Political Participation Frames in a Gay Community

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Abstract: This paper is based on a research project studying political discussions in the Swedish LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Transsexual) community Qruiser. The aim is to understand what motivated participation in Qruiser political forum threads. The research is nethnographic through online interviews, participant observations in, and content analyses of, political discussions threads during November 2012. By using framing theory as an analytical tool, the paper seeks to answer which frames attracted and mobilized participation and how this was done. The paper finds that particularly frames of the left vs the right and the xenophobic vs the political correct motivated participation together with a general game frame.

Keywords: Framing, Netnography, Online Community, Political Participation, Sexual Identity

A t least 100 million participate regularly on online communities today (Kozinets 2011: 10). Homosexuals were particularly quick to embrace the Internet and its affordance of time-space compression (Gross, 2007). Queer youth, often feeling geographically and emotionally isolated, turned to the Internet as a (somewhat) safe space to explore their sexual identities among supportive and like-minded others (ibid.). From a radical democratic perspective (Mouffe, 2005) such exploration of non-normative identities can be understood as political since it challenges dominant discourses about what a respectful life entails. Within the field of political communication, arguments have also been made that it would be wrong to narrowly focus on realms of institutionalized politics to understand political participation (Carpentier 2011: 39-40; Wright, 2012). In this paper I therefore approach LGBT online communities as political and as important if aiming at understanding political participation.

It is known that participation changes when it migrates to the Internet because of the possibility of anonymity, automatic archiving and easy access to other communities (Kozinets, 2011: 100). It has been claimed that such characteristics democratize participation, making participation in the form of expression of opinions and political mobilization more accessible for a wider range of the population (see for example Shirky, 2009). Others have questioned whether the Internet affords new spaces for political participation, reinforces democratic values, empowers citizen or merely underlines existing power relations (Morozov, 2011). However, these debates have not yet been extended to include participation in online affinity communities (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009: 41; Wright, 2012: 6). At the same time there seems to be a general lack of engagement in new media studies with non-normative identities (Karl, 2007: 47). The argument here is that communicative exploration of sexual identity online very well may constitute the subjective requirement to participate politically, not the least since affective communication helps us to think reflexively

about our life situations and how to navigate society (McGuigan, 2005). It is thus relevant to study online affinity communities as sites of political participation.

Hence, we know that a) there is a need to study realms of non-institutional politics b) that queer communities were early to adopt and use the internet, and c) that participation changes when moving to the online realm. This directs me to the object of this paper; the Swedish LGBT community *Qruiser* which is the biggest in the Nordic region and part of the larger affinity portal *QX* (Queer Extra). Qruiser is primarily used for flirting, dating, finding friends and sexual partners. This is underlined by the name Qruiser, referring to cruising - an activity undertaken by homosexual men (mostly in the pre-digital era and before general acceptance of homosexuality in the West) strolling around in outdoor areas known among gay men as a space to find other gay men (often parks) checking each other out, looking for – as well as having – casual sex.

Qruiser does not only offer an online space for cruising. There are also possibilities for political discussions in so-called forums and clubs. This paper is based in a research project studying political discussions in a Qruiser forum during November 2012. The research is nethnographic through online interviews, participant observations in, and content analyses of, political discussions. The particular focus of this research project has been to understand what kinds of participation is taking place and what motivates people to engage in political discussion threads. In a previous paper (Svensson, 2013), I concluded that political participation on Qruiser was geared towards conflict and dissent rather than towards deliberation, opinion formation and consensus. The participation style was rude and antagonistic and Qruiser was conceived of as a place freed from political correctness, providing an outlet for political frustration. This paper intends to go further into these findings with a particular aim to understand what motivated participation in political discussions. In this paper I concentrate on the forum discussions.

Analytical Framework

It has been a common practice among scholars to distinguish between narrow/minimalist and wide/maximalist definitions of participation (Carpentier, 2011). Narrow definitions sometimes include nothing more than casting a vote every fourth year, whereas wide definitions include all kinds of opinion expressions – from blogging to civil disobedience. Verba & Nie (1972: 2) famously delineated participation as attempts to influence public decision-makers. But participation also has come to refer to activities with the purpose of influencing society at large and not only decision-makers.

