

The Suicide Action

The Story of the Attempt at Introducing *The Democracy* in Iraq in the Year 2004

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In the beginning of January 2004 two men cross the border between Kuwait and Iraq on foot. Both are dressed in suit and tie, the traditional Western male uniform. They come from Copenhagen in Denmark, and they call themselves *Nielsen & Rasmussen*, two anonymous family names linked with an “&”, rather like the name of a trading company or a law firm.

Between them, Nielsen & Rasmussen carry a metal box with handles. The box looks like the food containers known from air travel. A paper sign has been glued on to the front of it, saying:

**The Democracy
Destination: Iraq**

Nielsen & Rasmussen are on their way to introducing *The Democracy* in Iraq. They are carrying it between them.

The box contains a tent, or rather what is left of a tent after the sides have been cut away: a room without walls, open in all directions. Also, Nielsen & Rasmussen bring a white flag in which has been cut a large round hole. It is a peace flag with a window open to the future. The last prop of this play, if it is a play, is an empty book. Together tent, flag and book make up the physical frame of *The Nomadic Parliament*.

Nielsen & Rasmussen intend to follow a route similar to the one the American army took when it invaded Iraq. However, their first steps on

Iraqi soil are taken with a certain hesitation; no battle song accompanies their entering. The presence of soldiers with machine guns at the border makes them uncomfortable and nervous. What now? It is hot and an endless desert stretches out in front of them.

Nielsen writes in his diary:

This is a mistake, I think, at home in Europe it seemed like a good idea, but here in the no man's desert between Kuwait and Iraq The Democracy feels quite clearly like a burden, the right idea in the wrong age.¹

The idea of bringing The Democracy to Iraq was born and planned at home in the suburbs of Copenhagen, as Nielsen writes. It revolves around the very idea of The European Democracy, of reinventing it through dialogue and allowing it to find a shape all over again. It is the utopian dream of a united world, a world of peace governed by a world parliament:

...open to each of the four corners of the world from where people naturally, like water running towards the bottom of a bathtub, would flock and gather around the empty, the powerless centre [...] to cooperate with them, in conversation, to find, build, think out, yes, speak out a brand new, ideal and universal form of The Democracy, a democracy that could be exported to the rest of the world and first and foremost to Iraq...²

At an earlier occasion Nielsen organized an action in Copenhagen based on a similar idea, and it achieved quite a lot of media exposure.³ But there is a huge difference between the realities of Copenhagen and Iraq. The moment Nielsen & Rasmussen cross the border they enter The State of Emergency and any supposedly ordinary state of affairs is suspended. Their intention is to drive up through Iraq with The Democracy in the trunk of a car, put up the tent without walls wherever possible, and invite whoever is willing to attend an assembly of The Nomadic Parliament. There is one topic on the agenda: democracy. Everybody attending will be asked to write his or her name in the book, thus documenting the birth of the Democratic Conversation in Iraq. They will be the changing Parliamentarians of The Nomadic Parliament.

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Nielsen is a Danish writer and dramatist. At an earlier occasion he has rid himself of his individual self and of his full name, *Claus Beck-Nielsen*. Now he is using the anonymous Nielsen. The identity of Rasmussen fades into the distance.

They are here in Iraq now, Nielsen & Rasmussen. After a while, *Adnan*, a Danish refugee and their Iraqi helper, who has entered Iraq through a different route, arrives with a car, and they drive off into the desert. Their journey totally depends on his help. Back in Denmark, Nielsen & Rasmussen have planned the journey together with Adnan. Their goal is to reach the centre of power, Baghdad, only armed with the “necessary naïvety” Nielsen mentions.

The journey takes a couple of weeks. Along the way, Nielsen sends home articles to a Danish newspaper, hoping the paper will print them so that a broader audience will know about their action. The newspaper does print them, and that is the first time I read about The Democracy.

In the fall of 2005, a book was published, telling the whole story of the Iraqi journey. The Book is called *The Suicide Action: The Story of the Attempt at Introducing The Democracy in Iraq in the Year of 2004*, written by Nielsen, or rather *clausbeck-nielsen.net*, the internet address that stands as the author. The book has become an outrageous and moving document.

Let me tell a little more of the journey as it is told by *clausbeck-nielsen.net*. As one can imagine, at no point is it easy. Even though Nielsen & Rasmussen have been able to establish contacts with different Iraqi groups before their arrival, and despite the fact that they receive crucial help (which is also dubious as it turns out) from Adnan and his Iraqi cousins, it is quite problematic right from the start to set up the meetings of The Nomadic Parliament. The language is a barrier. Neither of the two Europeans speak Arabic. They are totally dependent on their interpreters, and wherever they go they are met with suspicion from Americans and Iraqis alike. What do they want, these two anonymous Europeans? What are they here for? Those attending their meetings are mainly old men. How can they get in contact with a broader section of the Iraqi population, they wonder? Where are the young people? Where are the women? And where are the Fundamentalists? Let's find the Fundamentalists, Nielsen says. But how do you recognize one?

There are uplifting moments, however, like when The Nomadic