [Y]ahdih says today.[8]

In Germany, Mohamedou pursued a degree in electrical engineering, with an eye toward a career in telecom and computers, but he interrupted his studies to participate in a cause that was drawing young men from around the world: the insurgency against the communist-led government in Afghanistan. There were no restrictions or prohibitions on such activities in those days, and young men like Mohamedou made the trip openly; it was a cause that the West, and the United States in particular, actively supported. To join the fight required training, so in early 1991 Mohamedou attended the al-Farouq training camp near Khost for seven weeks and swore a loyalty oath to al-Qaeda, the camp's operators. He received light arms and mortar training, the guns mostly Soviet made, the mortar shells, he recalled in his 2004 Combatant Status Review hearing, made in the U.S.A.

Mohamedou returned to his studies after the training, but in early 1992, with the communist government on the verge of collapsing, he went back to Afghanistan. He joined a unit commanded by Jalaluddin Haqqani that was laying siege to the city of Gardez, which fell with little resistance three weeks after Mohamedou arrived. Kabul fell soon thereafter, and as Mohamedou explained at the CSRT hearing, the cause quickly turned murky:

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Right after the break down of [the] Communists, the Mujahiden themselves started to wage Jihad against themselves, to see who would be in power; the different factions began to fight against each other. I decided to go back because I didn't want to fight against other Muslims, and found no reason why; nor today did I see a reason to fight to see who could be president or vice-president. My goal was solely to fight against the aggressors, mainly the Communists, who forbid my brethren to practice their religion.

That, Mohamedou has always insisted, marked the end of his commitment to al-Qaeda. As he told the presiding officer at his CSRT:

Ma'am, I was knowledgeable I was fighting with al Qaida, but then al Qaida didn't wage Jihad against America. They told us to fight with our brothers against the Communists. In the mid-90's they wanted to wage Jihad against America, but I personally had nothing to do with that. I didn't join them in this idea; that's their problem. I am completely out of the line between al Qaida and the U.S. They have to solve this problem themselves; I am completely independent of this problem.[9]

Back in Germany, Mohamedou settled into the life he and his family in Nouakchott had planned. He completed his degree in electrical engineering at the University of Duisburg, his young Mauritanian wife joined him, and the couple lived and worked in Duisburg for most of the 1990s. During that time, though, he remained friends or kept in touch with companions from the Afghanistan adventure, some of whom maintained al-Qaeda ties. He also had his own direct association with a prominent al-Qaeda member, Mahfouz Ould al-Walid, also known as Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, who was a member of

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al-Qaeda's Shura Council and one of Osama bin Laden's senior theological advisers. Abu Hafs is a distant cousin of Mohamedou, and also a brother-in-law through his marriage to Mohamedou's wife's sister. The two were in occasional phone contact while Mohamedou was in Germany—a call from Abu Hafs, using bin Laden's satellite phone, caught the ears of German intelligence in 1999—and twice Mohamedou helped Abu Hafs transfer $4,000 to his family in Mauritania around the Ramadan holidays.

In 1998, Mohamedou and his wife traveled to Saudi Arabia to perform the hajj. That same year, unable to secure permanent residency in Germany, Mohamedou followed a college friend's recommendation and applied for landed immigrant status in Canada, and in November 1999 he moved to Montreal. He lived for a time with his former classmate and then at Montreal's large al Sunnah mosque, where, as a *hafiz*, or someone who has memorized the Koran, he was invited to lead Ramadan prayers when the imam was traveling. Less than a month after he arrived in Montreal, an Algerian immigrant and al-Qaeda member named Ahmed Ressam was arrested entering the United States with a car laden with explosives and a plan to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Day, as part of what became known as the Millennium Plot. Ressam had been based in Montreal. He left the city before Mohamedou arrived, but he had attended the al Sunnah mosque and had connections with several of what Mohamedou, at his CSRT hearing, called his classmate's "bad friends."

Ressam's arrest sparked a major investigation of the Muslim immigrant community in Montreal, and the al Sunnah mosque community in particular, and for the first time in his life, Mohamedou was questioned about possible terrorist connections. The

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Royal Canadian Mounted Police "came and interrogated me," he testified at his 2005 Administrative Review Board hearing.

> *I was scared to hell. They asked me do I know Ahmed Ressam, I said, "No," and then they asked do you know this guy and I said, "No, No." I was so scared I was shaking. . . . I was not used to this, it was the first time I had been interrogated and I just wanted to stay out of trouble and make sure I told the truth. But they were watching me in a very ugly way. It is okay to be watched, but it is not okay to see the people who are watching you. It was very clumsy, but they wanted to give the message that we are watching you.*

Back in Mauritania, Mohamedou's family was alarmed. " 'What are you doing in Canada?' " he recalled them asking. "I said nothing but look[ing] for a job. And my family decided I needed to get back to Mauritania because this guy must be in a very bad environment and we want to save him." His now ex-wife telephoned on behalf of the family to report that his mother was sick. As he described to the Review Board:

> *[She] called me and she was crying and she said, "Either you get me to Canada or you come to Mauritania." I said, "Hey, take it easy." I didn't like this life in Canada, I couldn't enjoy my freedom and being watched is not very good. I hated Canada and I said the work is very hard here. I took off on Friday, 21 January 2000; I took a flight from Montreal to Brussels, then to Dakar.*[10]

With that flight, the odyssey that will become Mohamedou's *Guantánamo Diary* begins.

It begins here because from this moment forward, a single

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force determines Mohamedou's fate: the United States. Geographically, what he calls his "endless world tour" of detention and interrogation will cover twenty thousand miles over the next eighteen months, starting with what is supposed to be a homecoming and ending with him marooned four thousand miles from home on a Caribbean island. He will be held and interrogated in four countries along the way, often with the participation of Americans, and always at the behest of the United States.

Here is how the first of these detentions is described in a timeline that U.S. District Judge James Robertson included in his declassified 2010 order granting Mohamedou's habeas corpus petition:

Jan 2000 *Flew from Canada to Senegal, where brothers met him to take him to Mauritania; he and brothers were seized by* [redacted] *authorities, and were questioned about the Millennium plot. An American came and took pictures; then, someone he presumed was American flew him to Mauritania, where he was questioned further by Mauritanian authorities about the Millennium plot.*

Feb 2000 *Interrogated by* [redacted] *re Millennium plot*

2/14/2000 [redacted] *released him, concluding there was no basis to believe he was involved in the Millennium plot.*

"The Mauritanians said, 'We don't need you, go away. We have no interest in you,'" Mohamedou recalled, describing that release at his ARB hearing. "I asked them what about the Americans? They said, 'The Americans keep saying you are a link but they don't give us any proof so what should we do?'"

But as Judge Robertson chronicled in his timeline, the Mauritanian government summoned Mohamedou again at the United States' request shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks:

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9/29/2001 *Arrested in Mauritania; authorities told him [redacted] arrest because Salahi was allegedly involved in Millennium plot.*

10/12/2001 *While he was detained, agents performed a search at his house, seizing tapes and documents.*

10/15/2001 *Released by [redacted] authorities.*[11]

Between those two Mauritanian arrests, both of which included interrogations by FBI agents, Mohamedou was living a remarkably ordinary and, by his country's standards, successful life, doing computer and electronics work, first for a medical supply company that also provided Internet services, and then for a similarly diversified family-owned import business. But now he was nervous. Although he was free and "went back to his life," as he explained to the ARB:

> *I thought now I will have a problem with my employer because my employer would not take me back because I am suspected of terrorism, and they said they would take care of this. In front of me while I was sitting [there] the highest intelligence guy in Mauritania called my employer and said that I was a good person, we have no problem with [him] and we arrested him for a reason. We had to question him and we have questioned him and he is good to go, so you can take him back.*[12]

His boss did take him back, and just over a month later, Mohamedou's work would take him to the Mauritanian Presidential Palace, where he spent a day preparing a bid to upgrade President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya's telephone and computer systems. When he got home, the national police appeared again, telling him he was needed once more for questioning. He asked them to wait while he showered. He dressed, grabbed

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his keys—he went voluntarily, driving his own car to police headquarters—and told his mother not to worry, he would be home soon. This time, though, he disappeared.

