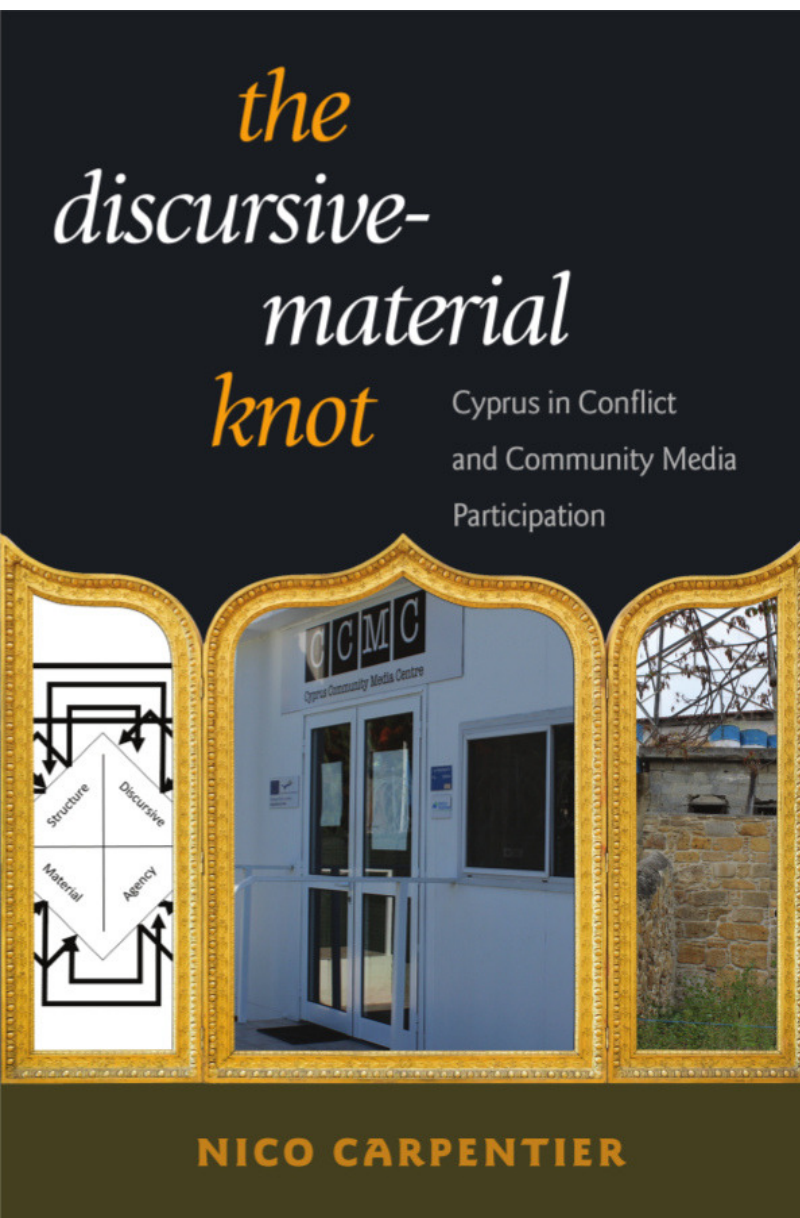# Conflict Transformation and Cyprus: Does Community Media Help?

A review essay on
"The Discursive-Material Knot:
Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation"
by Nico Carpentier

Hazal Yolga and Orestis Tringides

the discursive-material knot

Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation

NICO CARPENTIER

THE DISCURSIVE-MATERIAL KNOT: CYPRUS IN CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY MEDIA PARTICIPATION

A book by Nico Carpentier

Published by Peter Lang
New York, 2017

ISBN: 9781433137556

http://nicocarpentier.net/dmk

Cyprus, a small island in the Mediterranean, has been home to a long-lasting antagonism and conflict between the two main communities on the island, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, the country's political and historical complexity being the inverse of its size. A myriad of scholars—Cypriots and non-Cypriots alike—have taken on the study of the Cyprus conflict and the attempts of its transformation into a more peaceful and non-militarized situation. Nico Carpentier went a step further. He conducted an extensive study on Cyprus as an area of conflict, in conjunction with—and the role of—Cypriot community media (and in particular of the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC) and MYCYradio) in conflict transformation. With its integrated interdisciplinary approach with a radical combination of theory and empirical research applied on a well-researched case study, the book embraces both critical reflection of participation theories and analytical interpretation of empirical studies. With its application of a novel framework to the Cyprus problem, offers valuable insight into to the many mechanisms at play in shaping its future.

