"It did not come with Hitler and did not die with Hitler." The uses of the Holocaust by disability activists in Norway

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Abstract

When discussing present issues, vulnerable groups often compare such issues to historical atrocities, thereby injecting histories of vulnerability and oppression into contemporary debate. In 2006, the Norwegian health authorities introduced a program for registration of information about the level of functioning and the care needs of care receivers in the municipal service system, where mostly disabled people and elderly people were registered. The project triggered strong protests. The central charges were that such registration was humiliating, violated the subject's integrity, and reduced human beings to their biological (dys)functions. At one point, the protesters related the registration program to the story of the Holocaust, evoking the historical fact that registration of deviation was fundamental to the "euthanasia" killings in Nazi Germany. Numerous scholarly works discuss the legitimacy of such comparisons, but none discusses how the agents in debates think about their own use of such comparisons. In this article, we describe how the disability activists and health professionals who participated in the controversy understood, framed, and legitimated the rhetorical use of the Holocaust. Referring to Bauman's normality perspective, we try to understand the logic behind the evoking of the Holocaust in debates on the situation of vulnerable groups in general. This case serves for discussion on the communication strategies (and possibilities) of minority movements within their historical and cultural legacy.

Keywords: *History; activism; modernity; rhetoric; statistics; identity*

> *For your benefit, learn from our tragedy. It is not a written law that the next victims must be Jews.*
>
> Simon Wiesenthal

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The Holocaust is a central event in many people's lives, but it also has become a metaphor for our century. There cannot be an end to speaking and writing about it.

Aharon Appelfeld

In struggling for social inclusion and better living conditions, many vulnerable groups refer to the Holocaust atrocities during the Nazi period in Germany (Berenbaum, 1990; Bischoping & Kalmin, 1999). For the non-Jewish groups that were directly affected, such as Romani people and gays and lesbians, bringing up the Holocaust atrocities is powerful in debates about discrimination and related issues. It serves as a warning about what was possible only half a century ago (Duffy, 2001; Kramer, 1989; Stein, 1998).

This type of warning is also used in discussions on disability issues, where Nazi eugenics serves as a constant reference (Finkelstein, 2003; Wilkinson, 2008). One prominent example is a reference to "the road to the gas chamber" used by Mike Oliver (1990), the founding father of the social model of disability, when arguing that disabled people should be cautious about relying on others (non-disabled people and, above all, professionals) (p. 123). Snyder and Mitchell (2006), two disability studies scholars, point out that "[t]he Nazi era provided the tools and rationale for a hygienic drive toward the valorization of perfection and normalization. These goals stand at the heart of the modernist impulse" (p. 5). Such arguments are often inspired by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that the Holocaust was formed by the rationalities of modern society. Hence, it is important to interpret the Holocaust in a way that demonstrates social processes important also for understanding present issues (Bauman, 1991, p. xiii).

The discourse on disability and the Holocaust was introduced into a public protest and debate in Norway in 2006. That year, health authorities introduced a program for registering information about the level of functioning and care needs of care receivers in the municipal service system (IPLOS, individuell pleie- og omsorgstatistikk, national statistics linked to individual needs for care), where mostly disabled people and elderly people were registered. This is a national register, implemented locally, that is based on records of the needs of every person who applies for or receives assistance from municipal services. The main goals of the register are to legitimate and regulate access to services and to produce statistics on care needs in the population. The obtained information concerns areas such as housing, level of body functions, diagnoses, and use of services. According to the Health Ministry, quantification of the service needs is necessary for better resource management and for provision of optimal nursing and care services.

Some of the categories are recognizable from the Norwegian translation of the ICF (a categorization standard developed by the World Health Organization). IPLOS is a local tool for resource management and also a local implementation of international standards of information gathering about disability and care needs. In this sense, the activists also challenged larger frameworks of Norwegian welfare policy and even international trends.

The project triggered strong protests and criticism, not only from disability activists but also from some professionals. First, protesters charged the register of being humiliating, violating the subject's integrity, and reducing human beings to their biological (dys)functions (Tøndel, 2009). Second, many argued that the register enforced a sociopolitical climate wherein the register is potentially harmful (Solvang, Bartoszko, Bergland, Hanisch, & Woll, 2010). As a result, the register was modified in the following years.