For almost a year, his family was led to believe he was in Mauritanian custody. His oldest brother, Hamoud, regularly visited the security prison to deliver clean clothes and money for Mohamedou's meals. A week after Mohamedou turned himself in, however, a CIA rendition flight had spirited him to Jordan; months later, the United States had retrieved him from Amman and delivered him to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and, a few weeks after that, to Guantánamo. All this time, his family was paying for his upkeep in the Nouakchott prison; all this time, the prison officials pocketed the money, saying nothing. Finally, on October 28, 2002, Mohamedou's youngest brother, Yahdih, who had assumed Mohamedou's position as the family's European breadwinner, picked up that week's edition of *Der Spiegel* and read that his brother had by then "been sitting for months in a wire cage in the U.S. prison camp in Guantánamo."

Yahdih was furious—not, he remembers, at the United States but at the local authorities who had been assuring the family they had Mohamedou and he was safe. "Those police are bad people, they're thieves!" he kept yelling when he called his family with the news. "Don't say that!" they panicked, hanging up. He called them back and started in again. They hung up again.

Yahdih still lives in Düsseldorf. He and I met last year over a series of meals in a Moroccan restaurant on Ellerstraße, a center for the city's North African community. Yahdih introduced me to several of his friends, mainly young Moroccans, many of them, like Yahdih, now German citizens. Among themselves they spoke Arabic, French, and German; with me, like Yahdih, they gamely tried English, laughing at one another's mistakes. Yahdih told a classic immigrant's joke, in Arabic for his friends and

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then translating for me, about an aspiring hotel worker's English test. "What do you say if you want to call someone over to you?" the applicant is quizzed. "Please come here," he answers. "What if you want him to leave?" The applicant pauses, then brightens. "I go outside and tell him, 'Please come here!' "

In Düsseldorf, Yahdih and I spent an entire meal sorting and labeling photographs of siblings, sisters- and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews, many living in the family's multigenerational household in Nouakchott. During his 2004 CSRT hearing, Mohamedou explained his disinterest in al-Qaeda after he returned to Germany by saying, "I had a big family to feed, I had 100 mouths to feed." It was an exaggeration, but only by half, maybe. Now Yahdih bears a large share of that responsibility. Because activism can be a risky business in Mauritania, he has also assumed the family lead in advocating for Mohamedou's release. During our last meal together, we watched YouTube videos of a demonstration he helped organize in Nouakchott last year outside the Presidential Palace. The featured speaker, he pointed out, was a parliament minister.

A few days before I visited Yahdih, Mohamedou had been allowed one of his twice-yearly calls with his family. The calls are arranged under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross and connect Mohamedou with the family household in Nouakchott and with Yahdih in Germany. Yahdih told me he had recently written to the Red Cross to ask if the number of calls could be increased to three a year.

The first of these calls took place in 2008, six and a half years after Mohamedou disappeared. A reporter for *Der Spiegel* witnessed the scene:

> *At noon on a Friday in June 2008, the Slahi family convenes at the offices of the International Red Cross (IRC) in the Mauritanian*

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capital Nouakchott. His mother, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and aunts are all dressed in the flowing robes they would normally wear to a family party. They have come here to talk to Mohamedou, their lost son, by telephone. The Joint Task Force in Guantanamo has granted its approval, with the IRC acting as go-between. Thick carpets cover the stone floor and light-colored curtains billow at the windows of the IRC office.

"My son, my son, how are you feeling?" his mother asks. "I am so happy to hear you." She breaks into tears, as she hears his voice for the first time in more than six years. Mohamedou's older brother speaks with him for 40 minutes. Slahi tells his brother that he is doing well. He wants to know who has married whom, how his siblings are doing and who has had children. "That was my brother, the brother I know. He has not changed," Hamoud Ould Slahi says after the conversation.[13]

From what Yahdih tells me, the conversations remain more or less the same five years later, though two things have changed. The calls are now Skype calls, so they can see one another. And they are now missing Mohamedou's and Yahdih's mother. She died on March 27, 2013.

The lead editorial in the *New York Daily News* on March 23, 2010, was titled "Keep the Cell Door Shut: Appeal a Judge's Outrageous Ruling to Free 9/11 Thug." The editorial began:

It is shocking and true: a federal judge has ordered the release of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, one of the top recruiters for the 9/11 attacks—a man once deemed the highest-value detainee in Guantanamo.

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That ruling was Judge James Robertson's then still-classified memorandum order granting Mohamedou's habeas corpus petition—the petition Mohamedou handwrote in his Camp Echo cell five years before. Without access to that order or to the legal filings or court hearing that resulted in the order, the newspaper's editorial board nevertheless conjectured that a judge was letting "a terrorist with the blood of 3,000 on his hands" go free, adding contortedly, "he possibly being a man whose guilt was certain but unprovable beyond a reasonable doubt thanks to squeamishness over evidence acquired under rough treatment." Expressing confidence that Mohamedou was "squeezed appropriately hard after 9/11" and that his treatment made the country safer, the editors urged the Obama administration to appeal the order, adding, "What was the rush to release? The judge could have waited, should have waited, for the country to understand why this had to happen before exercising his legal authority."[14]

Two weeks later, the court released a declassified, redacted version of Judge Robertson's order. A section of the opinion summarizing the government's arguments for why Mohamedou must remain in Guantánamo included a footnote that might have surprised the newspaper's readers:

> *The government also argued at first that Salahi was also detainable under the "aided in 9/11" prong of the AUMF, but it has now abandoned that theory, acknowledging that Salahi probably did not even know about the 9/11 attacks.*[⋆15]

That certainly would make it a stretch to call Mohamedou a "9/11 thug." It is also a stretch, by any measure, to call a

⋆ The AUMF, or Authorization for Use of Military Force, is the September 14, 2001, law under which Guantánamo operates. It authorizes the

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judgment ordering a man freed nine years after he was taken into custody a "rush to release." But there is a truth at the heart of that *Daily News* editorial—and much of the press coverage about Mohamedou's case—and that truth is confusion. Nine years is now thirteen, and the country seems to be no closer to understanding the U.S. government's case for holding Mohamedou than when Judge Robertson, the one judge who has thoroughly reviewed his case, ordered him released.

This much seems clear from the available record: Mohamedou's time in U.S. custody did not begin with allegations that he was a top 9/11 recruiter. When he was questioned by FBI agents on his return to Mauritania in February 2000, and again a few weeks after the 9/11 attacks, the focus was on the Millennium Plot. This appears to have been the case for his rendition to Jordan as well: "The Jordanians were investigating my part in the Millennium plot," Mohamedou told the Administrative Review Board in 2005. "They told me they are especially concerned about the Millennium plot."