I have used some of these discussions to differentiate between political participation emanating from within representative democratic institutions and practices (parliamentary participation), participation emanating from outside the Parliament but with an outspoken aim to influence public decision-makers (activist participation), and participation emanating from a more popular culture sphere, not primarily set up for political purposes (cultural participation, see Svensson, 2011). Following this differentiation, the study of Qruiser concerns cultural participation. Non-institutionalized online arenas not primarily directed towards decision-makers (such as fan communities, net communities and affinity portals) may become spaces for political participation (Hermes, 2005). And as hinted to in the introduction, if aiming at understanding political participation, it would be wrong to exclusively focus on realms of institutionalized politics (Carpentier, 2011: 39-40; Dahlgren & Alvares, 2013: 51). Similarly, Wright (2012) – building on

Oldenburg's concept of the third place – argues for a notion of "third space" as non-political online spaces where political talk emerges.

When political participation occurs on sites of popular culture, it has often been understood as communications that take a political turn without initially intended to (Wojcieszek & Mutz, 2009). Examples are Graham's (2009) study of discussions on docusoap fan-pages and Svensson's (2010) study of discussions on ice-hockey fan-pages. But cultural participation also concerns specific spaces on larger affinity portals to which politically minded and interested members are directed. Andersson (2013) studied explicitly political discussions on an online youth community primarily based on music preferences and clothing style. He found that users were exposed to very opposing political views, something that socialized them into what he discusses as politically confrontational team players (see chapter 9). Another example is Campbell's (2007) study of comments to news stories on the affinity portal Gay.com. Similar to Andersson, he found vibrant and politically charged debates from a diversity of political positions. It thus seems that confrontation to diverse political opinions is more likely on non-outspokenly political communities and affinity portals. The study of Qruiser has similarities with Campbell in that we both focus on gay sites. However, this study focuses on discussion forums in a community instead of news stories in general on the larger affinity portal. The study also has similarities with Anderson in that my object of study – a political forum on Qruiser – are explicitly political but only one tiny part of a larger affinity community not primarily geared towards politics.

Focusing on participation on a Qruiser forum, it becomes apparent that I depart from an understanding of communication as participation. We know that communication is action from the heydays of discourse and speech act theory. The *polis* – as Arendt (1998/1958: 194, 198) pointed out already in the 50s – is not the city-state in its physical location, but the activity of people acting and speaking together. In this way Arendt theorizes action and communication together – as two sides of the same coin – and relates them to the sphere of the political. That communication is participation is perhaps more true than ever in todays connected societies, permeated by online social networking in which agency is complexly interwoven with the communication platforms we utilize and the communication taking place on them (Urry, 2007: 176). Indeed, as Carpentier (2011: 67) underlines, discussions on a net community deals with opportunities for mediated participation in a (semi)public debate as well as with self-representation in one of the spaces that characterize the social.

This paper attends to processes of meaning making on an online political forum. In connected societies, digital technologies and related practices become increasingly fused with existing and new systems of meaning, contributing to the emergence of a net culture (Kozinets, 2011: 23). By assuming an anthropological approach to culture, participation and community become dialectically intertwined – also with processes of identity negotiation/maintenance and meaning making. This connects back to the general aim of this paper to understand what motivated participation in political discussion threads on Qruiser. Through different processes of identification the individual become interlinked/interlinks him/herself with the community. This leads me to the theoretical tool for analyzing this; participation frames.

Building on Goffman, frames are generally referred to when studying meaning making and how participants interpret their participation (see Carpentier, 2011: 72). Discussing frames in relation to news journalism Entman (1993: 52) argues that frames select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. Media is important, together with personal experience and interaction with peers, for setting the frames of reference for readers, viewers or users – establishing a version of reality we then build our worldviews on (Scheufele, 1999: 105).