In this article, however, we are not concerned with the process of policy revision. The purpose is to discuss a prominent feature within the protests and the political climate: The repeated references, made by both activists and professionals, to the Holocaust. We are concerned with how the comparisons were made, and why they seemed *preferable* and *possible*, not with their sociopolitical effects.

There are numerous scholarly works discussing the legitimacy of the Holocaust comparisons (Bischoping & Kalmin, 1999; Landau, 2006; MacDonald, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2001), but no empirical studies are available on how the participants in debates understand this rhetorical use. Inspired by Irvin Hashimoto (1985), who points out that "recognizing intentions is important to evaluating any [persuasive] discourse" (p. 48), we aim to describe how the disability activists and health professionals in the controversy understood, framed, and legitimated their rhetorical actions. Answering these three questions, we structure our discussion with analytical perspectives from the fields of rhetoric, ethics, and identity politics. These

perspectives will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

When disabled people refer to the Holocaust, their reference includes and emphasizes the T4 program that preceded the establishment of the extermination camps. In the late 1930s, the Nazis established policies, which lead to the extermination of almost 250,000 people with physical or mental disabilities and which might be seen as a precursor to the Holocaust (Evans, 2004; Lifton, 1986; Proctor, 1988; Ryan & Schuchman, 2002). In September 1939, Hitler specified persons who should be included in the program of racial hygiene. He defined them as suffering patients "judged incurably sick, by critical medical examination" (Proctor, 1988). After sterilization of thousands of people with various disabilities, the Nazis introduced the euthanasia programs by establishing a policy of direct medical killing, which was "arranged within medical channels, by means of medical decisions, and carried out by doctors and their assistants" (Lifton, 1986, p. 21). The medical killing was justified by the concept of "life unworthy of life" and "burden on the state." Six main killing centers were established to accommodate the procedures. One of the most known today was the psychiatric hospital in Hadamar, Germany, where more than 14,000 disabled people were killed in gas chambers, by starvation and by lethal injection. The T4 program "involved virtually the entire German psychiatric community and related portions of the general medical community" (Lifton, 1986, p. 65). The quantitative and category-based questionnaires were worked out by the chief psychiatrists and administrators and distributed to all

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hospitals and homes for chronic patients. The expert evaluations of the patients were to help to decide if the patient was regarded as "worthy of life" or should be killed.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

This study analyzes data from two sources. We collected printed and online public documents addressing issues about the register, with emphasis on the period 2006–2008 when IPLOS was implemented nationally and criticism started and eventually peaked. The public debate about the register was happening in different media, and we took into account all media where IPLOS had been mentioned: websites, newsletters, magazines, local and national newspapers, private blogs, and public speeches. In this article, we focus on texts in which the Holocaust, human rights, and exclusion themes were mentioned. These data document rhetorical strategies used in the controversy when it happened, but give little or no information about intentions or later reflections. They have therefore been supplemented by data from a second source, interviews with key agents in the controversy.

The interviewees were persons directly or indirectly engaged in the debate. First, we met with Bjørn Hansen, former chair of NHF Oslo (Oslo branch of the Norwegian Association of Disabled). Speaking at the Holocaust Memorial Day in Oslo in 2007, he drew a line between the Holocaust and IPLOS. The Memorial Day was facilitated by The Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo. Second, to follow up on the role of the center, we

interviewed a representative. Third, we met with two representatives of ULOBA (Cooperative on Personal Assistance), a cooperative established to facilitate personal assistance for people with disabilities, but which also has a disability activism branch. ULOBA frequently used the Holocaust rhetorically in the IPLOS debate. We then met with the chairperson of The Norwegian Association of General Practitioners, who mentioned euthanasia programs in a TV documentary about the introduction of IPLOS. Finally, we met with representatives from two disability associations, NHF and FFO (Norwegian Federation of Organizations of Disabled People), who played an active role in the debate.