By the time the CIA delivered Mohamedou to Jordan, though, Ahmed Ressam had been cooperating for months with the Justice Department in the United States, and by the time the CIA retrieved Mohamedou eight months later, Ressam had testified in two terrorism trials and provided the names of more than 150 people involved in terrorism to the U.S. government and the governments of six other countries. Some of those people were Guantánamo detainees, and the U.S. government has used Ressam's statements as evidence against them in their habeas cases.

president "to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."

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Not so with Mohamedou. Ressam "conspicuously fails to implicate Salahi," Robertson noted in his habeas opinion.

The CIA would have known this. The agency would also have known if the Jordanians had uncovered anything linking Mohamedou to the Millennium Plot, the September 11 attacks, or any other terrorist plots. But the CIA apparently never provided any information from his interrogation in Amman to Guantánamo prosecutors. In a 2012 interview with the Rule of Law Oral History Project at Columbia University, Lt. Col. Stuart Couch, the Marine prosecutor assigned to build a case against Mohamedou in Guantánamo, said that the CIA showed him no intelligence reports of its own, and most of the reports the agency did share with him came from Mohamedou's Guantánamo interrogation. "He had been in their custody for six months. They knew I was the lead prosecutor. They knew we were contemplating a capital case. If we could have found his connection to 9/11, we were going to go for the death penalty."

"So something must have gone on," Stuart Couch surmised in that interview. "Slahi was in the custody of the CIA, and they must have felt like they got as much information out of him as they could, or the information they had didn't pan out to his significance, and they just kind of threw him over to U.S. military control at Bagram, Afghanistan."[16]

There is a chilling passage in the 2004 CIA inspector general's investigation report *Counterterrorism and Detention Interrogation Activities, September 2001–October 2003*, one of only two unredacted passages in a four-page blacked-out section of the report headed "Endgame." It says:

> *The number of detainees in CIA custody is relatively small by comparison with those in military custody. Nevertheless, the Agency, like the military, has an interest in the disposition of*

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detainees and a particular interest in those who, if not kept in isolation, would likely have divulged information about the circumstances of their detention.[17]

In early 2002, not even Mohamedou's family knew he was in Jordan. Few people anywhere knew that the United States was operating a rendition, detention, and interrogation program, and that it was doing so not just with the assistance of long-standing allies like the Jordanian intelligence service but also with the cooperation of other, shakier friends. Mauritania was such a friend. In 2002, Mauritania's president and multi-decade ruler Ould Taya was under fire internationally for his country's human rights record, and at home for his close cooperation with the United States' antiterrorism policies. That Mohamedou had been questioned by FBI agents in his own country in 2000 had been controversial enough to attract the press. What if he had returned to the country in mid-2002 with stories that he had been turned over to the Americans without extradition proceedings, in violation of an explicit Mauritanian constitutional protection; that the CIA had delivered him in secret to Jordan; and that he had been interrogated for months in a Jordanian prison?

In any case, there is no indication that when a U.S. military C-17 carrying Mohamedou and thirty-four other prisoners landed in Guantánamo on August 5, 2002, the thirty-one-year-old Mauritanian was an especially high-value detainee. He would have stood out if so: an article published two weeks later in the *Los Angeles Times* titled "No Leaders of al Qaeda Found at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba" quoted government sources who said that there were "no big fish" in custody there, and the island's nearly six hundred detainees were not "high enough in the command and control structure to help counter-terrorism

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experts unravel al Qaeda's tightknit cell and security system."[18] A top secret CIA audit of the facility around the same time reportedly echoed those conclusions. When journalists visited the camp that August, the commander of Guantánamo's detention operations told them his own uniformed officers were questioning the continuing designation of detainees as "enemy combatants" as opposed to prisoners of war entitled to Geneva convention protections. The Pentagon's solution was to replace that commander and ratchet up the camp's intelligence operations.

Almost immediately a schism opened between military interrogators and the FBI and Criminal Investigation Task Force agents who had generally been leading prisoner interviews in Guantánamo. In September and October, over the fierce objections of the FBI and CITF agents, the military set up its first "Special Projects Team" and developed a written plan for the interrogation of the Saudi prisoner Mohammed al-Qahtani. That plan incorporated some of the "enhanced interrogation techniques" the CIA had been employing for several months in its own secret prison. Under the plan, which was implemented in fits and starts through the fall and finally, with the signed authorization of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, in a harrowing fifty-day barrage starting in November, military interrogators subjected Qahtani to a round-the-clock regime of extreme sleep deprivation, loud music and white noise, frigid temperatures, stress positions, threats, and a variety of physical and sexual humiliations.

It was during this time, as the struggle over interrogation methods was playing out in the camp, that a link surfaced between Mohamedou Ould Slahi and the 9/11 hijackers. "September 11, 2002, America arrested a man by the name of Ramzi bin al-Shibh, who is said to be the key guy in the September 11th attacks," Mohamedou recounted at his 2005 ARB hearing.

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> *It is exactly one year after September 11, and since his capture my life has changed drastically. The guy identified me as the guy that he saw in October 1999, which is correct, he was in my house. He said that I advised him to go to Afghanistan to train. Okay, then his interrogator* [redacted] *from the FBI asked him to speculate who I was as a person. He said I think he is an operative of Usama Bin Laden and without him I would never have been involved in September 11th.*[19]

Bin al-Shibh had been the target of an international manhunt since 9/11 for his alleged role in coordinating the "Hamburg cell" of hijackers. He was transferred to CIA custody immediately after his capture in a shoot-out in a suburb of Karachi and was held first in the CIA's "Dark Prison" in Afghanistan and then, through the fall, in a prison near Rabat, Morocco. During interrogations in one of those facilities, bin al-Shibh told of a chance meeting with a stranger on a train in Germany, where he and two friends talked of jihad and their desire to travel to Chechnya to join the fight against the Russians. The stranger suggested they contact Mohamedou in Duisburg, and when they did, Mohamedou put them up for a night. "When they arrived," the 9/11 Commission recorded in a description drawn from intelligence reports from those interrogations, "Slahi explained that it was difficult to get to Chechnya at the time because many travelers were being detained in Georgia. He recommended they go through Afghanistan instead, where they could train for jihad before traveling to Chechnya."[20]

Bin al-Shibh did not assert that Mohamedou sent him to Afghanistan to join a plot against the United States. Lt. Col. Couch, who saw the bin al-Shibh intelligence report, recalled in the 2012 interview, "I never saw any mention that it was to attack America. I never saw the fact that Ramzi Bin al-Shibh

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had said, 'We told him what we wanted to do, and he said, "This is where you need to go train."' It was sort of, 'This is where you can get training.'"[21] During Mohamedou's habeas proceedings, the U.S. government did not argue that he had persuaded the men to join bin Laden's plot; rather, the government alleged that in suggesting that the men seek training in Afghanistan—something Mohamedou had learned was necessary to join an earlier fight involving Russians—he was serving in general as an al-Qaeda recruiter. Judge Robertson disagreed, finding that the record showed only that "Salahi provided lodging for three men for one night in Germany, that one of these was Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and that there was discussion of jihad and Afghanistan."[22]

Stuart Couch received bin al-Shibh's intelligence reports when he was assigned Mohamedou's case in the fall of 2003. The reports, and the assignment itself, had particular significance for the former Marine pilot: his close friend Michael Horrocks, a fellow refueling tanker pilot in the Marines, was the copilot on the United Airlines flight that the 9/11 hijackers used to bring down the World Trade Center's South Tower. That event had drawn Stuart Couch back to active service. He joined the Guantánamo military commission's team of prosecutors with a purpose, hoping, as he explained in a 2007 *Wall Street Journal* profile, "to get a crack at the guys who attacked the United States."[23]

Soon he was looking at batches of intelligence reports from another source, Mohamedou himself, the fruit of what military interrogators were already touting as their most successful Guantánamo interrogation. Those reports contained no information about the circumstances of that interrogation, but Lt. Col. Couch had his suspicions. He had been told that Mohamedou was on "Special Projects." He had caught a glimpse, on

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his first visit to the base, of another prisoner shackled to the floor in an empty interrogation booth, rocking back and forth as a strobe light flashed and heavy metal blared. He had seen this kind of thing before: as a Marine pilot, he had endured a week of such techniques in a program that prepares U.S. airmen for the experience of capture and torture.