Apart from news journalism, it is mostly in theories of collective action that ideas of (collective action) frames have been developed and analyzed. Frame analysis has provided a window on how collective actors construct interpretive schema that underlies mobilization and sustain action (Steinberg, 1998: 845). Frames are also situationally sensitive as they describe how communication, negotiation, and production of meaning are *framed* by a certain environment (Steinberg, 1998: 846). Benford & Snow (2000: 613) in turn underline framing as a signifying work in which participants engage actively to produce and maintain meaning. This highlights a duality in frame analysis focusing both on the environment (such as (mass) media texts) and on (mostly) individual meaning making practices. Scheufele (1999: 106) distinguishes between individual and media frames. Individual frames refer to information processing schemata and media frames to attributes to news, an organizing idea that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. Hence, frames do both condense the world out there (media frames) as well as signify it (individual frames) (Steinberg, 1998: 845). By criticizing individual frames, Steinberg (1998: 852) argues against Scheufele's media-individual frame dichotomy. He underlines frames as meaning making structures, as something that take place between us and that does not reside within us. Therefore we should not forget the environment, the discursive fields within which framing tales place. Largely agreeing with Steinberg, I believe frames are helpful as an analytical tool when aiming at understanding meaning making, motivation and participation. Frames help to render events and occurrences meaningful, to organize experience (and communication) and thus also to guide participation by simplifying and condensing the world in ways that mobilize, motivate and make participation meaningful (Benford & Snow, 2000: 614). In this way frames and participation are dialectically intertwined in giving meaning to events as well as to one self and to others through signifying practices of interpretation.

Keeping in mind that frames are dialogic, dynamic and unstable, in this paper I am particularly interested in how frames and participation intersect in an online political forum. Hence, I am looking for to analyze something that could be labeled as participation frames, i.e. frames that individuals use and refer to when participating in political discussion threads on Qruiser. The first question the paper then wishes to pose is which frames attracted (mobilized and maintained) participation. To discern such frames I have to look for common threads in the empirical material (see Ryan et al., 2011: 177). The second question deals with how these frames attracted participation (realizing that these two questions are hard to separate and have to be dealt with in tandem). To attend to this I will have to pay attention to the role of the online environment on Qruiser, the language and terminology used, principles, norms and values adhered to as well as what practices participants were cherishing. To conduct such analysis I have studied online postings, i.e. digitally mediated speech utterances as well as interviewed participants and observed their posting behavior and participated in it, which I will attend to next.

Method

Given the theoretical focus on participation and meaning making, condensed to the analytical tool participation frames, together with the aim to understand these – I have chosen a nethnographic method. Nethnography is a form of ethnography adapted to the characteristics of online communities (Kozinets, 2011: 9). Three main differences between ethno- and nethnography are how a researcher 1) enter into the culture, 2) how to collect data and 3) ethical considerations a researcher has to make. The first difference is straightforward; you enter into the culture online, through the Internet and the communication platform(s) the community use. The second

difference - to collect data - is possible through a combination of a wide array of methods (Kozinets, 2011: 65). In this research project I have collected material through online interviews, participant observations in, and content analyses of, political discussions threads. I will attend to these next.

The study of political discussions on Qruiser primarily took place during November 2012. November 1st the community had 109153 active members. According to member statistics 72 percent of these defined themselves as male and 72 percent defined themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. The majority of the members are between 20 and 40 years old with an average age of 33. 72 percent of the members are based in Sweden and only 17 percent defined themselves as in a relationship, underlining Qruiser's main function – for gays to find a date.

For this paper I have focused on political discussion threads in the sub-forum Politics, Society & the World (my translation: Politik, Samhälle & Världen). Discussion forums are particularly suitable for nethnographic research according to Kozinets (2011: 120-121). I conducted participant observations in all discussion threads started from November 1st to 20th. I continued downloading postings in these threads downloaded until November 25th. This gave me a corpus of 76 different threads, started by 31 different nicknames, containing in total 2853 postings. Kozinets (2011: 139) argues that about 1000 pages double spaced with postings is a suitable amount of data from discussion forums. From the 76 discussion threads on Qruiser November 2012 I have about 1700 pages of postings, all of which have been analyzed for this paper. After having published a conference paper on this material (see Svensson, 2013), I linked to this paper in a discussion thread (June 2013) in order to share my results with the community and participants. This discussion thread sparked a mild debate that has also been included in this study.