The interviews were semistructured by a guide that was designed based on the findings from a preliminary analysis of the written material (Solvang, Bartoszko, Bergland, Hanisch, & Woll, 2010). The issues we brought up were the organizations' objectives, their perception of their role in society and in the disability debate, attitudes toward IPLOS and Norwegian welfare state policies, as well as identity politics. We also asked the interviewees about their view on the process of anti-IPLOS protests and about their recollection of how the reference to the Holocaust had started and developed. The interviews were taped and transcribed. Together with the written material collected, the interviews were analyzed according to basic principles in qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). In the first analytical stage, we identified main themes in the media material. Based on these findings, we developed interview questions and conducted the interviews. In a second stage, we identified and manually

categorized key themes in the interviews according to the main research question as well as in relation to the findings from the written material. Together, interview and written material revealed the crucial themes and shed light on the main research questions.

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

When including a reference to the Holocaust in their rhetoric, the activists establish a relation between IPLOS and the Holocaust. We will argue that two relations are established: metonymical and metaphorical. Doing so, we rely on the definitions proposed by the British-Australian linguist M.A.K. Halliday. He distinguished metonymy ("word is used for something related to that which it usually refers to") from metaphor ("word is used for something resembling that which it usually refers to") (Halliday, 1985, pp. 319–320). In metonymical use, some aspect(s) of A (IPLOS) is (are) claimed to be identical (or at least corresponding) to some aspects of B (the Holocaust). In metaphorical use, one admits that A and B are essentially different and incomparable; nevertheless, one claims that A and B can shed light on one another.

The Holocaust as metonymy

Regarding metonymical use of the Holocaust, our informants often emphasized that registration—which was crucial to the Holocaust—could be harmful in comparable circumstances. In this context, the activists recalled the Nazi propaganda and the Holocaust that gave the world a "lasting image of how the construction of an 'other' can ultimately go" (Gamson, 1995, p. 2). The core of this similarity was found in IPLOS's very own nature as an administrative tool. As Bjørn Hansen explains, "Lists were what made this cruel efficiency [massive killing] possible." Because of this experience with registration practices in the past, which culminated in tragedies, the activists wanted to warn against the lack of critical reflection on the procedures that the authorities were promoting.

The metonymical use is not specific to disability activists. It is also evident in the very first reference to the Holocaust made by Jan Emil Kristoffersen, chairperson of The Norwegian Association of General Practitioners, who stated in an interview for a TV documentary about IPLOS that "it is good we did not have IPLOS in 1940."[1] He further explained to us in our research interview with him that "there lies a violating potential" in any register. In the interview, we discussed his view on the tendencies for widespread registration practices, tendencies that he referred to as "registration optimism" (*registrerings-optimisme*). In the same way as the activists, Kristoffersen showed concern for the lack of security in the registration system:

> Because if some mad political constellation were to happen now, right, a regime that had a different attitude towards disabled people or gay or Jews or whomever (...) there must be a plan for record destruction. And they [authorities] have never presented it. This is a serious matter.

Hence, the main point of the Holocaust metonymy is not to relate IPLOS (as an administrative system) to the Holocaust

(as massive killings). Instead, the main point is that the systems and discourses that preceded and facilitated the Holocaust in general and T4 in particular (diagnostic registration, estimation of public cost in relation to impairment-specific characteristics, and restrictions of civil rights on the basis of "biological" characteristics) are increasingly re-introduced into European policy by way of information systems such as IPLOS. This view—whereby contemporary systems pose risks similar to those posed by the administrative systems of the 1930s—is not held by disability activists alone. Human geographer Nancy Hansen, for instance, argues that "there are disturbing similarities in arguments found in NAZI [all upper-case letters in the original] documentation concerning 'quality of life,' 'useless eaters' or 'lives less worthy' and mainstream genetics and medical ethics discussions concerning disability taking place today" (Hansen, 2006, p. 2; see also Evans, 2004).