Those suspicions were confirmed when the lieutenant colonel's investigator, a Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) agent, gained access to military interrogators' files. Those files included the Special Projects Team's daily memoranda for the record, the interrogators' detailed accounts not only of what was said in each session but also of how the information was extracted.

Those records remain classified, but they are summarized in the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee's 2008 *Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody* and the Justice Department's own 2008 review of interrogations in Guantánamo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Those reports document a "special interrogation" that followed a second painstaking, Rumsfeld-approved plan and unfolded almost exactly as Mohamedou describes it in his *Guantánamo Diary*. Among the specific documents described in those reports are two that, when Stuart Couch uncovered them in early 2004, convinced him that Mohamedou had been tortured.

The first was a fake State Department letter Mohamedou had been presented in August 2003, which was clearly meant to exploit his close relationship with his mother. In its report, the Senate Armed Services Committee describes "a fictitious letter that had been drafted by the Interrogation Team Chief stating that his mother had been detained, would be interrogated, and if she were uncooperative she might be transferred to GTMO. The letter pointed out that she would be the only female detained at 'this previously all-male prison environment.'"

The second was an October 17, 2003, e-mail exchange between

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one of Mohamedou's interrogators and a U.S. military psychiatrist. In it, the committee found, the interrogator "stated that 'Slahi told me he is "hearing voices" now. . . . He is worried as he knows this is not normal. . . . By the way . . . is this something that happens to people who have little external stimulus such as daylight, human interaction etc???? Seems a little creepy.' " The psychologist responded, "Sensory deprivation can cause hallucinations, usually visual rather than auditory, but you never know. . . . In the dark you create things out of what little you have."[24]

In a 2009 interview, Lt. Col. Couch described the impact of these discoveries:

> *Right in the middle of this time, when I had received this information from the NCIS agent—the documents, the State Department letterhead—and it was at the end of this, hearing all of this information, reading all this information, months and months and months of wrangling with the issue, that I was in church this Sunday, and we had a baptism. We got to the part of the liturgy where the congregation repeats—I'm paraphrasing here, but the essence is that we respect the dignity of every human being and seek peace and justice on earth. And when we spoke those words that morning, there were a lot of people in that church, but I could have been the only one there. I just felt this incredible, alright, there it is. You can't come in here on Sunday, and as a Christian, subscribe to this belief of dignity of every human being and say I will seek justice and peace on the earth, and continue to go with the prosecution using that kind of evidence. And at that point I knew what I had to do. I had to get off the fence.*[25]

Stuart Couch withdrew from Mohamedou's case, refusing to proceed with any effort to try him before a military commission.

No charge sheet has ever been drawn up against Mohamedou

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Ould Slahi in Guantánamo, no military commission defense attorney was ever appointed to his case, and it appears there have been no further attempts to prepare a case for prosecution. The *Daily News* editorial decrying Judge Robertson's habeas decision attributes this to "squeamishness" over using "evidence acquired under rough treatment," but it is not at all clear that Mohamedou's brutal Guantánamo interrogation yielded any evidence that he had a hand in any criminal or terrorist activities. At his 2005 ARB hearing, he told of manufacturing confessions under torture, but the interrogators themselves must have discounted what they knew to be induced confessions; what they passed along in their scrubbed intelligence reports consisted instead, Stuart Couch has said, of a kind of "Who's Who of al Qaeda in Germany and all of Europe."[26]

Just as his extreme treatment is often cited as an indicator of his guilt, so those intelligence reports have come to serve as a kind of after-the-fact proof that Mohamedou himself must be among the Who's Who. And yet, Stuart Couch has suggested, Mohamedou's knowledge seems to have been little better than his interrogators'. "I think, if my recollection is right, that most of them had already been known to the intelligence services when he was being questioned," Couch noted in the 2012 interview, adding:

> *I've got to be clear on something. When you read the intelligence reports given up by Slahi, he doesn't implicate himself in anything. The only way he implicates himself is by his knowledge of these people. He never implicates himself in any of what I would consider to be an overt act that was part of the al-Qaeda conspiracy to attack the United States on 9/11.*[27]

Nor, it seems, have U.S. intelligence services unearthed anything else implicating Mohamedou in other terrorist plots or

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attacks. In a 2013 interview, Colonel Morris Davis, who became chief prosecutor for the Guantánamo military commissions in 2005, described a last-ditch effort, almost two years after Stuart Couch withdrew from Mohamedou's case, to develop some kind of charge against Mohamedou. Colonel Davis's real target at the time was not Mohamedou, who by then hardly even registered on the prosecutorial radar, but rather the prisoner the military had moved into the hut next door to Mohamedou's to mitigate the effects of his torture and almost two years of solitary confinement. That prisoner would not accept a plea bargain, however, unless Mohamedou received a similar offer. "We had to figure some kind of similar deal for Slahi," Colonel Davis said in that interview, "which meant we had to find *something* we could charge him with, and that was where we were having real trouble."

> *When Slahi came in, I think the suspicion was that they'd caught a big fish. He reminded me of Forrest Gump, in the sense that there were a lot of noteworthy events in the history of al-Qaida and terrorism, and there was Slahi, lurking somewhere in the background. He was in Germany, Canada, different places that look suspicious, and that caused them to believe that he was a big fish, but then when they really invested the effort to look into it, that's not where they came out. I remember a while after I got there, in early 2007, we had a big meeting with the CIA, the FBI, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Justice, and we got a briefing from the investigators who worked on the Slahi case, and their conclusion was there's a lot of smoke and no fire.*[28]

When Mohamedou's habeas corpus petition finally came before the federal court in 2009, the U.S. government did not try to argue that he was a major al-Qaeda figure or that he had

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a hand in any al-Qaeda plans or attacks. As the DC Circuit Court of Appeals wrote in its subsequent review of the case:

> *The United States seeks to detain Mohammedou Ould Salahi on the grounds that he was "part of" al-Qaida not because he fought with al-Qaida or its allies against the United States, but rather because he swore an oath of allegiance to the organization, associated with its members, and helped it in various ways, including hosting its leaders and referring aspiring jihadists to a known al-Qaida operative.*[29]

When Judge Robertson heard Mohamedou's petition in 2009, the DC district courts presiding over Guantánamo habeas cases were judging the question of whether a petitioner was part of al-Qaeda based on whether the government could show that the petitioner was an active member of the organization at the time he was detained. Mohamedou had joined al-Qaeda in 1991 and sworn a loyalty oath to the organization at that time, but that was a very different al-Qaeda, practically an ally of the United States; Mohamedou has always maintained that the fall of the communist government in Afghanistan marked the end of his participation in the organization. In his habeas proceedings, the government insisted that his occasional contacts and interactions with his brother-in-law and cousin Abu Hafs and a handful of other friends and acquaintances who had remained active in al-Qaeda proved that Mohamedou was still a part of the organization. While a few of those interactions involved possible gestures of support, none, Robertson suggested, rose to the level of criminal material support for terrorism, and overall, Mohamedou's contacts with these people were so sporadic that "they tend to support Salahi's submission that he was attempting to find the appropriate balance—avoiding close

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relationships with al Qaida members, but also trying to avoid making himself an enemy."

