

Identity and its Discontents:

Corporeal Indexicality in Claus Beck-Nielsen and Jonas Khemiri

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Walls of national language, literary genre, and interpretive practice separate the works of Claus Beck-Nielsen and Jonas Khemiri. Beck-Nielsen is a provocative Danish performance artist whose work seeks to problematize both domestic as well as international norms. His books are simultaneously a side effect of his performance art, as well as the site of that art's dissemination and critique. By publishing narratives of his own artistic projects, Beck-Nielsen enters into Danish critical discourse, inviting (or entrapping) the paratextual participation of other forms of print media such as newspapers in his project. Jonas Khemiri is a Swedish author whose two novels and one stage play have generated praise for their sensitive and nuanced portrayal of Swedish identity among two generations of Arab immigrants in Stockholm.

What has done the most to obscure the important thematic connections between these two authors is the interpretive practice of placing them in separate and distinct literary movements. These "stovepipes" run in parallel to each other, but neither connect nor allow any critical juxtaposition of the works themselves. A brief summary of these interpretive traditions follows.

Attempts to place Beck-Nielsen's output within literary history are complicated by the usual genre transgression that performance art entails. Two main threads of interpretation can nonetheless be discerned. The first links him with the left-wing journalist Günter Wallraff, whose exploits in the West Germany of the 1970s included impersonating factory workers, alcoholics, and even Turkish immigrants. In this tradition, which has its counterparts in Scandinavian literature of the 1970s as well (Ekelöf 1970), Beck-Nielsen plays the part of the socially-conscious author incognito, assuming the dress and behaviors of a social outcast in order to shine a light on injustice and inequality within the boundaries of the national welfare state. Despite the temptation to see Beck-Nielsen as a continuation of this tradition, both the critics' perception of this genre as old-fashioned as well as the author's own self-reflexivity conspire to suggest something far more interesting than just "Wallraffing" is going on.

The second way of interpreting Beck-Nielsen is to see his "autofiction" as part of a trend among Danish authors of the 1990s and 2000s (Høeg, Brøgger, Stage) to entwine autobiography and fictional narrative in ways which are purposefully confusing, or at least

resistant to black-and-white categories of fact and fiction. Poul Behrendt's 2006 *Dobbelkontrakten: en æstetisk nydannelse* is an exhaustive (and arguably exhausting) treatment of the phenomenon whereby the previous contract between reader and author are renegotiated. There can indeed be no doubt that Beck-Nielsen plays with his own involvement in his story in a "factional" manner, but what separates his tale in *Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001)* from a more conventional pseudo-memoir such as Høeg's *De måske egnede* is, as we shall see, is that Beck-Nielsen himself experienced many of the traumas which he wrote about – at the same time that he was also more responsible than Høeg in causing them.

Jonas Khemiri's writing is nearly always discussed in Sweden as the brightest light of "second-generation" immigrant literature which began in 2001 with Alejandro Wenger's collection of short stories *Til vår ära* and Johannes Anyuru's 2003 book of poems *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*. Khemiri's 2003 *Ett öga rött* was the breakthrough *bildningsroman* which put the story of a young, non-white Swede on the pages of book reviews and best-seller lists. Since then, Khemiri's second novel *Montecore: en unik tiger* and play *Invasion!* in 2006, together with Marjaneh Bakhtiari's *Kalla det vad fan du vill* from 2005, have provided ample raw materials for the construction of the *invandrarlitteratur* genre. I myself confess to having written a Masters Thesis on the topic in 2005, and even today, the apparatus of research universities, such as Uppsala's Centre for Multiethnic Research, depends on the first-generation/second-generation divide to organize its projects of literary history. Critics of this *invandrarlitteratur* category include, not surprisingly, the authors themselves, as well as a few critics such as Astrid Trotzig, whose 2004 essay "Biografi som kategori" is perhaps the most thorough attempt thus far to problematize the grouping.