The Holocaust as metaphor

The metaphorical use of the Holocaust was more important to the actors in the IPLOS debate. They recalled the Holocaust so as to shed light on the potential for dehumanizing oppression that they saw in IPLOS. Bjørn Hansen, in his speech during the Holocaust commemoration in Oslo in 2007, presented the history of the Nazi euthanasia programs and concluded that "Dehumanization of people with disabilities did not start with the Holocaust and it did not end with the Nazi's defeat either." He placed IPLOS within a tradition of statistical tools,

registers, and lists, all of which pose a real threat to disabled people. They also threaten trust, respect, and equality in civil society. In short, the activists objected to a perceived intertwining of biological and social worth. For them, IPLOS stood for objectification and reification of human beings, processes that also took place during the Nazi regime.

Metaphors for the Holocaust were also expressed by visual imagery. On the website that the ULOBA cooperative created in protest against IPLOS, they used a logo that resembles an anti-Nazi iconic symbol where a fist crushes a swastika. On the website, a fist crushes the stone letters of IPLOS. Also, when writing about IPLOS, ULOBA made both textual and visual connections between IPLOS and Nazi Germany by using pictures of a swastika and of Hitler, as well as posters and other promotional material for the T4 program.[2]

The activists viewed IPLOS as a representational practice for the modernist project. This perspective is in line with much scholarly work, wherein T4 is viewed as a part of modernity. Snyder and Mitchell (2006) argue that modernity's "*modus operandi* consists of efforts to classify and pathologize human differences (known today as disabilities) and then manage them through various institutional locations" (p. 4; italicized in the original). Drawing further upon the work of Bauman (1991), they argue that "our own era replicates an ideology of extinction" by "dehumanizing networks of beliefs that exist about disability and disabled people" (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006, p. 34).

The metaphorical use establishes a resemblance between a signified (IPLOS) and a signifier (the Holocaust).

Here, as in other contexts, the Holocaust signifies violation of human dignity and of the value of human life. This form of relation—where IPLOS is situated in modernity within certain connotations, rather than being identified with some aspect(s) of the Holocaust—is very common in the material.

Metaphors for the Holocaust also conveyed another feeling of violation, which relates to the role of the *registered* rather than to the role of the *register*. Many informants had the feeling of being reduced to passive objects without any ability to influence their own situation. "Disabled people ARE [upper-case letters in the original] actually people!" —it was stated at the ULOBA website.[3] This way of arguing closely resembles Martha Nussbaum's analysis of objectification (1995), which suggests that one of the main features of objectification is instrumentality. In this perspective, the IPLOS protests were also a response to experiences of objectification.

Arguments about objectification opposed not only IPLOS as a whole but also what the activists saw as oppressive and excluding elements in the questionnaire itself. In their view, the design included "questions [. . .] of normative character,"[4] which relied on a pathological and paternalistic approach to disabled people. Questions regarding a culturally acceptable way of eating or getting dressed up uncovered in a brutal way not only this normative character but also the scale that was used to measure people and their needs. IPLOS presented standards that were not adapted to people who were registered. Instead, IPLOS presented standards that represented non-disabled people.

According to the Norwegian activists, IPLOS is an example of "how formulas of abnormality develop and serve to discount entire populations as *biologically inferior*," to use the wording of Snyder and Mitchell (2006, p. 12; italicized in the original). They saw IPLOS not only as an enforcement of oppressive standards of normality, and not adapted to people who were being registered, but also as a reinforcement of a feeling of inferiority that many of disabled people already live with. In a disability newsletter, one activist stated, "When you are born with a disability, you already feel different. When additionally the state and authorities grade you along a number of variables, it is nothing else but public harassment."[5] For some, the humiliation stemmed from the medical understanding of disability that is evident in the IPLOS questionnaire. According to an editorial in *Handikapnytt*,[6] knowledge produced on such a basis is worthless in relation to the aim of improving services, dignity, and independent life.

TEACHING HISTORY

To establish rhetorical relations—be they metonymical or metaphorical—is not a one-way process. Just as the metonymies and metaphors change and reconstruct the understanding of IPLOS by connecting it to humiliation and violence, rhetorical relations of this kind reconstruct the understanding of the Holocaust by connecting it to oppression of disabled people.