Judge Robertson's decision granting Mohamedou's habeas corpus petition and ordering his release came at a critical moment: as of April 1, 2010, the U.S. government had lost thirty-four out of forty-six habeas cases. In appeals of several of those cases, the government persuaded the DC Circuit Court of Appeals to accept a looser standard for judging whether a petitioner was "part of" al-Qaeda; now, as the appellate court explained in reversing Judge Robertson's order and remanding the case to district court for rehearing, the government no longer needed to show that a Guantánamo prisoner was carrying out al-Qaeda orders or directions at the time he was taken into custody.

In its opinion, the appeals court was careful to delineate "the precise nature of the government's case against Salahi." "The government has not criminally indicted Salahi for providing material support to terrorists or the 'foreign terrorist organization' al-Qaida," the court emphasized. "Nor," it added, "does the government seek to detain Salahi under the AUMF on the grounds that he aided the September 11 attacks or 'purposefully and materially support[ed]' forces associated with al-Qaeda 'in hostilities against U.S. Coalition partners.'" Rather, when Mohamedou's habeas corpus case is reheard in federal court, the government will likely again be arguing that his sporadic interactions with active al-Qaeda members in the 1990s mean that he too remained a member. Under the new standard, the court wrote, "Even if Salahi's connections to these individuals fail independently to prove that he was 'part of' al-Qaida, those connections make it more likely that Salahi was a member of the organization when captured and thus remain relevant to the question of whether he is detainable."[30]

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Ironically, when a district court rehears the case, the government will likely face questions about what it has always contended is the most damaging of those connections, Mohamedou's relationship with his cousin and brother-in-law Abu Hafs. As a member of bin Laden's Shura Council, Abu Hafs had a $5 million bounty on his head from the United States in the late 1990s, a figure that increased to $25 million after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. For years, though, the United States has known that Abu Hafs opposed those attacks; the 9/11 Commission reported that he "even wrote Bin Laden a message basing opposition to those attacks on the Qur'an." After the attacks, Abu Hafs left Afghanistan for Iran, where Iranian authorities placed him under a soft form of house arrest for more than a decade. In April 2012, Iran repatriated Abu Hafs to Mauritania. He was held for two months in a Mauritanian prison, during which he reportedly met with an international delegation that included Americans, condemned the 9/11 attacks, and renounced his ties to al-Qaeda. He was released in July 2012 and has been living since then as a free man.

I have not met Mohamedou Ould Slahi. Other than sending him a letter introducing myself when I was asked if I would help to bring his manuscript to print—a letter I do not know if he received—I have not communicated with him in any way.

I did request to meet with him at least once before submitting the completed work to make sure my edits met with his approval. The answer from the Pentagon was brief and absolute. "Visiting or otherwise communicating with any detainee in the detention facility in Guantanamo, unless you are legal counsel representing the detainee, is not possible," a public affairs officer wrote.

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"As you are aware, the detainees are held under the Law of War. Additionally, we do not subject detainees to public curiosity."

The phrase "public curiosity" comes from one of the pillars of the Law of War, the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Article 13 of the convention, "Humane Treatment of Prisoners," says:

> *Prisoners must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody will be prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention. . . .*
>
> *Prisoners must at all times be protected, particularly from acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.*
>
> *Measures of reprisal against prisoners of war are prohibited.*

I had proposed a confidential meeting, under strict security protocols, to make sure the edited version of Mohamedou's work—a work he specifically wrote for a public readership—accurately represents the original content and intent. For years that work itself was withheld, under a censorship regime that has not always served Geneva's purposes.

Censorship has been integral to the United States' post-9/11 detention operations from the start. It has been purposeful, not once but twice: first, to open a space for the abuse of prisoners, and then to conceal that those abuses happened. In Mohamedou's case, those abuses include enforced disappearance; arbitrary and incommunicado detention; cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; and torture. We know this thanks to a documentary record that was also, for years, rigorously suppressed.

I do not know to what extent personal and institutional

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interests in covering up those abuses have contributed to Mohamedou's continuing imprisonment. I do know that in the five years I have spent reading the record about his case, I have not been persuaded by my government's vague and shifting explanations for why he is in Guantánamo, or by the assertions of those who defend his now-thirteen-year detention by saying he is almost certainly, or possibly, a this or a that. My own sense of fairness tells me the question of what this or that may be, and of why he must remain in U.S. custody, should long ago have been answered. It would have been, I believe, if his *Guantánamo Diary* had not been kept secret for so long.

When Mohamedou wrote the manuscript for this book nine years ago, in the same isolated hut where some of the book's most nightmarish scenes had very recently happened, he set himself a task. "I have only written what I experienced, what I saw, and what I learned first-hand," he explains near the end. "I have tried not to exaggerate, nor to understate. I have tried to be as fair as possible, to the U.S. government, to my brothers, and to myself."

He has, from everything I have seen, done just that. The story he tells is well corroborated by the declassified record; he proves again and again to be a reliable narrator. He certainly does not exaggerate: the record contains torments and humiliations not included in the book, and he renders several of those he does include with considerable discretion. Even when the events he recounts are at their most extreme, his narration is tempered and direct. The horrors of those events speak for themselves.

That is because his real interest is always in the human dramas of these scenes. "The law of war is harsh," Mohamedou writes early on.

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If there's anything good at all in a war, it's that it brings the best and the worst out of people: some people try to use the lawlessness to hurt others, and some try to reduce the suffering to the minimum.

In chronicling his journey through the darkest regions of the United States' post-9/11 detention and interrogation program, his attention remains on his interrogators and guards, on his fellow detainees, and on himself. In his desire "to be fair," as he puts it, he recognizes the larger context of fear and confusion in which all these characters interact, and the much more local institutional and social forces that shape those interactions. But he also sees the capacity of every character to shape or mitigate the action, and he tries to understand people, regardless of stations or uniforms or conditions, as protagonists in their own right. In doing so, he transforms even the most dehumanizing situations into a series of individual, and at times harrowingly intimate, human exchanges.

This is the secret world of Guantánamo—a world of startlingly premeditated brutalities and of incidental degradations, but also a world of ameliorating gestures and kindnesses, of acknowledgments and recognitions, of mutual curiosities and risky forays across deep divides. That Mohamedou managed to experience all of this despite four years of the most arbitrary treatment imaginable and in the midst of one of Guantánamo's most horrendous interrogations says a great deal about his own character and his humanity. It says even more about his skills as a writer that he was able, so soon after the most traumatic of those experiences, to create from them a narrative that manages to be both damning and redeeming.