To this material, all thread starters and recurrent posters from November 2012 were invited to participate in online interviews. Not everyone agreed to participate. To date, I have conducted interviews on the platform with 36 different nicknames. The interviews have been different in length (and some are still continuing). In total I have around 250 pages of interview material. This material includes interviews from a pre-study April 2012

I have also conducted reflective field diary from November 1st – documenting observations, feelings, subtexts, and experiences as I participated in discussions as well as during the analysis phase. Such reflective field notations help decipher rationales and meanings behind cultural acts, and hence they have been beneficial for my analysis (Kozinets, 2011: 15). According to Kozinets (2011: 138-139), there are thus three types of data to be collected in nethnographic research, all of which have been collected in this study; 1) archive data (easily selected through copy and paste on these forums) 2) elicited data (gathered in interaction with participants through online interviews) and 3) field notations (noted in the reflexive diary).

The third difference from offline ethnography concerned ethical issues. Qruiser is neither a public nor a private forum. You need to become a member to access the site, a process that only takes two minutes. Hence, it is easier to access Qruiser than to subscribe to a newspaper. Member profile pictures are also displayed for all visitors to the login page (see https://www.qruiser.com), even to those not yet having signed up or become members. Despite this easy access and display of members profile pictures publicly; it is doubtful that participants expect that their participation will appear in a research project (Kozinets, 2011: 193). I have therefore been fully open with my presence and my research aims on Qruiser, not the least on my profile page (as advised by Kozinets, 2011: 201). November 4th I also changed my nickname to *forskaren* (the researcher) and as stated earlier I have also published research results on the forum. In March I contacted the administrators who gave me permission to conduct the research. I have also attempted to get

permission from the publisher but without any success (despite several attempts). However, I have checked the terms of use and the different policies on Qruiser and made sure that I have not violated any one of these conducting the research. I have also tried to interview all thread starters of the threads included in the study. Even if not all of them wanted participate in interviews, all of the ones that answered to my request gave me permission to study the threads they started (as advised by Kozinets, 2011: 203). Furthermore, in this paper I will not use any personal information about any participant (such as nickname or age). No postings will be cited; only interview excerpts from participants having given me their permission to do so will be displayed here. This does not entail complete anonymity, but something scholars have labeled "middle masking" (Kozinets, 2011: 211). Participants have been given a high amount of confidentiality and data have been stored in way that only I can access. Furthermore, since this is data collected in forums in which some participants link to their own blogs - with their given name and all kinds of personal information fully accessible – and since these are forums in which people confront each other for the opinions they express, I argue that the participants themselves did not act as if the communication was private (for a discussion on this see Andersson, 2013: 162-164). In conclusion then, the risk of damage to the participants is minimal, the participants autonomy and integrity is secured, I am using a relevant method for data gathering and the contribution of this research is substantial (I believe). Following Elgesem (2002) this means that this study is justified from an ethical standpoint.

Results

The forum attracted a lot of heated discussions between clear-cut and confident opponents with strong pre-established convictions. A previous study concluded that participation on this Qruiser forum was geared towards conflict and dissent between antagonists actively seeking to misinterpret each other's postings in order to attack and use unflattering labels on each other (Svensson, 2013). The question thus arises, what frames motivated participation in such heated and antagonistic discussion threads? Here I could clearly outline two participation frames, the left vs. the right and the xenophobes vs. the cultural relativists.

Studying the postings in the 76 threads collected in the forum, the division between the left and the right stands out. In the discussions threads, right-wing posters talked about "the left riffraff's confused world views" or how "the socialist Sweden has decide it is ugly to work, to earn your own living" (all quotes translated from Swedish by author). The left-wing posters showed similar (lack of) eloquence talking about the "bourgeois pack" and for example female ministers as "bourgeois bitches" and market liberals as "authoritarian bullies". That this frame triggered participation was also evident in the interview material. When asked why participating in the forum discussions a majority of the interviewees at least once in the interview made use of this frame to explain, and thus provide their participation with meaning. Statements such as "the left has done so much harm", "concerning the left, they have nothing to offer" and "we have to combat the right-wing opinions on the forum" were common.