When asked about reasons for recalling the Holocaust during the IPLOS

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debate, a representative of ULOBA explained:

> We had an exhibition at our place, from Hadamar. And for this exhibition, we created eight new posters that drew lines from Hadamar to this day. And when we worked on that we got all this knowledge, you know, what happens with euthanasia, what happens with the prenatal diagnostics, what is the mood about these issues around the world, and then we began to see that here there are actually quite a few things that are unpleasant and where we feel kind of chill of Hadamar, as we formulated it. And so it became very obvious for us to think along these lines when IPLOS came.

When IPLOS was introduced, the activists were already working on creating links between present practices and historical atrocities. In addition, the activists criticized the common view concerning the history of the Holocaust for relying on "historical alienation" or even "history forgery." In their own view, the activists opposed not only IPLOS but also what scholars have called "chosen amnesia," whereby people/countries exclude unwanted or unsavory aspects of their national past (Buckley-Zistel, 2006; MacDonald, 2008). In the words of one informant:

> The Jews have in a way stolen the Holocaust, to put it that way. But it is no wonder, for it was, after all, large amounts of people, but … and I was not aware of … until a few years back, that there was a systematic program for groups other than the Jews. But Hadamar [exhibition] opened our eyes to … we saw it. And then, ULOBA saw kind of as its task to bring that knowledge to Norway and bring it

> to light again because we feel, or many of us at least, we find that we are an endangered species, to put it that way.

In this way, they called for spreading of consciousness and understanding of a "broad Holocaust," which encompasses other groups, in contrast to the "narrow Holocaust," which applies exclusively to European Jews (MacDonald, 2008).

Addressing and evoking T4 and the Holocaust in the IPLOS debate, many were responding to the fact that project T4 is largely absent from the public consciousness (Hansen, 2006). Hansen's research exposes that just "a few memorials acknowledge that disabled people were victims of genocide and Most [*sic*] of the victims [*sic*] records remain sealed and off limits to researchers" (2006, p. 5). She acknowledges that even among disability scholars, the Holocaust research seems to create contention (Hansen, 2006; see also Stolinsky, 1998). Little scholarship has been published on disability in the context of the Holocaust, and Kudlick (2003) even concludes that "disabled people have never received recognition as victims of genocide" (p. 787).

In the IPLOS debate, the Holocaust is evoked not only as a metonymical or metaphorical signifier but also as an actual historical event. It seems clear that the metaphorical use of the Holocaust (in the IPLOS debate) would have been much less potent without the historical facticity of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the potency of the past atrocities (of the Holocaust in general, but in particular of T4) does not depend solely on the rhetoric of the disability activists. As the representative who we

interviewed from The Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo pointed out, "Stop! You cannot start measuring and counting people who sit in a wheelchair, because there is a story here." Whereas strategic identity politics certainly draw attention to the history of disabled people, the historical structures also provide conditions and opportunities for identity politics. It seems clear that the *we* (the voice in the activism) is strengthened by claiming their own history.

GETTING MEDIA ATTENTION

The evoking of the Holocaust is also a matter of persuasion and drawing attention. One activist said, "You know, it is all about winning the media." The activists problematized access to media and lack of interest in disability issues. They expressed the belief that without media coverage, there is no way to catch public attention. They also expressed strong faith in conflict. To be recognized by mass media, one needs a conflict. The activists said that they intended "to shake people," "to provoke," or "to go over the line" to make people react. In the opinion of the activists, a conflict, or even a scandal, is needed to obtain reactions and to make the public reflect. Thus, the activists aimed to achieve both attention *and* active reflection while invoking the Holocaust.