CCMC was established in 2009 with the mission of empowering a media-literate and active society. With the aim of encouraging community-led communications and media in Cyprus and supporting local civil society and community media organizations, groups and the wider community island-wide. CCMC has been promoting the benefits of community-based media to as wide an audience as possible and giving members of the many communities on the island the skills to organize, create and disseminate their messages. CCMC's affiliated multi-lingual community webradio station, MYCYradio, began broadcasting in April 2013, aiming to engage with and serve all communities living in Cyprus, by providing a platform for a diversity of voices to be heard, while also highlighting cultural and linguistic diversity, encourage social integration and promote a culture of active citizenship and participatory democracy.

In his book, *The Discursive-Material Knot: Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation*, Professor Nico Carpentier closely explores the CCMC and MYCYradio and the ways in which they contribute to peace-building and subsequently to community-building among members of the society, from both within and across of the divide in Cyprus. At the same time, the book combines an analysis of Cyprus' historical narrative and an illustration of its contemporary agonistic media development within the realm of community media, while offering an in-depth look into the diversity and the multi-layered natures of conflict transformation processes.

Structurally constructed as a triptych, the author, Nico Carpentier, has produced three intertwined platforms, radically combining high theory and empirical research. The first two platforms/chapters provide the theoretical backbone of the study which feeds into all other platforms, taking from the wider perspectives of theory of the politics of participation in contemporary culture and conflict theory.

In Platform 1, Carpentier starts by building the theoretical foundation of the book by articulating on the intricate relationship between the discursive and the material - a developed "knotted" theoretical framework where both components are essentially entangled in a non-hierarchical manner. It also serves as an autonomous theoretical reflection on the two dimensions and reconciling the discursive and the material in their knotted interactions. Afterwards, by focusing on community media from the perspective of discursive-material knot, Platform 2 brings together and rethinks community media theory, participatory theory, and conflict (transformation) theory . It first offers a general reflection on participation, then zooms in on community media organizations from the perspective of the discursive-material knot. The discursive-material knot's all-pervasive manifestations range from the tiniest micro-level of human interaction to the macro-structures of society.

The author puts these theoretical tools and the discursive-material knot developed in the first two platforms, to work in Platform 3. Carpentier provides a factual overview of the history of the Cyprus Problem, juxtaposes discursive-material analyses of it, and, in particular, of the role of the different nationalisms within this conflict. The difficulty of grasping the political complexity of the Cyprus Problem is duly demonstrated. The textual analysis of the Cyprus Problem is combined with the author's own photographic work (which focuses on the memorializations of the Cyprus Problem), adding a visual-analytical component to this part. The analyses of the historical context of Cyprus provides necessary context for the study of the practices of the CCMC and MYCYradio as local cases. Within Platform 3's spectrum, he explores the experience and the effects of those participatory community media organizations in contributing to conflict transformation from a state of antagonism to agonism and contributing to social change. In particular, the author focuses on how CCMC and MYCYradio function as a **participatory-agonistic assemblage**. He explains how CCMC and MYCYradio position themselves (through their practices) as alternatives to the Cypriot (and international) mainstream media.