> *"It is almost exclusively socialists of various colors that participate in the debates here so a different perspective - a voice that believes in freedom - is needed"*

Already in the previous article I observed that the positioning of the opponent was to a surprisingly large extent done using a frame of the left vs. the right (Svensson, 2013). I have come across this frame in other studies (see Svensson et al., 2014), but was surprised that this frame

remains hegemonic – sorting all kinds of conflicts into this frame. It functioned as a master frame for attracting participation, understanding posting practices, yourself and others as participants in these threads. The right-left scale is thus far from obsolete in the contemporary political landscape. Nonetheless it is simplistic and its dominance does hide other ways of constructing the political.

The other main frame that triggered participation that stands out in the material is the exchange between xenophobes (or unafraid truth-tellers according to themselves) and the defenders of multiculturalism (or the politically correct mafia/ cultural relativists according to their opponents). There are numerous examples referred to in the 2853 postings collected of for example municipalities having to "shut down elderly care units" at the same time as they received refugees who "drained the welfare system without contributing to it". In the interviews this frame was prominent with statements such as "I engage in discussions that concerns Sweden, its duration as a nation and as a home for the Swedish people and Swedish culture contra multiculturalists". On the other side their opponents argued that these posters were wrong as "there is no such thing as free immigration" and that "not even refugees can assume to have a safe haven in Sweden". Some of these posters did not shy away from naming their opponents xenophobes, fascists or even on some few occasions, Nazis, as in the posting below.

> "Faceless racists/Nazis are everywhere online, but on an LGBT site? It is an insult to us and to those who fought for our rights"

In the interviews opponents of multiculturalism talked about what they considered a confusion of nationalism for racism. "I stand for being a nationalist, however my opponents love to label me racist, even though these are two different things". At the same time some of these participants welcomed a forum climate "where the political correctness has decreased" and "spread of different opinions are more visible", here anti-immigration opinions. It was thus obvious that this frame motivated participation and made it meaningful for participants.

Not surprisingly, one side here considered the religion of Islam as particularly evil and attacked Muslims as unwanted and unfit for Swedish society. You could for example observe statements in the postings like this one:

> "Many Muslims are so shielded from the rest of the world that they are still for the most part believe in, and live by, Muslim traditions, as they did during the time of the prophet Mohammed. Their modernization process has not even begun."

The idea of cultural relativism was an important part of this frame as arguments frequently were made that Christianity (Judaism or any other religion or culture for that matter) and Islam were measured by different yardsticks. For example, some believed that there was a general silencing of women abuse and homophobia in Islam by a politically correct elite who did not dare to criticize Islam, afraid of being labeled islamophobists. "You cannot criticize mosques for spreading hatred against Jews, Christians and homosexuals without being attacked for spreading hatred against Muslims!". There were also frequent references to what was called "Islamophobia-phobia" both in the postings and in the interviews.

> "The subordination of women has worsened recently by cultural relativism and the sprawl of Islamophobia-phobia, the belief that all cultures are equally good, and that we should not criticize Islam as it would be prejudiced and racist."

Some times the left vs. the right and the xenophobe vs. the cultural relativist frames intersected in interesting ways. It was for example considered that xenophobes were right-wing extremists

and that people on the left defended the religion of Islam – that they considered "all Muslims as an oppressed working class" as one interviewed participant phrased it. Or as in the posting below;

> *"I am also amazed that some LGBT people, particularly those with left-wing views, excuse Islamic homophobia, or believe it milder than other homophobia. They are cultural relativists, and therefore use a different yardstick when it comes to Islam. Repression they sharply condemn outside Islam becomes acceptable for them when it is Muslims who stands for it."*

Furthermore these postings and interview excerpts also reveal how gay rights were used as an argument to justify ones position in relation to the two frames. On the left, posters accused opponents of lacking "self-respect" since they, as ascribed Sweden Democrats (Swedish xenophobic populist party on the extreme right), supported family conservative ideas. On the other side, LGTBs on the left were accused of having "insufficient self-respect" since they "defended or played down Muslim homophobia". And sometimes the supposed left-wing posters and Sweden Democrats were lumped together as in this example "the people on the left here who cringe to Muslim congregations are not one bit better than sympathizers of the Sweden Democrats". Qruiser being a LGTB community thus clearly influenced how the frames were used by the common use of gay rights in both ends of these two frames.