In his study on public debate concerning preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), Stephen Wilkinson (2008) asks whether we should use "eugenics talk" in bioethical discussion. Emotive language can be applied for various purposes, and one of them is "to encourage people to

use their critical-rational faculties, perhaps by shocking them into thinking critically about something previously unquestioned" (p. 471). Our informants used this kind of argumentation while defending their rhetorical use of the Holocaust. They agreed that the language they used in the campaign had a potential shock value, but argued that it was a necessity to make people realize what situation disabled people are in, as it is "perhaps the major gap in knowledge among most people," as one activist pointed out. According to the activists, public opinion on disabled people must be challenged, and that to do so often requires extraordinary measures. The activists stay thus in the same line of reasoning as Wilkinson, who argues that in bioethics emotive language may be justified when used to make people think "critically about subjects that they otherwise wouldn't" (p. 471).

However, good reasons exist for avoiding certain terms and concepts because of their pejorative connotations, Wilkinson argues further. He presents several motivations to avoid terms like "eugenics" and "Nazi." One of them is that such terms can be insulting to the health workers and to the victims of the Nazi eugenicists "who may feel that calling PGD eugenics trivialises Nazi atrocities" (p. 468). In the IPLOS case, the Norwegian Health Ministry and the health personnel saw themselves as victims of offensive characterizations. Our informants referred to feedbacks from the authorities, health personnel, and bureaucrats wherein they expressed that comparing them, even if not directly, to people who operated during the Nazi regime was offensive and inappropriate. In the public debate, however, the health

professionals seemed to refrain from commenting on the rhetorical use of the Holocaust.

By referring to the highly emotive words and comparing phenomena "in an almost sloganish way," the organizations also risk, according to the representative we interviewed from The Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo, "overshadowing of what you try to achieve now with something so cruel." She further stated, "It is very dangerous to make connections between categories that are basically very different, because you lose information about both [phenomena]." She also accused the activists of abusing history to achieve a "free ride," indicating that she understood that such a use of the Holocaust was an easy way to achieve attention, and that it was somehow disrespectful of the genuine suffering and victimhood experienced during the Holocaust. The activists did not agree with this type of criticism. In their own opinion, they raised a historical concern that addressed a real and important risk:

> I cannot imagine why it would not happen again. I know that we are going around, at least up here in the cold North, and are saying "never again," right; the world says so, but at the same time we can watch the news and just like that! It happens, something or another. Suddenly we have a conflict. Well, things happen. Of course, nobody wants the Holocaust to happen again, but the Holocaust is happening again. It is true that it happens in other parts of the world, a little farther away from our living room, or even not necessarily [so far away].

This type of reasoning provides the normative grounds for the rhetorical use of the Holocaust in the IPLOS controversy. On a less normative level, it is possible that the rhetorical use of the Holocaust not only *drew*, but also *diverted* media attention from the contemporary issue at stake. By reclaiming history, the activists clearly drew attention to the metonymical/metaphorical *signifier* (the Holocaust, in particular T4) beyond its relation to the metonymically/metaphorically *signified* (IPLOS). The use of a contested and perhaps problematic signifier may also lead audiences to focus on *if* the Holocaust should signify (aspects of) IPLOS, rather than on *what* this signifier may signify.

As Wilkinson points out, emotive communication often diverts attention; for instance, one's own feelings of being insulted tend to circumvent or neutralize receivers' abilities for rational reasoning. The purely provocative and emotive language may lead people "to disengage their critical-rational faculties and to form moral views based on irrelevant or superficial features" (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 470). Again, the activists acknowledged this risk, but they argued that it was worth taking.

THE *WE* OF DISABILITY ACTIVISM

When using the Holocaust in analogical rhetoric, the activists establish a relation of similarity between disabled people and other oppressed groups (those subjected to the Holocaust in general, and Jews in particular). In this way, the Holocaust metonymies and metaphors become nuts and bolts in historicizing identity politics.

This phenomenon is in accord with MacDonald's (2008) perspective on the Holocaust discourses, "The Holocaust should also engender a public space where victim groups can freely discuss and present *their* [emphasis in original] histories of victimization and abuse" (p. 4).