With these caveats in mind, we can nevertheless note that these second-generation works share techniques that broaden the conception of the "Swedish." Each similarity in these texts points to some common goal in the more abstract realm of theory. First, many use the concrete immigrant suburb as their setting and/or theme, in an attempt to engage with the racial and class aspects of urban space. Second, most are at least partially written in non-standard Swedish. Though this linguistic move is often misinterpreted as being documentary or "realistic," (the sociolinguist Ulla-Britt Kotsinas discovered and named such *Rinkebysvenska* as early as the 1980s) I have argued (2005) that the use of immigrant slang and non-standard grammar in these works is linked more to aesthetics rather than sociology, an attempt to broaden the confines of what is an acceptable literary language. Engaging with, and contesting, architectonic and linguistic notions of center/periphery (city/suburb,

rikssvenska/rinkebysvenska), these authors get a handle on far larger problems of cultural integration and national belonging in Sweden.

This brief overview of the ways that Claus Beck-Nielsen and Jonas Khemiri are understood in their national contexts should show that, while both are considered part of a contemporary avant-garde, conventions of genre and national literature conspire to place each author in a separate artistic tradition, rather than enabling a potentially fruitful juxtaposition. In this paper, I examine Beck-Nielsen's 2003 book *Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001): En biografi* together with Khemiri's 2006 stage play *Invasion!*, performed at Sweden's Riksteater, for the ways in which they expose profound dissatisfaction with the condition of individual identity within the context of the Nordic nation-state and its social welfare apparatus. Khemiri's play explores the obsession with fixing the identity and controlling the movements of one "Abul Kasem," a stand-in for all non-Europeans in the era of Guantánamo, whereas Beck-Nielsen's book is the chronicle of his own life on streets of Copenhagen, playing the role of a homeless man named "Claus Nielsen" who can't remember his CPR number.

The way that both works attack public-sector identity management in contemporary Scandinavia is rooted in the unique conditions of the 21st century, yet is also linked to some of the central scholarship on the nation-state in the 20th century. It is my contention that buried underneath exterior dissimilarities lies a strikingly similar critique of the dominant form of social and political organization in 20th century Scandinavia: what we might term the welfare-nation-state.

My subtitle, "corporeal indexicality," suggests that central problem of identity for these two writers is the literal *body* of the social outsider. In two cases of deviance from the Welfare State's expected relationship with its citizens (one contingent on class and the other on race,) the state subjects the human corpse to a biopolitical system of control and identification which, when considered in the context of the theories of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, illuminates a key contradiction in the heart of the modern nation. By putting these two contemporary Nordic works into conversation, we can shed light on their common critique of the national-welfare-state.

Two crucial areas of intersection link these texts. First, both demonstrate a marked obsession with personal names as both key to identity as well as the space of identity's confusion and disorientation. Second, they show a common concern with what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has articulated as a contradiction inherent in modern democracy, stemming from the distinction in ancient Greek between *bios* and *zoe*, civilized

life and bare life. The contradiction that Agamben identified centers on the way that state methods of biopolitical control over citizens inevitably expand to encompass not just citizens, but also the “non-political” bodies of refugees, illegal immigrants and the homeless. Despite granting these subaltern individuals no political rights, modern nation-states *must* seek to control them, as they are essential to the very definition of political life protected by western democracies. This “inclusive exclusion,” as Agamben terms it (8) is the paradoxical terrain that both Khemiri and Beck-Nielsen place their characters. As we read these two authors’ texts, we delve deep into the consequences of the irresolvable contradiction at the heart of states that simultaneously require the existence of, as well as deny the rights of, bare life.

Let me explain the first of these two convergences – identity – by briefly detailing the plot of both works. For this purpose, the self-reflexivity and meta-fictiveness of Beck-Nielsen’s text works to our advantage, as the book provides its own plot summary:

12. december 2000 ankommer en mand til Københavns Hovedbanegård med toget fra Tyskland. Manden medbringer ingen ting ud over sig selv, det tøj han har på og et ønske om at skaffe sig mad, varme, et sted at sove og på længere sigt muligheden for at klare sig selv. Men meget hurtigt viser det set, at manden, på grund af et manglende personnummer, slet ikke kan få lov at klare sig selv, han må ikke tjene penge, betale skat, leje en lejlighed eller sætte sine penge i banken. [...] i mellemtiden, befinder han sig udenfor, på gaden, som en ingen, i officiel ikke-eksistens. Da Systemet, i en vis forstand, er abstrakt, har det heller ingen konkret indgang, bortset fra personnummeret. (101)