And yet this is not what impressed me most, as a reader and as a writer, when I first opened the file with Mohamedou's

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handwritten manuscript of *Guantánamo Diary*. What arrested me were characters and scenes far removed from Guantánamo: The hard-luck stowaway in a Senegalese prison. A sunset in Nouakchott after a Saharan dust storm. A heartbreaking moment of homesickness during a Ramadan call to prayer. The airport approach over Nouakchott's shantytowns. A rain-glazed runway in Cyprus. A drowsy predawn lull on a CIA rendition flight. Here is where I first recognized Mohamedou the writer, his sharp eye for character, his remarkable ear for voices, the way his recollections are infused with information recorded by all five senses, the way he accesses the full emotional register, in himself and others. He has the qualities I value most in a writer: a moving sense of beauty and a sharp sense of irony. He has a fantastic sense of humor.

He manages all of this in English, his fourth language, a language he was in the process of mastering even as he wrote the manuscript. This accomplishment testifies to a lifelong facility and fascination with words. But it also stems, it is clear, from a determination to engage, and to meet his environment on its own terms. On one level, mastering English in Guantánamo meant moving beyond translation and interpretation, beyond the necessity of a third person in the room, and opening the possibility that every contact with every one of his captors could be a personal exchange. On another, it meant decoding and understanding the language of the power that controls his fate—a power, as his twenty-thousand-mile odyssey of detention and interrogation vividly illustrates, of staggering influence and reach. Out of this engagement comes a truly remarkable work. On the one hand, it is a mirror in which, for the first time in anything I have read from Guantánamo, I have recognized aspects of myself, in both the characters of my compatriots and of those my country is holding captive. On another, it

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is a lens on an empire with a scope and impact few of us who live inside it fully understand.

For now, that power still controls Mohamedou's story. It is present in these pages in the form of more than 2,600 black-box redactions. These redactions do not just hide important elements of the action. They also blur Mohamedou's guiding principles and his basic purpose, undercutting the candor with which he addresses his own case, and obscuring his efforts to distinguish his characters as individuals, some culpable, some admirable, most a complex and shifting combination of both.

And it is present above all in his continuing, poorly explained imprisonment. Thirteen years ago, Mohamedou left his home in Nouakchott, Mauritania, and drove to the headquarters of his national police for questioning. He has not returned. For our collective sense of story and of justice, we must have a clearer understanding of why this has not happened yet, and what will happen next.

Guantánamo lives on unanswered questions. But now that we have *Guantánamo Diary*, how can we not at least resolve the questions in Mohamedou's case?

When we do, I believe there will be a homecoming. When that happens, the redactions will be filled in, the text will be reedited and amended and updated as Mohamedou himself would have it, and we will all be free to see *Guantánamo Diary* for what it ultimately is: an account of one man's odyssey through an increasingly borderless and anxious world, a world where the forces shaping lives are ever more distant and clandestine, where destinies are determined by powers with seemingly infinite reach, a world that threatens to dehumanize but fails to dehumanize—in short, an epic for our times.

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comfort items, except for a thin iso-mat and a very thin, small, and worn-out blanket. I was deprived from my books, which I owned. I was deprived from my Koran. I was deprived from my soap. I was deprived from my toothpaste - maybe -, I was deprived from the roll of toilet paper I had. The cell - better the box - was cooled down that I was shaking most of the time. I was forbidden from seeing the light of the day. Every once in a while they gave me a rec-time in the night to keep me from seeing or interacting with any detainees. I was living litterally in terror, I don't remember having slept one night quietly, and that if they gave me a break, which was rarely. For the next seventy days to come I hadn't known the sweetness of sleeping. Interrogation for 24-hours, three, and some times four shifts a day. I rarely got a day-off, "If you ~~cooperate~~ start to cooperate you will have some sleep, and hot meals" [3] [redacted] used to tell me repeatedly. The Last visit of ICRC: After a couple days of my tranfer [3] [redacted] from ICRC showed up at my cell and asked me whether I wanted to write a letter, "Yes!" I said, [3] [redacted] handed a paper and I wrote, "Mama I love you, I just wanted to tell you that I love you!"

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After that visits I never saw the ICRC for more than a year. They tried to see me but in vain. "You started to torture me, but you don't know how much I can take. You might end up killing me I said when [redacted] and [redacted] pulled me for interrogation, "We do recommand things, but we don't have the final decision" [redacted] said, "I just want to warn you, I am suffering b/c of the harsh conditions you expose me to. I already have sciatic nerve ~~crisis~~ attack. And torture will not make me more cooperative", "According to my experience we will cooperate. We are stronger than you, a[redacted] ces" [redacted] said. [redacted] never w[redacted] name, but he got busted, when mistakenly one of an colleague called him with his name. He doesn't know that I know his name, but well I do. [redacted] grew worse with every day passing by. He started to lay me out my case - He started with the story of [redacted], and me having recruit him for sep11 attack, "Why should he lie to us" [redacted] said, "I don't know". "All you have to say is, I don't remember, I don't know, I have done nothing. You think you are going to impress an American jury with these word. In the eyes of Americans, you are doomed. Just looking at you in orange suits, chains, being muslim, and Arabic is enough to convict you" [redacted] said "That is injust", "We know that you are criminal"

GUANTÁNAMO DIARY

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[redacted]. I have a great body." Every once in a while [redacted] offered me to other side of the cell, "If you start to cooperate, I am gonna stop harassing you? otherwise I will be doing the same with you and worse every day. I am [redacted] and that why my gov't designated me to this job. I've been always successful. Having sex with somebody is not considered as torture" [redacted] was leading the monolog [redacted]. Every now and then the [redacted] entered the room, and try to make me speak, "you cannot defeat us, we have so many people, and we keep humilate you with American [redacted]", "I have a [redacted] friend, I'm gonna bring tomorrow to help me" [redacted] said, "At least [redacted] cooperate" said [redacted] wryly. [redacted] didn't undress me but [redacted] was touching my private parts with [redacted] body. In the late afternoon, the torture squad started with other poor detainee. I could hear loud music playing. "Do you want me to send you to that team or are you gonna cooperate" said [redacted], but I didn't answer. The guards wryly used to call [redacted] the most of the torture took place in those buildings, and in the nights. When the darkness started to cover the sorry camp, [redacted] sent me back to my cell. "Today is just the begin, what's coming is worse and that is every day" [redacted] Doctor Routine check: In order [redacted] to see how much torture a detainee

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ONE

Jordan–Afghanistan–GTMO

July 2002–February 2003

The American Team Takes Over . . . Arrival at Bagram . . . Bagram to GTMO . . . GTMO, the New Home . . . One Day in Paradise, the Next in Hell

[redacted], July [redacted], 2002, 10 p.m.*

The music was off. The conversations of the guards faded away. The truck emptied.

I felt alone in the hearse truck.

The waiting didn't last: I felt the presence of new people, a silent team. I don't remember a single word during the whole rendition to follow.

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* It becomes clear, from an unredacted date a few pages into the manuscript, that the action begins late in the evening on July 19, 2002. MOS manuscript, 10. A Council of Europe investigation has confirmed that a CIA-leased Gulfstream jet with the tail number N379P departed Amman, Jordan, at 11:15 p.m. that night for Kabul, Afghanistan. An addendum to that 2006 report listing the flight records is available at http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2006/20060614_Ejdoc162006PartII-Appendix.pdf.

EDITOR'S NOTE ON THE FOOTNOTES: None of Mohamedou Ould Slahi's attorneys holding security clearances has reviewed the footnotes in this book, contributed to them in any way, or confirmed or denied my speculations contained in them. Nor has anyone else with access

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A person was undoing the chains on my wrists. He undid the first hand, and another guy grabbed that hand and bent it while a third person was putting on the new, firmer and heavier shackles. Now my hands were shackled in front of me.

