

Story for performance #971
webcast from Sydney at 07:47PM, 16 Feb 08



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'War on drugs lacks a certain something', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 16/02/08.

Tags: [Palestine](#), [drugs](#), [crime](#), [workplace](#)
Writer/s: [Adam Possamai](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

The Palestinian commander of the Nablus drug squad gets out of his modest car. He crosses the busy street while the orange juice vendor salutes him from his shoddy booth. He barely signals in return and passes the owner of the coffee booth. For the many years they have seen each other, neither has ever given a friendly sign to the other. The police commander walks furiously towards his office. His moustache follows the movement of his lips:

'He is here?'

'He is sitting at your desk,' replies a police officer reading his newspaper.

The police Captain sees the skinny man waiting for him at his desk. The smoke coming out of the man's cigarette looks like a living entity which has infiltrated the room as if it was seeking hidden information. The man looks at the trophy case of the Nablus narcotic squad: some crude bongs made from plastic water bottles, some syringes, some pills; not much of a trophy haul for a drug squad.

The Captain knows that he and his team have been observed, analysed, put into small calculable pieces for weeks by this man from the Palestinian government.

'What do you want?' asks the Captain while lighting his own cigarette hoping that his smoke will negate that of the other man.

'How about a coffee?'

The Captain does not acknowledge the request and lets the cleaner serve them coffee. Both men are sipping their very black drink looking at each other intensely hoping to read each others dark intention. The skinny man breaks the staring duel and comes to the point:

'Since the newspaper article on your department, you are the joke of the planet.'

The Captain does not say anything and looks at the man straight into his eyes wishing to make him uncomfortable while speaking. The man marks a few seconds of pause, inhales a bit more smoke and continues:

'The whole world knows that you have 25 people working for you on fighting drugs, while cocaine and heroin are very limited in your area. Look at your trophy case, this is bullshit. If you were a movie director, would you put in a museum the shots that you took as a toddler?'

The Captain, furious, hits his hand on the table. He points his finger to the government's auditor and yells:

'I have here a broken fax machine, and one, only one computer with no internet connection. Also, the petty budget you give to my department is only 1300 shekels a month. 800 of that go to that man who does the cleaning and makes the coffee. We've only got two cars and one is stuck at the garage because we can't pay the mechanic to fix it. So, don't you dare come to my office telling me how badly I manage my accounts when you give me shit to spend.'

'Your department is a joke, and I have been sent here to fix it,' replies the auditor. 'You have too many men working for you to stop a crime that is almost non-existent. There are only hashish and ecstasy tablets around, that is peanuts. There is no cocaine and heroin, no gold. 25 men to collect peanuts is a joke.'

'Are you suggesting that I should get rid of some of my men?'

The auditor finishes his coffee and as he is about to tell the Captain about the future of his department, the leader of the squad gets an envelope out from his desk.

'Before you tell me to get rid of my men or of my department, I should tell you something. My men and I have just put together some money to buy a small digital camera. You didn't budget it, but we went out of our way and our own pocket to get what we need to do our job. You know, we are very devoted to doing our job. What we uncovered with this camera was quite interesting.'

The Captain slides the photographs along the desk and invites the auditor to check them.

'Look, I really like your smile on this picture,' says the policeman. 'You really look happy. Do you often look that happy with your wife?'

The auditor looks at them carefully, finishes his cigarette and throws the butt in the coffee cup.

'As I was going to say before you interrupted me,' articulates the auditor with a broken voice, 'I thought that a solution to your problems would be for your men to make their own coffee by themselves instead of paying that cleaner for this job. This will save you some money and make your department a much stronger one.'

The Captain raises a smile and walks with the auditor towards the door. He says while holding the door with a big smile:

'By the way, here is the memory card of the camera. For some reason, our computer cannot make any copies of these pictures. Please give my regards to your wife.'

'I will,' replies the auditor.

The Captain buys a drink for the first time in years at the coffee booth and surprises the vendor. He walks happily back inside the building and grasps the last two packs of coffee from the kitchenette. He yells at his men:

'We are staying together and we continue to work the same way as ever.'

His men, all but the cleaner, cheer him and applaud the work he has done. Before walking back to his desk to read the paper, the Captain stops by the trophy case to put the two packs of coffee between two bongs.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Adam Possamai.