



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Synagogues prove a sticking point in Gaza pull-out', *The Age online*, 10/09/05.

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We were walking across the vast open square facing the Western Wall, sole remnant of the biblical Jewish Temple. Just a retaining wall, holding up the esplanade and the mosques. Our mosques. The Jews call it the 'Wailing Wall', they go to lament there, for the destruction of their temple, thousands of years ago. They come here from all over the world, they sway like metronomes in prayer, they write messages on little papers and slide them into crannies between the stones, they even have a fax in a room at the northern end of the square, so that Jews in Brooklyn and Antwerp can flash off a timely prayer to be pushed into the wall at times of need. They dance before the wall, women and men in separate enclosures, they decry our mosques which have taken their temple's place, and call for its reconstruction. I felt a squeeze of relief, the Jews have their religious fanatics too, not only us.

I did not know how we got here. A moment before, we had been on the city walls, looking down the valley towards the Dead Sea. Normally Palestinians cannot get past the security barriers that surround the Western Wall,...and I could not even remember how we had got through, as if our being so self-engrossed with our problems had created a shield about us which had waived away the soldiers guarding the checkpoint. All around us the shocked stares of Jewish pilgrims, the men in long black coats and hats, the wigged and shawled women...one look as we passed, and the men in black scattered from our path like skittles in the wind, as if we were nitro-glycerine.

I was the first to speak, after leaving our vantage point on the wall. 'So I'm on the Clearstream List', I said. A list of bank accounts. It included French politicians and Colombian business men. The bank had told me that discretion was their motto. For this they were going to have to pay. But first, damage control. 'Are any of our clients also on the list?'

A moment's hesitation. 'No...', my agent began, and my relief was such that I remembered the tea amidst soft cushions awaiting my return at the Danish Tea House. 'Then it's not so bad. It will demonstrate the risk involved to our clients. We can up our commissions. Don't take it so hard, how about a raise in pay?'

Once upon a time I had received an email from a certain Mr John Obutu. John had apparently received my name from the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce which had recommended me for my trustworthiness. He explained to me that he was a lawyer working for the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources, in the department that handled industrial tenders. He had recently granted a large tender to an American company for the construction of a pipeline. He had arranged with them for part of the monies paid by the Ministry to be

siphoned into a separate bank account. All he needed was a third party to transfer its contents elsewhere in exchange for an honest though generous commission. Since I was always conscientious whenever a potential business opportunity presented itself, I called my wife's cousin's son-in-law who worked at the Chamber of Commerce who, after consulting his colleagues, reassured me that no John Obutu from Nigeria or elsewhere had ever been in touch with them. Indeed, over the following months I received many more missives making similar offers. And I felt a certain pleasure when I heard that some of these third world scams were separating gullible, opportunistic Americans from their funds.

One evening, I was sitting in the Danish Tea House, sharing a moment of reverie with myself. I imagined writing such a letter. Who would I be? Margaret Thatcher's son Mark, now there was one for monkey business on an international scale! Then it struck me that while John Obutu had surely been bogus, there were certainly lawyers buying pipelines for the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources, as there were certainly dead generals' stricken daughters-in-law in possession of a windfall and in need of some financial sleight of hand on the part of an obliging stranger. All one had to do was find them. Rare are those who have really profited from the dot.com boom and, as a Palestinian shut up in occupied territory, I felt a certain pride even, for a line of business so unorthodox.

My agent interrupted me. 'No, none of our clients are on the list. Except one.'

'And who is that?' I asked. No one would confiscate my euphoria. I would take care of that. Give them a discount.

'It's Idi who's on the list. They say that he is on the way, with his henchmen.'

'I thought that Idi was dead', I replied. My heart sank. The papers had been full of obituaries. I had been quite relieved. He had been an irksome client.

'No, he isn't. He's travelling incognito.'

'For Idi, that would be difficult, given his form factor.'

'Not so. Idi did the Jeddah diet. No alcohol. No sweetness. No women.'

'Do you know when he is arriving?'

'I don't know. I'm waiting for the signal. He says that he is going to feed you to the crocodiles.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joseph Rabie.*