In the case of the IPLOS debate, this presentation was not only a matter of historical consciousness, but also an attempt to raise consciousness of how disabled people still are second-class citizens. One of the activists stated, "It did not come with Hitler and did not die with Hitler." And continued, "I think we also need to do it [remind people of the past] because ... it is not dead. It is alive and kicking. Still." In the same spirit, Evans (2004) concludes his *Forgotten Crimes*, "People with disabilities throughout the world continue to be the subject of many of the same myths, dehumanizing stereotypes and falsehoods that made their sterilization, exploitation, and extermination possible during the Nazi era" (p. 160). Like Evans, the activists did not see IPLOS as a singular case, but rather saw it as part of a larger context, part of a comprehensive historical process of discrimination and dehumanization of people with disabilities. By making the link between this particular health administrative system and the Holocaust, the activists wanted to link memory, present realities, and future solutions (see also Evans, 2004, p. 165). Maintenance of the collective memory of historical events was thus one of the reasons for referring to the Holocaust.

But this is not rhetoric without problems. The use of the Holocaust may threaten a possible universalizing strategy in disability activism. While bodily difference and vulnerability are experienced for longer or shorter periods by a wide range of people, and hence could make it possible for them to join ranks with non-disabled people also affected by registration practices such as IPLOS, the Holocaust rhetoric can lead to exclusion rather than inclusion. The sociologist Gunhild Tøndel (2009) concludes that:

> Through comparisons like this the activists demarcate themselves from non-disabled, when they might have used the situation to promote an understanding of themselves being as average citizens, disabled or otherwise, and hence natural allies and with citizens on equal terms. (p. 57)

It was clear to the informants that the Holocaust metonymies (or metaphors) made their group even more vulnerable, but they felt it was necessary to remind people that they already were a vulnerable group. "But we already are victims" was one example of how the informants responded to challenges similar to that expressed by Tøndel. They felt that all aspects of their history should be taken into account while planning administrative systems like IPLOS.

By evoking the Holocaust when negotiating disability identity, the activists seem to be taking two opposing positions: that of the powerful and that of the powerless. They referred to pride and shame, to being empowered and oppressed, and to being an active actor and a passive victim. These positions are not stable, but are rather momentary negotiations. First, the activists contributed to the framing of disabled people as a minority (Solvang, Breivik, & Haualand, 2005), in the sense that they

"articulate their 'differences' from the dominant society, and make claims upon the state and its services," to use Urla's words (1993, p. 818). Second, the visibility was achieved by evoking a strong signifier (the Holocaust), which is not disability-specific. Third, the history of disabled people as a minority category was reworked by highlighting a disability-specific part of the Holocaust (T4).

We believe these negotiations represent a more complex search for collective identities than that described heretofore in research on activism. Traditionally, scholars have presented activist groups —be they social agents with certain views, or as groups with specific self-images and self-presentations—as fairly stable (e.g. Chafetz & Dworkin, 1986; Tarrow, 2011; Turner & Killian, 1972). Rather than supporting this traditional view, our findings support the idea that collective identities are as flexible and ever changing as individual ones are. Identities and actions must be perceived as discursive and thus fluid (Butler, 1990; Mole, 2007; Paredes, 2007).

Leading up to a conclusion, we will suggest that negotiations of collective identity become intensified and more articulated when the group is threatened. Relying on the work of Fredrik Barth (1969), we can say that in this specific conflict situation the activists have chosen to refer to the set of values, which are powerful *here and now*, and most importantly, which differentiate the group from another one (Barth, 1969). While Tøndel (2009) might be right when she argues that the activists' reference to the Holocaust was potentially disempowering, it was nevertheless important to formation, transformation, and redefinition of various types of social identities.

We believe that the case of the IPLOS activism gives reason for disability researchers to pay greater attention to the "contexts of diverse belonging modes surrounding communities" (Sicakkan & Lithman, 2005, p. 28) when studying issues related to identity and disabled people.

CONCLUSION

We have so far seen that in discussing present issues, vulnerable groups like those that were subject to Nazi atrocities strategically use a comparison with Nazi Germany, where registration of deviation was fundamental for medical killing. Several scholars see this strategy as problematic. Evoking the Holocaust may be disempowering or may lead to "rhetorical overkill" (as Bishoping and Kalmin suggest). Furthermore, it could also be argued that such comparisons "will diminish [the Holocaust's] moral force as an example and warning of radical evil in the world" (Melson, 1992, p. 34). Finally, such comparisons could also be perceived as morally challenging. It is possible that "evoking the Holocaust in non-Jewish contexts will reduce the significance of Jewish suffering and make Jews more vulnerable worldwide" (Landau, 2006; MacDonald, 2008, p. 32; Rosenbaum, 2001).