Now we have entered into the question of how these frames mobilized and maintained participation. Walther (1997) argues that if you expect future interaction in a net community, users will interact in a more friendly and cooperatively manner and the tone will be generally more positive than if the users think their interaction will be limited. Following Walther participants in the Qruiser forum did thus not expect future interaction. In my observations it was obvious that the participants did not read each other's postings carefully, their interchange was rude, fast, full of spelling mistakes, indicating their quick composition in the heat of the fight, not seldom using caricatures to portray the opponent in a bad light by associating opinions from the extreme versions of these positions to the opponent. If you were perceived of as belonging to the left you had to answer for North Korean politics and like-wise, if you were perceived of as right-wing you had to answer to everything from American foreign policy to decisions from the Swedish ruling conservative alliance. According to one interview, this antagonist atmosphere led to parsing and preconceived opinions, which in turn led participants to give in to the general antagonistic tone of the threads and adopt a more ferocious appearance.

This leads me what could be labeled the truth frame, which was clearly observable in the postings in the forum threads. "I participate when I find that there is too much injustice, bullying and ignorance – to correct the worldview in the forum" as one interviewee phrased it. There was a tendency among the participants to preach what they were convinced of was the truth, and if you did not get the truth, you were basically ignorant. The examples below are from three different interviews.

> *"The thread had about 90% inaccurate information, so I started another thread to correct these lies"*

> *"I'm damn tired of ignorance in general. And I become even more tired as a gay man when Qruiser allows faceless trolls to spew their racism and coarse lies"*

> *"You learn fairly quickly that there is no point participating in their (the extreme right) threads, you become blocked if you disclose anything for them objectionable, facts for example"*

In the interviews participants talked about an urge to let people know the truth – to share this truth, that they had access to.

> *"I don't know why the Sweden Democrats trigger the leftists hateful sentiments here, especially since these are founded in ignorance. Someone has to tell the truth."*

> *"I stand up for knowledge and justice. That is correct. But also to educate and show facts rather than rumors"*

This was not about opinion formation. Participants had formed their opinions already before participating. Thus the participation was rather motivated by an urge to preach your conviction to others. Internet, through its practice of linking, seems to afford this. Using links was a way to verify standpoints and convictions (source criticism aside). By justifying a post with a link in a sense seemed to confirm the standpoint expressed, a kind if verification that indeed the claim in the post was true, and hence that the poster had access to the truth (see also Carpentier, 2014).

While the participants believed to have privileged access to truth, they were also mostly aware of that they could not convince their opponents. In the interview except below I asked one participant about his debate with an opponent, if he believed he could get him to change his mind:

> *"You don't win over XX in this way, it is about to get more people to discover the major shortcomings in his arguments"*

This non belief in the ability to change the opponents mind, is further elaborated in the interview below

> *"I will never get the opponent to change his opinion, and that's not the purpose either. The debate is to influence those who are uncertain and that just follow the debate."*

This excerpt hints to one motivation to participate in these forum threads. Participants did not expect to convince or to reason with their opponents, but by engaging in debate with them they were actually addressing someone else, an imagined audience, an audience believed much easier to convince than debate opponents.

> *"To answer your question for who I want to discover the shortcomings of XXs argumentation, those who still can be influenced. They are not any specific persons. But I want to show alternatives for those undecided"*

A conception of an imagined audience as consisting of individuals who will be convinced by their arguments further underlines the participation in the forum threads as a form fantasy (see Carpentier, 2014). "The ones who read without commenting I believe are the ones who try to form an opinion, I respect these people" as one interviewee phrased it. Therefore some participants told me they referred opponents – sending them personal messages – to the (semi)publicly forum for (semi)public debate. My conclusion is that the participants wanted the debate to be visible for this imagined audience. Here I could observe a rule/principle having formed on the forum; you do not participate if you do not have a solid opinion already formed, then you are expected to lurk. This further underlines the importance of the imagined audience for these participants.