Somebody started to rip my clothes with something like a scissors. I was like, What the heck is going on? I started to worry about the trip I neither wanted nor initiated. Somebody else was deciding everything for me; I had all the worries in the world but making a decision. Many thoughts went quickly through my head. The optimistic thoughts suggested, Maybe you're in the hands of Americans, but don't worry, they just want to take you home, and to make sure that everything goes in secrecy. The pessimistic ones went, You screwed up! The Americans managed to pin some shit on you, and they're taking you to U.S. prisons for the rest of your life.

I was stripped naked. It was humiliating, but the blindfold helped me miss the nasty look of my naked body. During the whole procedure, the only prayer I could remember was the crisis prayer, *Ya hayyu! Ya kayyum!* and I was mumbling it all the time. Whenever I came to be in a similar situation, I would forget all my prayers except the crisis prayer, which I learned from life of our Prophet, Peace be upon him.

One of the team wrapped a diaper around my private parts. Only then was I dead sure that the plane was heading to the U.S. Now I started to convince myself that "every thing's gonna be alright." My only worry was about my family seeing me on TV in such a degrading situation. I was so skinny. I've been always, but never *that* skinny: my street clothes had become so loose that I looked like a small cat in a big bag.

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to the unredacted manuscript reviewed the footnotes, contributed to them in any way, or confirmed or denied my speculations contained in them.

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When the U.S. team finished putting me in the clothes they tailored for me, a guy removed my blindfold for a moment. I couldn't see much because he directed the flashlight into my eyes. He was wrapped from hair to toe in a black uniform. He opened his mouth and stuck his tongue out, gesturing for me to do the same, a kind of AHH test which I took without resistance. I saw part of his very pale, blond-haired arm, which cemented my theory of being in Uncle Sam's hands.

The blindfold was pushed down. The whole time I was listening to loud plane engines; I very much believe that some planes were landing and others taking off. I felt my "special" plane approaching, or the truck approaching the plane, I don't recall anymore. But I do recall that when the escort grabbed me from the truck, there was no space between the truck and the airplane stairs. I was so exhausted, sick, and tired that I couldn't walk, which compelled the escort to pull me up the steps like a dead body.

Inside the plane it was very cold. I was laid on a sofa and the guards shackled me, mostly likely to the floor. I felt a blanket put over me; though very thin, it comforted me.

I relaxed and gave myself to my dreams. I was thinking about different members of my family I would never see again. How sad would they be! I was crying silently and without tears; for some reason, I gave all my tears at the beginning of the expedition, which was like the boundary between death and life. I wished I were better to people. I wished I were better to my family. I regretted every mistake I made in my life, toward God, toward my family, toward anybody!

I was thinking about life in an American prison. I was thinking about documentaries I had seen about their prisons, and the harshness with which they treat their prisoners. I wished I were blind or had some kind of handicap, so they would put me in

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isolation and give me some kind of humane treatment and protection. I was thinking, What will the first hearing with the judge be like? Do I have a chance to get due process in a country so full of hatred against Muslims? Am I really already convicted, even before I get the chance to defend myself?

I drowned in these painful dreams in the warmth of the blanket. Every once in a while the pain of the urine urge pinched me. The diaper didn't work with me: I could not convince my brain to give the signal to my bladder. The harder I tried, the firmer my brain became. The guard beside me kept pouring water bottle caps in my mouth, which worsened my situation. There was no refusing it, either you swallow or you choke. Lying on one side was killing me beyond belief, but every attempt to change my position ended in failure, for a strong hand pushed me back to the same position.

I could tell that the plane was a big jet, which led me to believe that flight was direct to the U.S. But after about five hours, the plane started to lose altitude and smoothly hit the runway. I realized the U.S. is a little bit farther than that. Where are we? In Ramstein, Germany? Yes! Ramstein it is: in Ramstein there's a U.S. military airport for transiting planes from the middle east; we're going to stop here for fuel. But as soon as the plane landed, the guards started to change my metal chains for plastic ones that cut my ankles painfully on the short walk to a helicopter. One of the guards, while pulling me out of the plane, tapped me on the shoulder as if to say, "you're gonna be alright." As in agony as I was, that gesture gave me hope that there were still some human beings among the people who were dealing with me.

When the sun hit me, the question popped up again: Where am I? Yes, Germany it is: it was July and the sun rises early. But

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why Germany? I had done no crimes in Germany! What shit did they pull on me? And yet the German legal system was by far a better choice for me; I know the procedures and speak the language. Moreover, the German system is somewhat transparent, and there are no two and three hundred years sentences. I had little to worry about: a German judge will face me and show me whatever the government has brought against me, and then I'm going to be sent to a temporary jail until my case is decided. I won't be subject to torture, and I won't have to see the evil faces of interrogators.

After about ten minutes the helicopter landed and I was taken into a truck, with a guard on either side. The chauffeur and his neighbor were talking in a language I had never heard before. I thought, What the heck are they speaking, maybe Filipino? I thought of the Philippines because I'm aware of the huge U.S. Military presence there. Oh, yes, Philippines it is: *they* conspired with the U.S. and pulled some shit on me. What would the questions of *their* judge be? By now, though, I just wanted to arrive and take a pee, and after that they can do whatever they please. Please let me arrive! I thought; After that you may kill me!

The guards pulled me out of the truck after a five-minute drive, and it felt as if they put me in a hall. They forced me to kneel and bend my head down: I should remain in that position until they grabbed me. They yelled, "Do not move." Before worrying about anything else, I took my most remarkable urine since I was born. It was such a relief; I felt I was released and sent back home. All of a sudden my worries faded away, and I smiled inside. Nobody noticed what I did.

About a quarter of an hour later, some guards pulled me and towed me to a room where they obviously had "processed"

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many detainees. Once I entered the room, the guards took the gear off my head. Oh, my ears ached so badly, and so did my head; actually my whole body was conspiring against me. I could barely stand. The guards started to deprive me of my clothes, and soon I stood there as naked as my mother bore me. I stood there for the first time in front of U.S. soldiers, not on TV, this was for real. I had the most common reaction, covering my private parts with my hands. I also quietly started to recite the crisis prayer, *Ya hayyu! Ya kayyum!* Nobody stopped me from praying; however, one of the MPs was staring at me with his eyes full of hatred. Later on he would order me to stop looking around in the room.

A [redacted] medic gave me a quick medical check, after which I was wrapped in Afghani cloths. Yes, Afghani clothes in the Philippines! Of course I was chained, hands and feet tied to my waist. My hands, moreover, were put in mittens. Now I'm ready for action! What action? No clue!

The escort team pulled me blindfolded to a neighboring interrogation room. As soon as I entered the room, several people started to shout and throw heavy things against the wall. In the melee, I could distinguish the following questions:

"Where is Mullah Omar?"

"Where is Usama Bin Laden?"

"Where is Jalaluddin Haqqani?"

A very quick analysis went through my brain: the individuals in those questions were leading a country, and now they're a bunch of fugitives! The interrogators missed a couple of things. First, they had just briefed me about the latest news: Afghanistan is taken over, but the high level people have not been captured. Second, I turned myself in about the time when the war against terrorism started, and since then I have been in a Jordanian prison, literally cut off from the rest of the world. So

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how am I supposed to know about the U.S. taking over Afghanistan, let alone about its leaders having fled? Not to mention where they are now.

I humbly replied, "I don't know!"

"You're a liar!" shouted one of them in broken Arabic.