While this ‘Claus Nielsen’ was surviving on the streets of Copenhagen, his adventure was being chronicled by papers as diverse as *Ekstra Bladet* and *Information*. The articles and photos published in these papers constitute a kind of paratext in relationship to what would become the actual book. In the case of *Information*, the journalist who reported on Claus Nielsen’s struggles was Claus Beck-Nielsen himself. This play with names had a serious point: by the simple act of removing what he called the “distinctive hyphen” from his last name and forgetting his CPR number, Beck-Nielsen became a Dane so completely ordinary that the system was unable to handle him. At the police station, an officer works in vain to find him in official records:

– Sid ned, siger han, – Claus Nielsen? og ser ind i min sjæl ...
– Claus Nielsen, siger jeg ...
– Dit personnummer? ...
– Det er noget med seks, siger jeg [...]
– Hedder du Jan Klint Nielsen? ... [...]
– Jeg hedder Claus Nielsen, siger jeg, – ja ja, siger han ...
[...]
Timerne går ... snart er der papirer nok til en hel telefonbog ...

- Claus Nielsen, råber han og rejser sig behersket, og så kommer hånden igen, – vi kan desværre ikke hjælpe dig ...
- Hvad skal jeg så gøre, siger jeg ...
- Jeg kan ikke finde dig, siger han, Marc, – desværre ... og følger mig ud ... (30)

Without the unique, identifying number, Beck-Nielsen has disappeared into a mass of Danes with more or less the same name. The only thing that had previously guaranteed his uniqueness, his state-given number, shows its importance in a dramatic fashion at the very moment of its (artificial) absence. This strange inversion in importance between sign and signifier inspires Beck-Nielsen to reflect on the way that the state's bio-political mechanism of control — his CPR number — has assumed primary importance in the social everyday controlled and enabled by the modern Danish welfare state. His thoughts circle in a way around the distinction in Christian theology between body and soul. The soul's purported imperishability has been replaced by – or more precisely subsumed into – the longevity of a mathematical notation:

Ti cifre og en lille streg. Jeg troede, det var en praktisk foranstaltning, et vedhæng til mig, som en slipsenål eller en billet. Det er omvendt: Jeg var en konsekvens af det nummer. Nu er jeg væk. (Sjælen sidder in nummeret. Når et menneske dør, så forsvinder kroppen [...] Tilbage er nummeret. Nummeret er udødeligt. (115)

If Beck-Nielsen's emphasis is on how the apparatus of the welfare state depends on the unchanging nature of the CPR number in the face of the anonymity of his all-too-Danish name, then Jonas Khemiri works on a similar theme with name that makes unmistakable reference to the Orient. Just as "Claus Nielsen" is so common a name as to render its carrier invisible, "Abul Kasem" is a name that invokes so many ethnic and cultural connotations as to render its carrier everywhere at once. In Khemiri's own summary of his play,

Som klangbotten och metafiktiv ram används Carl Jonas Love Almqvists pjäs *Signora Luna*. Här ingår karaktären Abulkasem Ali Moharrem, den ryktbare sköflaren, "Corsar-araben". Abulkasem sviker italienskan Signora Luna, seglar hem till sitt harem med parets två barn, tillfångatas, berövas sin syn med gift och fångslas i en grav i 20 år. I *Invasion!* återerövrar Abulkasem, han ges ett ansikte, eller snarare: han ges åtskilliga ansikten, han blir så mycket mer (och så många fler) än den siluett, den skugglika gestalt (som man fruktar i såväl Almqvists öppningsscener som i dagens västvärld).

While Claus Beck-Nielsen's book addresses the consequences of one man changing his name, *Invasion!* focuses on the strange ability of one name to change seemingly everyone. "Abul Kasem," originally a figure in the legendary *1001 Nights*, found his entrée into the Nordic scene in Almqvist's above-mentioned 1835 work. But Khemiri embraced and extended that first, tentative appearance, writing Abul Kasem into his play as a spectral

main character, unseen but everywhere as dozens of characters assume the role of Abul Kasem either willingly or unwillingly, as the mysterious Arab is slowly built into a mythical, larger-than-life Bin Ladin-esque figure.

As Abul Kasem becomes unmoored from his historical origins in Almqvist's prose, he enjoys a grandiose afterlife in the minds of Khemiri's characters. Abul Kasem wanders like a kind of restless ghost, infecting present-day Swedes from all social strata and political affiliations. A group of suburban teenagers, taken to a production of Almqvist's 1835 play by their well-meaning teacher, appropriate the term and turn it into a kind of all-purpose slang:

Och senare på terminen [...] kunde Abulkasem betyda precis vad som helst. Det kunde vara adjektiv...

