



**“THE OATH”**  
By Laura Poitras

Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2010 on PBS (Check local listings)

**Filmmaker’s Statement**

I was first interested in making a film about Guantanamo in 2003, when I was also beginning a film about the war in Iraq. I never imagined Guantanamo would still be open when I finished that film, but sadly it was — and still is today.

Originally, my idea for **The Oath** was to make a film about someone released from Guantanamo and returning home. In May 2007, I traveled to Yemen looking to find that story and that’s when I met Abu Jandal, Osama bin Laden’s former bodyguard, driving a taxicab in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen. I wasn’t looking to make a film about Al-Qaeda, but that changed when I met Abu Jandal.

Themes of betrayal, guilt, loyalty, family and absence are not typically things that come to mind when we imagine a film about Al-Qaeda and Guantanamo. Despite the dangers of telling this story, it compelled me.

Born in Saudi Arabia of Yemeni parents, Abu Jandal left home in 1993 to fight jihad in Bosnia. In 1996 he recruited Salim Hamdan to join him for jihad in Tajikistan. While traveling through Afghanistan, they were recruited by Osama bin Laden. Abu Jandal became bin Laden’s personal bodyguard and “Emir of Hospitality.” Salim Hamdan became bin Laden’s driver. Abu Jandal ends up driving a taxi and Hamdan ends up at Guantanamo.

**The Oath** is the second documentary in a trilogy I am working on about America post 9/11. The first film, **My Country, My Country**, is about the U.S. occupation of Iraq told from the perspective of a Sunni doctor and his family. In many ways, **My Country, My Country**, and its depiction of the victims of this conflict, gave me permission to take on **The Oath**. The third film will look at domestic surveillance.

In each film, my goal has been to understand the repercussions of 9/11 through the stories of people living this history. I’m also interested in creating primary documents — an on-the-ground record that can help us understand this history as time passes. I believe the world will be grappling with the tragedy of 9/11 and America’s reaction to the attack for generations to come.

In the nine years since the attacks of 9/11, the United States has begun two wars, institutionalized indefinite detention without trial, conducted “extraordinary rendition,” established secret prisons overseas and participated in the legalization of torture. In these same nine years, Al-Qaeda has grown from a fringe terrorist organization into an international social movement that is being “franchised” worldwide.

If the United States and Western nations hope to contain, rather than spread, the threat of Al-Qaeda, we must understand its motivations and internal divisions. To do that requires first seeing Islamic radicals like Abu Jandal as real people — subject to the human condition rather than apart from it. To acknowledge that humanity is not a justification of their acts, but rather an acceptance of an uncomfortable reality.

— *Laura Poitras, Director/Producer*