Neither the disability activists, nor the authors of this article, deny or neglect this last point. There is a thin line between abuse and legitimate use of history when evoking the Nazi atrocities. Rather than evaluating the rhetoric in this perspective, we will finish by

pointing to a few factors that made this use of history possible.

First, this policy criticism presupposes some kind of similarity between the contemporary Norwegian welfare state and the Third Reich of the 1940s. In his now classic study of the Holocaust and modernity, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the Holocaust was made possible by the rationality of modern society. He therefore argues that the Holocaust was not a unique incident, but rather that it was part of normality and that there is a lurking danger of repetition, in one or another form, "To put it bluntly, there are reasons to be worried because we know now that we live in a type of society that made the Holocaust possible, and that contained nothing which could stop the Holocaust from happening" (Bauman, 1991, p. 88). In his view, the Holocaust is an out-of-control by-product of the modern world, made up of familiar social forces. Even though Bauman's perspectives can be disputed, we would argue that it sheds light on the specifically modern framing of human difference.

Second, the protesters sought to establish an historical frame for their position as the vulnerable. In our view, the evoking of the Holocaust should be regarded as an amplified effort to remind political bodies and bureaucracies that treating people as objects is dangerous. The main non-Jewish sufferers of the Nazi atrocities (Romani people, homosexuals, and disabled people) remained a problem for a healthy and morally sound society both before 1933 and after 1945. Without these historical conditions, it would be very difficult to frame and legitimatize protests against deviance labeling such as impairment-based registration.

Third, the protests were made possible by European continuities on the level of policy. It is little doubt that the European welfare state began to develop prior to the Second World War. It is also well documented that Germany, even during the war, was by no means "falling behind" in that historical development. More importantly, the contemporary welfare rests on a dual relation to the impaired body, which was indeed established in the first half of the 20th century: On the one hand, registering both impairments and needs for assistance is crucial to policies (welfare policies, medical services, etc.) that empower disabled people. On the other, the very same registration can also form the basis of social exclusion and even (in the historical case of T4) of systematic killings.

These continuities (with respect to rationality, vulnerability, and welfare states, respectively) does not render the use of the Holocaust unproblematic in a moral sense. It is also possible that they facilitate exclusion rather than they strive for inclusion. However, it seems clear that these protests would have been impossible without the continuities. We argue that the IPLOS is embedded in a benevolent welfare state, which is integrated in the modernist project. Regardless the question of rhetorical overkill, the study of these protests can inform our understanding of the historical conditions and facilitators for disability protests. Furthermore, the fact that the Holocaust and the Norwegian welfare state can be drawn into protest rhetoric in this way can enrich our

understanding of those two sociohistorical phenomena.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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NOTES

1. Mari and Aksel Storstein, *Jakten på Sylvia B [The Hunt for Sylvia B]*, February 26, 2007, TV2. The title is that of a confrontational documentary in which one of the directors asked cabinet ministers the questions used in the IPLOS questionnaire. Sylvia B(rustad) was one of the ministers, at the time Minister of Health and Care Services.
2. Lecture in 2008 on IPLOS for *Personvernkommisjonen* (The Commission on Protection of Privacy) made accessible by the disability activism magazine *Selvsagt*: http://magasinet-selvsagt.no/fp/tema/iplos/IPLOSforedrag.php
3. http://www.iplos.net/cms/
4. Letter to Minister of Health and Care Services. Sylvia Brustad from Eilin Reinaas and Lars Ødegård, leaders of Norwegian Association of Disabled.
5. Beate Skogvik (*Handikapnytt* 5/2006, newsletter from The Norwegian Association of Disabled).
6. *Handikapnytt* 5/2006.

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