D (gäspande):

"Shit, jag är galet Abulkasem, jag var uppe och kollade film hela natten..."

B:

Verb...

D (irriterat):

"Kom igen Lefte, abulkasemma nån annan, jag hann inte plugga..."

B:

Det kunde vara förolämpning...

D (hotfullt):

"Spela inte Abulkasem, mannen, ge mig kön, det var min tur."

B:

Det kunde vara komplimang...

D (lyckligt):

"Mammas död han var värsta Abulkasem, han satte 14 poäng i första kvartern."

B:

Det blev det perfekta ordet... Ibland blev det förstås missförstånd...

D:

"Vad menar du Abulkasem!? [argt] Jaha, okey, du menar *Abulkasem*? Okey, mitt fel... [ursäktande]"

Det underliga med Abulkasem var att ordet stannade kvar, det förändrades, växte, levde vidare...

Typical of Khemiri's writing is this sense of playfulness with language, the glorious feeling of taking on new identities, as teenagers turn Abulkasem's name into the slang word that can mean anything and everything. From the boys' appropriation of Almqvist's orientalized figure as their own, the play chronicles the lightning-like proliferation of the

word through Swedish society. A series of improbable coincidences spread the name like a meme through high and low culture alike. A telemarketer passes himself off as Abulkasem at a bar as he hits on a female graduate student, who, in turn, blurts out the name “Abulkasem” to her classmates later on, describing him as the next world-famous Muslim film director:

Då får jag nog. Jag vägrar ge mig den här gången. Jag tar sats och börjar berätta om motrörelsen, om de sekulariserade muslimska kulturkretsarna, om de intellektuella, om postmodernistiska radikalfeminister i slöja. Sen plockar jag fram trumfkortet.

”Och ni har väl alla hört talas om... om.... ” Jag ska förstås berätta om min nya idol, den muslimska regissören Aouatef som gjort global succé [...] Men... Plötsligt får jag en blackout. Hennes namn är borta. Och istället hör jag mig säga:

”Ni har väl alla hört talas om... om... om... A... A-A-Abulkasem? Har ni inte?”
Vad skulle jag göra? Jag var tvungen att säga någonting. Och först efteråt inser att jag lånat namnet från turken i skinnväst.

The graduate student in the scene above, herself a Swedish Kurd, grasps at the name of Abulkasem in a moment of panic when she forgets the real name of a middle-eastern director. Her participation in the spread of the name is involuntary, almost unconscious – she had just heard it earlier from the telemarketer trying to hit on her. Why does Khemiri show this name to be so unstable, so untrustworthy as a marker of identity, and how does his game with Abulkasem’s name relate to Beck-Nielsen’s game with his own?

What separates Khemiri’s treatment of personal names from Beck-Nielsen’s interest in the same topic is the different ways that their characters’ names are socially marked. “Claus Nielsen” is so unmarked, so generic, that it serves as a kind of Danish “John Smith.” By serving as the appellation for so many people (hundreds, if the scene in the police station is to be believed), it becomes the name of nobody, without accompanying CPR-number – the state’s rationalistic method of control over this chaos. Conversely, “Abulkasem” is highly marked as exotic and unusual, yet this very exoticism allows it to stand for any and every Middle Easterner, from the “Turk in a leather vest” at the bar to an up-and-coming female director. This polyvalence is, in Khemiri’s play, a symbol of the ambiguity and unsettled relationship between a Nordic society and individual middle easterners, be they abroad, in refugee camps, or living next door. In both Beck-Nielsen and Khemiri, then, control over bodies and their identities stands at the center of their respective name games.

This difference between how marked or unmarked names are in the works is reflected in the respective developments in each text, as state mechanisms of control and identification attempt to fix identity. While *Invasion!* is a story that gets wilder and wilder

with each scene (until the unsettling ending), *Claus Beck-Nielsen* is a slow stripping away of the main character's humanity. Beck-Nielsen promised to adhere to the principle of "Ingen fiction. Kun reduktion" (111) in his performance of a homeless Dane, and both he himself as well as the state participate in slowly *reducing* the central figure of the book to the barest possible form of life. Yet phenomenon of Abulkasem follows the opposite rule: all fiction, only *expansion*. There is seemingly no limit to the way that Abulkasem can circulate as the marker of the Orient in the western imagination. Circus-mirror opposites of each other, both Beck-Nielsen's and Khemiri's game with names have in common a fascination with the way that individuals achieve, or avoid, individuality through semiotic systems.