Through an analysis of the discourse of participation within MYCYradio, looking at the signifying practices of the producers and the guests in the interviews, and on the social media pages of the programs, Nico Carpentier offers an insight into the counter-hegemonic nature of MYCYradio and how it engages with the hegemony of the mainstream media within the Cypriot mediascape. Additionally, a reception study of MYCYradio content was conducted to explore how MYCYradio listeners and non-listeners, Cypriot and non-Cypriot citizens, Turkish, English, and Greek-language speakers relate to the participatory identity of MYCYradio, communicated through 13 fragments from the programs. Based on the interviews with broadcasters, volunteers and guests, MYCYradio's identity focuses on its **alternativity** and **independence** in contrast with the mainstream media. According to the broadcasters and

guests, MYCYradio offers a platform where people can speak their minds freely, talk about everyday life or issues which are not addressed in the mainstream media and therefore feel more empowered.

As media organizations, CCMC and MYCYradio are different because they facilitate the participation of Cypriots (and non-Cypriots) in the structure of the organization and in the MYCYradio broadcasts. Apart from its participatory-democratic identity, Carpentier observes, through the analyses of media content, the reception study and interviews, that MYCYradio's identity was also articulated as sensitive, alternative, autonomous, dialogical and relaxed.

Nico Carpentier then analyzes how the organizational practices of CCMC and MYCYradio, and the webradio's broadcasts, **contribute to peace-building by transforming antagonism into agonism**. He analyzes MYCYradio's signifying practices and their reception through a series of re-articulations of agonistic discourse: The overcoming/decentering of the divide, the reconfiguration of time, the deconstruction of the homogeneous self, and the elaboration of the cost of the conflict.

Carpentier (2017, p. 349) observes that "in a first set of re-articulations, the existence of a togetherness is emphasized, without ignoring differences and the conflicts this generates." The discourses manifesting in the broadcasts and in the focus groups were grounded in affects and notions such as empathy, friendship, dialogue, bridging the gaps, conflictual togetherness and commonalities in the past and the future.

MYCYradio's broadcasts not only subtly disrupt the idea of the other/enemy, but CCMC and MYCYradio also create a form of material togetherness, where the different communities meet, collaborate and co-decide together. The book does not shy away from showing the problems that CCMC and MYCYradio have to face, but the book simultaneously highlights the many merits of CCMC and MYCYradio.

The main argument of this study, though, is that there is a **natural alignment between these two elements**—between **participation and peace-building**. CCMC and MYCYradio, as a participatory assemblage, plays an important role in peace-building because it is a community media organization, radically committed to maximizing participation. This commitment to participation, for instance, produces high levels of inclusivity, supported by principles of equality and respect for diversity. It allows for the creation of an alternative community of ordinary people outside the logic of antagonistic nationalisms, for alternative (horizontal) structures that facilitate collaboration, and for the deployment of multi-layered forms of citizenship and networks of like-minded civil society organizations.

The book not only takes a step forward in developing a theoretical reconciliation between discourse studies and new materialist theory, and makes headway in the further elaboration of community media theory, participatory theory and conflict theory, but also serves as a methodological toolkit, allowing for better understanding of the intricacies of civil society based community media, showing the complexity and

richness of conflict transformation processes, offering resources for scholars and reflective practitioners alike. An equally important contribution of "*The Discursive-Material Knot: Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation*" lies in its detailed analysis of how community media organizations contribute to a **culture of peace**. This book will be prove to be a very useful study for anyone interested in the question of how to treat the relation between discourse and matter from the points of view of theory, method, and critique. Furthermore, the book's non-hierarchical nature, and the use of a knot model for its analysis, makes it a very compelling and fitting tool to tackle the variety of diverse (community) media practices and assemblages across the globe.

Finally, the theoretical evolution of the discursive-theoretical knot aims to engage scholars from a number of academic fields, reflective organizations and groups, stakeholders and (community) media actors in a constructive dialogue. Particularly in the field of communication and media studies, community media theory still deserves strengthening and attracting more study and application within the context of work of community media organizations. And the community media's connection to the discursive/material dimension (and to the supportive structure/agency dimension) offers a good route to contribute to this aim.

Book cover and photos 2 and 4 provided by the publisher and Nico Carpentier; Photos 1, 3 and 5 by Old Nicosia Revealed