"No, I'm not lying, I was captured so and so, and I only know Abu Hafs . . ." I said, in a quick summary of my whole story.*

"We should interrogate these motherfuckers like the Israelis do."

"What do they do?" asked another.

"They strip them naked and interrogate them!"

"Maybe we should!" suggested another. Chairs were still flying around and hitting the walls and the floor. I knew it was only a show of force, and the establishment of fear and anxiety. I went with the flow and even shook myself more than necessary. I didn't believe that Americans torture, even though I had always considered it a remote possibility.

"I am gonna interrogate you later on," said one, and the U.S. interpreter repeated the same in Arabic.

"Take him to the Hotel," suggested the interrogator. This time the interpreter didn't translate.

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* Abu Hafs, whose name appears here and elsewhere in the manuscript unredacted, is MOS's cousin and former brother-in-law. His full name is Mahfouz Ould al-Walid, and he is also known as Abu Hafs al-Mauritani. Abu Hafs married the sister of MOS's former wife. He was a prominent member of al-Qaeda's Shura Council, the group's main advisory body, in the 1990s and up until the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. It has been widely reported that Abu Hafs opposed those attacks; the 9/11 Commission recorded that "Abu Hafs the Mauritanian reportedly even wrote Bin Ladin a message basing opposition to the attacks on the Qur'an." Abu Hafs left Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks and spent the next decade under house arrest in Iran. In April 2012 he was extradited to Mauritania, where he was held briefly and then released. He is now a free man. The relevant section of the 9/11 Commission report is available at http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Ch7.pdf.

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And so was the first interrogation done. Before the escort grabbed me, in my terrorizing fear, I tried to connect with the interpreter.

"Where did you learn such good Arabic?" I asked.

"In the U.S.!" he replied, sounding flattered. In fact, he didn't speak good Arabic; I just was trying to make some friends.

The escort team led me away. "You speak English," one of them said in a thick Asian accent.

"A little bit," I replied. He laughed, and so did his colleague. I felt like a human being leading a casual conversation. I said to myself, Look how friendly the Americans are: they're gonna put you in a Hotel, interrogate you for a couple of days, and then fly you home safely. There's no place for worry. The U.S. just wants to check everything, and since you're innocent, they're gonna find that out. For Pete's sake, you're on a base in Philippines; even though it's a place at the edge of legality, it's just temporary. The fact that one of the guards sounded Asian strengthened my wrong theory of being in the Philippines.

I soon arrived, not at a Hotel but at a wooden cell with neither a bathroom nor a sink. From the modest furniture—a weathered, thin mattress and an old blanket—you could tell there had been somebody here. I was kind of happy for having left Jordan, the place of randomness, but I was worried about the prayers I could not perform, and I wanted to know how many prayers I missed on the trip. The guard of the cell was a small, skinny white [redacted], a fact which gave me more comfort: for the last eight months I had been dealt with solely by big, muscular males.*

* Context suggests the guard may be female. Throughout the manuscript, it appears that the pronouns *she* and *her* are consistently redacted, and *he* and *his* appear unredacted.

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I asked [redacted] about the time, and [redacted] told me it was about eleven, if I remember correctly. I had one more question.

"What day is it?"

"I don't know, every day here is the same," [redacted] replied. I realized I had asked too much; [redacted] wasn't even supposed to tell me the time, as I would learn later.

I found a Koran gently placed on some water bottles. I realized I was not alone in the jail, which was surely not a Hotel.

As it turned out, I was delivered to the wrong cell. Suddenly, I saw the weathered feet of a detainee whose face I couldn't see because it was covered with a black bag. Black bags, I soon would learn, were put on everybody's heads to blindfold them and make them unrecognizable, including the writer. Honestly, I didn't want to see the face of the detainee, just in case he was in pain or suffering, because I hate to see people suffering; it drives me crazy. I'll never forget the moans and cries of the poor detainees in Jordan when they were suffering torture. I remember putting my hands over my ears to stop myself from hearing the cries, but no matter how hard I tried, I was still able to hear the suffering. It was awful, even worse than torture.

The [redacted] guard at my door stopped the escort team and organized my transfer to another cell. It was the same as the one I was just in, but in the facing wall. In the room there was a half-full water bottle, the label of which was written in Russian; I wished I had learned Russian. I said to myself, a U.S. base in the Philippines, with water bottles from Russia? The U.S. doesn't need supplies from Russia, and besides, geographically it makes no sense. Where *am* I? Maybe in a former Russian Republic, like Tajikstan? All I know is that I don't know!

The cell had no facility to take care of the natural business. Washing for prayer was impossible and forbidden. There was no clue as to the *Kibla*, the direction of Mecca. I did what I

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could. My next door neighbor was mentally sick; he was shouting in a language with which I was not familiar. I later learned that he was a Taliban leader.

Later on that day, July 20, 2002, the guards pulled me for routine police work, fingerprints, height, weight, etcetera. I was offered [redacted] as interpreter. It was obvious that Arabic was not [redacted] first language. [redacted] taught me the rules: no speaking, no praying loudly, no washing for prayer, and a bunch of other nos in that direction.* The guard asked me whether I wanted to use the bathroom. I thought he meant a place where you can shower; "Yes," I said. The bathroom was a barrel filled with human waste. It was the most disgusting bathroom I ever saw. The guards had to watch you while you were taking care of business. I couldn't eat the food—the food in Jordan was, by far, better than the cold MREs I got in Bagram—so I didn't really have to use the bathroom. To pee, I would use the empty water bottles I had in my room. The hygienic situation was not exactly perfect; sometimes when the bottle got filled, I continued on the floor, making sure that it didn't go all the way to the door.

For the next several nights in isolation, I got a funny guard who was trying to convert me to Christianity. I enjoyed the conversations, though my English was very basic. My dialogue partner was young, religious, and energetic. He liked Bush ("the true religious leader," according to him); he hated Bill Clinton ("the Infidel"). He loved the dollar and hated the Euro. He had his copy of the bible on him all the time, and whenever the opportunity arose he read me stories, most of which were from the Old Testament. I wouldn't have been able to understand them if I hadn't read the bible in Arabic several times—not to mention that the versions of the stories are not that far from the

* Again, redacted pronouns suggest the interpreter is female.

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ones in the Koran. I had studied the Bible in the Jordanian prison; I asked for a copy, and they offered me one. It was very helpful in understanding Western societies, even though many of them deny being influenced by religious scriptures.

I didn't try to argue with him: I was happy to have somebody to talk to. He and I were unanimous that the religious scriptures, including the Koran, must have come from the same source. As it turned out, the hot-tempered soldier's knowledge about his religion was very shallow. Nonetheless I enjoyed him being my guard. He gave me more time on the bathroom, and he even looked away when I used the barrel.

I asked him about my situation. "You're not a criminal, because they put the criminals in the other side," he told me, gesturing with his hand. I thought about those "criminals" and pictured a bunch of young Muslims, and how hard their situation could be. I felt bad. As it turned out, later on I was transferred to these "criminals," and became a "high priority criminal." I was kind of ashamed when the same guard saw me later with the "criminals," after he had told me that I was going to be released at most after three days. He acted normally, but he didn't have that much freedom to talk to me about religion there because of his numerous colleagues. Other detainees told me that he was not bad toward them, either.

The second or the third night [redacted] pulled me out of my cell himself and led me to an interrogation, where the same [redacted] Arabic already had taken a seat. [redacted]. You could tell he was the right man for the job: he was the kind of man who

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