But even as this verbal slapstick circulates the name of Abulkasem seemingly unchecked, Khemiri invokes the way real middle-eastern bodies becoming increasingly regulated and controlled, sought after by governments and armies. The play introduces a middle-aged Iranian refugee who ends up at the end of this chain of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, receiving countless phone calls after the graduate student gives "Abulkasem" the telemarketer a made-up phone number at the bar.

This Iranian, hiding from the immigration authorities, is desperately waiting for a call from his lawyer, but all he receives throughout the play are increasingly desperate phone calls from the boy who thinks the girl is avoiding him. "Abulkasem's" frequent and emphatic voicemails, which the Iranian is the unfortunate and unintentional recipient of, create an atmosphere of paranoia in the refugee's head. Addressing the audience directly, the refugee asks:

Vem är? Inte känner. Vem Abulkasem? Han förföljer... Han ringar igen och igen och igen... Nu varje dag han ringar... Säger "Jag är Abulkasem". "Här är Abulkasem". Vem är? Drömmar inte bra, Abulkasem inte bra... Huvud i krig. På dagen plockar äpplen. På natten jag drömmer Abulkasem... Abulkasem jagar...

—
Abulkasem överallt... Vaktar... Hotar... Kanske Abulkasem är jag? Kanske Abulkasem är ni? "

The Iranian refugee, present in Sweden "illegally," is the darker vision of globalization's ideal of free-flowing, flexible, and contingent identity, for those are not at liberty to control their fates with the same degree of freedom. As each of Khemiri's characters puts the name of Abulkasem to his or her own use, the play offers a parallel series of scenes where an expert's panel – a strange amalgamation of the CIA, FBI and various Euro-American intellectuals – debate the intentions and location of that terrorist mastermind: Abulkasem.

A clear stand-in for Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, *this* Abulkasem is a symbol of the cipher-like nature of the middle-eastern body whose physical location provides grist for politicians and armies alike. His political affiliations, past and present, shift like the sand in the desert as the brightest minds of the West attempt to fix and define the terrorist's identity:

B: Under genomskinliga pseudonymer som Akulbasem eller Alubkasem börjar han skriva sina omtalade krönikor...

D: Han hyllar USAs utrikespolitik.

C: Han försvarar Israels utvidgade bosättningar, han tackar israelerna för att dom, detta landlösa folk, förbarmat sig över Palestina, detta folklösa land.

B: Men samtidigt vet vi att Abulkasem går i antiamerikanska demonstrationer, skanderar antisemitiska slagord och bränner den israeliska flaggan. [...]

A: Så... Hans krönikor är alltså ironiska... Eller?

D: Vi tror det...

B: Vad vi däremot VET är att från och med nu kan INGEN lita på Abulkasem.

C: Han blir svajandets mästare.

D: Han blir snabbt känd som kollaboratör bland sina landsmän...

C: Och som motståndsmän i fiendens läger.

B: Västvärlden ser honom som potentiell terrorist.

C: Arabvärlden som svikare.

D: Alla läser honom som sin opponent.

B: Och snart är alla överens om att det är Abulkasem som är det största hotet mot vår gemensamma framtid.

This pendulum effect that the 'panel of experts' encounters when trying to fix Abulkasem's identity is a parody, I would argue, of the perceived unfixability of Middle Eastern identity in Western societies. Luckily, the concept of Abulkasem is infinitely expandable, from Zionist to Islamist – the perfect term for unsettled times. Khemiri seems to have taken literally the idea that if an enemy didn't exist, we would have had to invent him.