This leads me to what I found to be a key rationale, motivation for the participation on the forum, a game/play rationale. In almost all interviews this was referred to in one way or another, that "to discuss is a way to compete, a hobby" or that "anything that amuses me is a good thing". The most common way interviewees explained their participation in the forum threads was to refer it as a pastime. And here it seems that participants preferred passing time fighting between

clear cut opponents than to reason with undecided, that this was more fun/ liberating, not the least because of its lack of political correctness as highlighted in the excepts below:

> "There is no-one that censors you here, there is no wait before your post gets published, you also generally get an immediate response, which is usually pretty fun"

> "On this type of site, people unleash in a completely different way with there thoughts and opinions, it's liberating"

> "I participate mainly when I am bored, etc., a pastime, but also because it's fun to tease all the "left" people here on (when you're bored)."

To win was secondary, or not even thought about. It was more about keeping the game ongoing. This suggests that the metaphor of play, instead of game, to better illustrate the participation in the forum threads. It therefore seemed that participants even rejoiced in attacking each other and being attacked in turn. Participants had their favorite opponents and could express joy when they entered into the thread as in this posting: "XX has awaken from his coma :) bring on the leftist propaganda". In the interviews, participants talked about how they appreciated also negative reactions, that negative reactions was a sign that they had been successful in their provocations:

> "I see strong negative reactions as a sign that the one who has expressed such reactions has been emotionally affected (upset) over what I have written. And as an ideological opponent (or something like that), I wish him all evil, and thus become satisfied thinking of their political agitation."

From a play perspective rudeness/provocation is part of the rules, to make it interesting and keep the playing ongoing. In this sense to be attacked at least was to be acknowledged, as a player, a much better fate than being ignored.

> "I often say that if I have not provoked anyone I have not affected anything. If you don't get any comments it seemed nobody bothered"

> "I will probably not write more in debate forums here. It's not worth the time I spend, to talk if nobody listens"

This was about skillfully using the participation frames, caricaturing your opponents in light of these frames in order to trigger the play and make the pastime, here debate, ongoing. Participants in the forum did not expect to cooperate, rather to entertain themselves. It seemed that the medium afforded this because of its directness, being fast, anonymous as well as the platform, being conceived of as liberated from politically correctness. This is participation as play and this explains the tendency to attack each other rather than to reason.

Conclusion

I set out to study political participation on Qruiser in order to broadening the understanding of political participation in contemporary western, liberal and connected societies. The particular aim was to understand what motivated participation on Qruiser political forums through the analytical tool of participation frames. Attending to political discussion threads in the Forum: *Politics Society and the World* I could discern three different frames, the left vs. right, the xenophobes vs politically correct and a general game frame. This study show how these frames were dialectically

intertwined in the political participation in the forum, giving meaning to discussion, one self and others through signifying practices of interpretation.

Practices of identity negotiation and maintenance were conducted within these participation frames and thus they provided the participants a subjective anchoring point for their participation as well as a temperature at the society in which they lived (here Sweden). While being an outlet for passions and "refreshingly freed from politically correctness", these frames were also highly limiting as they carried with them ideological dimensions and preconceived ways of constructing the political. It is thus clear that using these frames was homogenizing, reducing complexities and nuances (see also Carpentier, 2014).

So what does the political participation on Qruiser say about our society and our co-existence in it? It hints at participation as confrontation rather than opinion formation and the play as an increasing important form for conceiving of democracy. If you are deliberative democrat this might be more worrying than if adhering radical democracy. However, these participants were generally politically interested individuals whose overall participation ranged from letting off steam in Qruiser forums threads to more deliberative style participation in other settings. Hence, we cannot judge the sophistication of their overall participatory practices by only attending to their participation on Qruiser.

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