Back on the streets of Copenhagen, Claus Beck-Nielsen discovered the limits of his own game of identity invention. Initially, he thought that he could keep his two identities separate by using "Claus Nielsen" as a sign of his transformation. During the one day a week that Beck-Nielsen is on the streets, he changed his name to mark his new identity. Yet strikingly, what he discovers at the end of his performance piece is that it is *impossible* to

keep his two identities separate: Nielsen's life bleeds into Beck-Nielsen's existence, permanently changing it. Indeed, the paratextual articles in *Ekstra Bladet*, *Politiken* and *Information* which accompanied and followed the performance demonstrate as much schizophrenia in divining Beck-Nielsen's true identity as does the panel of experts in pinning down Abulkasem. Whether Claus Beck-Nielsen, Claus Nielsen, Clæs Bech, or Ole Davidsen is writing the text, we as readers would do well to remember that there is a game being played.

The notion of "gaming" identity is brought to the fore literally in *Invasion!* as the panel of experts, in desperation, resorts to tactic deployed by the US-led Coalition during the hunt for high-ranking Baathists in Iraq:

Vi tillverkar ett särskilt Memoryspel, där alla bilder föreställer Abulkasem i olika förklädnader...
Abulkasem som äppelplockare.
Abulkasem som Lance, professionell dansare.
Abulkasem som Arvind, stammande telemarketingförsäljare.
Abulkasem som Aouatef, kvinnlig demonregissör.
På baksidan påminns man om den sjusiffriga belöningen och numret till tipstelefonen...

Identity, and how it is to be determined, is the central problem for both Khemiri and Beck-Nielsen. The fragmented and non-linear nature of both their texts is thus a reflection of the disorder and chaos that lies when identity is called into question. One way of understanding why both texts steadfastly refuse to follow a linear narrative, jumping around instead from character to character, and from narrator to narrator, is to cite Beck-Nielsen (or more precisely, the nameless author at a point in the text where the 'real' Claus Beck-Nielsen seems to have vanished) as he describes an apparent diary of Beck-Nielsen's story. What he says about the diary works just as well, I believe, as an explanation for the confusion and polyvalence of Khemiri's play:

I mine øjne er [det] et koncentrat – ikke en krystallisering, snarere bare en implosion – af den samlede harddisk. Og med sin tilsyneladende kronologi, sit dag-for-dag-kaos af ideer, refleksioner, erindringer, gentagelser, henvendelser, svar, selvforsvar, selvbekræftelse, fortrydelser og visioner minder den mig om en menneskelig bevidsthed. (100)

Citing this passage, then, leaves us at the point of having two visceral testimonies of "human consciousness" at a time of identity crisis, with Abulkasem seemingly just as real (or unreal) as Claus Beck-Nielsen. But we are still no closer to understanding the reasons why

identity should matter so much in these contemporary works, nor indeed how or why the human body becomes a focal point of this identity crisis. In order to reach these two goals – the import of these literary texts, as well as the role that the body plays for both individuals and states – we need to discuss the two works in the context of Giorgio Agamben's theory of *bare life*.

Agamben is working in the tradition of, and seeking to extend, such theorists of state power such as Hannah Arendt and Michael Foucault. He is fascinated by Foucault's distinction between juridico-institutional methods by which the state integrates care of 'bare life' into itself (abortion, concentration camps), and what Foucault termed "Technologies of the Self," that is, how individuals bind themselves to both their own identity and state power. His project might be described as an attempt to develop more fully the relationship between these two Foucaultian theories. He comes to the conclusion that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power." (6)

In order to support this thesis, Agamben begins from the ancient Greek division between two forms of what we call "life": *zoe* and *bios*. These translate roughly to life in a biological sense, *zoe*, and political life, *bios*. This distinction contains seeds of a central paradox in Western political thought, as Agamben claims that

The fundamental categorial (sic) pair of Western politics is ... that of bare life/political existence, *zōē/bios*, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion. (8)

Put simply, the homeless Claus Nielsen and the refugee Iranian apple-picker are defined by their respective Nordic states as *zoe*, life completely outside the political system of the welfare state. Their own rights are problematized by their refusal (in the case of Claus Nielsen) or inability (in the case of the apple-picker) to participate in *bios*. Agamben's contention is that modern nation-states' increasing concern with bare life has collapsed the distinction between *bios* and *zoe*, leading countries to control and regulate even that bare life that they see as outside the circle of the nation. This has resulted in *aporia*, an irresolvable internal contradiction, which explains the dehumanizing potential of those nation-states supposedly at the apotheosis of western humanism. In Agamben's own words,

... the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction...

...along with the the disciplinary process by which State power makes man as a living being into its own specific object, another process is set in motion ... in which man as a living being presents himself no longer as an object but as the subject of political power...these processes ... converge insofar as both concern the bare life of the citizen, the new biopolitical body of humanity. (9-10)

We can find evidence of Agamben's own bios/zoe distinction in our texts, in so far as both Beck-Nielsen and Khemiri implicate the welfare state's interest in regulating bare life in its dehumanizing power. We see this first in Beck-Nielsen's attempts to get a new CPR number to replace his "forgotten" one. He fantasizes about tattooing the number in his flesh, inscribing his political identity (bios) on the flesh of his bare life (zoe). (Not for nothing is a plan of Auschwitz on the cover of Agamben's English translation.)

Så giv mig et nyt nummer, siger jeg, – et nyt nummer og lidt penge, så kan du gå med mig, så går vi direkte hen til en tatovør og får nummeret tatoveret her på min arm, siger jeg, – her! så forsvinder jeg ikke igen ... Hun går ud bagved ... jeg venter ... hun kommer tilbage, – har du slået hovedet? siger hun. (29)

Jeg må have det nummer, ikke bare i hovedet, ikke bare på et plastikkort i lommen, jeg vil have det tatoveret, brændt ind i mit kød. (116)

Always helpful, the efficient Danish police force suggest bodily examination to resolve the pressing matter of Claus Nielsen's identity:

– Vi skal have et aftryk af dine tænder, siger han, – nogle billeder, fingerrulninger, vi er jo nødt til at vide, hvem du er ... (85)

The individual body is the place where the state's interest in regulating bare life collides with bios, the realm of human and civil rights. Beck-Nielsen realizes this, and in the text shows a schizophrenic awareness of the centrality of the body as index to identity. In another point in the narrative, he demands that a dentist remove all of his teeth:

"Ville det ikke være lettere at rykke dem alle sammen ud og give mig et gebis? [...] Så træk dem ud og give mig et gibis!"

Beck-Nielsen is trying here to destroy a method of indexing his body – by removing all his teeth, the state can no longer take dental imprints to find out who he is. This self-injury could be written off as but one more absurdist part of Beck-Nielsen's performance art, were it not for a startling resonance with Khemiri's work. In the final scene of the play, a young boy is alone on the stage, recounting the terrible memory of discovering the Iranian asylum-seeker during a vacation in Skåne:

Borta vid spisen det stod en gubbe kanske han hade 50 år ... Jag tänkte han var turk men också han kunde vara iranier, kanske arab. ... och jag minns han tog djupaste andetaget och jag minns han sen tryckte handens fingrar rakt ned på plattan och jag minns fräsande ljudet och hans ögon blev stora och sen knipigt små och han höll

kvar handen och det fräste mer och jag minns han hade andra handen som stöd och han hade fortfarande kvar fingrarna och det rykte från plattan och gubbens arm ryckte och ansiktet var som vriden disktrasa och han blundade och stånkade och fingertopparna brändes och han höll kvar och jag minns tårar på hans kinder och lukten av stekt korv ...

Just as Claus Nielsen demands all his teeth be removed, in order to sever the link between his body and his identity, so has this Iranian, having escaped a refugee camp, taken the desperate step of burning his own fingertips so that he cannot be definitely identified by the Swedish state. Without an identity, there is now way of determining his nationality and he cannot be sent back to Iran where, presumably, he fears persecution.

We are left with a disturbing picture of an outsider whose identity as middle-easterner has entangled himself in the most basic level of biopolitics: movement of bodies across national borders. And his experience in Sweden, which here clearly stands in for the western world generally, suggests that the crushing weight of interpretation upon his identity has driven him to the most extreme kind of self-abnegation. As the collected fantasies and imaginings of Swedes project themselves on the imaginary figure of Abulkasem in other parts of the play, this real-world middle-easterner becomes entrapped by the forces of state power which, Khemiri suggests, seem to view the task of deporting an apple-picker with the same zeal that they bring to the hunt for Osama bin Laden. At once much more serious than Beck-Nielsen's performance art, the play is at same time curiously bound by the exact same technologies of the self. Khemiri leaves with us a disturbing image of the asylum-seeker driven mad by the virus of Abulkasem, which floats through Swedish society with a fluidity which mocks his own imprisonment:

Fotot på den asylsökande äppelplockaren som arresterats i Skåne. Mannen som vägrade uppge sitt riktiga namn. Mannen vars fingeravtryck inte gick att tyda... Mannen som envist hävdade att han hette... Abulkasem...

Claus Beck-Nielsen's own nationality was never called into question by his adventures on the streets of Copenhagen: no matter how low he sank, he never lost his nationality. But he seemed to be conscious of the links between race and class that characterized his experiment in homelessness. Writing in *Weekendavisen* in 2001, he claimed

"Claus Nielsen [...] er og bliver – personnummerløs – nærmest usandsynlig, en umulig mellemting af en hjemløs dansker, en asylansøger og den biografiske Claus Beck-Nielsen."

Beck-Nielsen's mention of the asylum-seeker, together with Khemiri's linkage of the way that middle-eastern bodies are hunted from Skåne to Tora Bora to Baghdad, leads us

to consider Agamben's claim that the projects of "human rights" and biopolitics are intimately linked:

Declarations of [universal human] rights represent the originary figure of the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state. The same bare life that ... in the classical world was clearly distinguished as *zoe* from political life (*bios*) now fully enters into the structure of the state and even becomes the earthly foundation of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty.

[...]

If refugees represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain – bare life – to appear for an instant within that domain. In this sense, the refugee is truly the "man of rights," as Arendt suggests, the first and only real appearance of rights outside the fiction of the citizen that always covers them over." (126-131)

As Beck-Nielsen notes, both he and Khemiri have hit upon a central crisis of the welfare state in a time of transnational forces greater than itself.

...Claus Nielsen og alle de absurde forsøg på at placere ham slet ikke er så enestående. De er tværtimod temmelig tidstypiske. På nationalt niveau gøres der lignende forsøg på at placere mennesker, der ligesom Claus Nielsen ikke har noget personnummer. Man tilbyder asylansøgere flere tusinde kroner for at stige på et fly, der vil bringe dem ud i verden, til Afghanistan, Somalia, Irak, Iran. Ifølge radioavisen er disse forsøg en konsekvens af menneske—rettighederne: Ethvert menneske må høre hjemme et sted. (126)

What both Beck-Nielsen and Khemiri do in their texts is to shine a spotlight on this central contradiction of modern welfare states: in their extension of power and control over *zoe*, bare life, they enter into an uneasy – and unequal – relationship with non-political life: beings whose biology, rather than their citizenship, is primary, and whose bodies are the index to their being. The homeless outsider in Copenhagen and the escaped Iranian refugee in Skåne live in what Agamben terms a state of "irreducible indistinction" in which they are controlled by a system that does not – that, in fact, *cannot* – acknowledge their rights as *bios*, as political life, because it must define its own citizens in opposition to bare life. The concentration camp of Nazi Germany, the refugee camp in Skåne, and the hostel on Istedsgade are, then, linked – not in the way we might think (their outward similarity or in the exaggerated claims of progressive social critique,) but rather in their underlying conceptions of life inside and outside the circle of the welfare state, *bios* and *zoe* respectively. In both texts' use of the human corpse as the index to identity, they highlight the trauma that the body is subject to when the possibilities of flexible, contingent identity inherent in postmodern society collide body-first with the modern (and Modernist) national welfare state.

The two texts are first and foremost narratives from that space of irresolvable contradiction, which, according to Agamben, is central to our understanding of modern states. He writes:

Modern democracy's decadence and gradual convergence with totalitarian states in post-democratic spectacular societies ... may well be rooted in this aporia, which marks the beginning of modern democracy and forces it into complicity with its most implacable enemy. (10)

In providing the welfare state with a foil for its oppositional self-definition, both the Iranian refugee and the homeless Claus Nielsen embody (quite literally) that form of bare life that stands in "inclusive exclusion" to normative notions of race and class. By setting Khemiri's and Back-Nielsen's texts in conversation with one another, rather than within their own genre stovepipes, what emerges a trans-Nordic avant garde concerned with those victims of the welfare state who are often never considered to even have the rights to such a subject status. As the commotion over Sweden's "second-generation" breakthrough of the early 2000s subsides, critical readers would do well to re-focus their efforts on the thematic elements that bind Nordic literatures to one another, shaped in each case by a shared social and political history – and possibly fate.

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