Nico Carpentier, **The Discursive-Material Knot: Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation**, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2017, 472 pp., $51.85 (paperback), $104.55 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
John D. H. Downing
Southern Illinois University, USA

This monograph is a valuable contribution to research, conceptually and empirically, on several levels: discourse theory, ethnic/national conflict, community media studies, and Cyprus Studies.
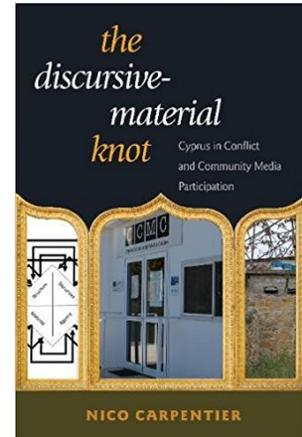
Discourse Analysis

Carpentier's mastery of the literature on discourse analysis and its several variants, and of the other major topics featuring in this monograph, is both polymathic and assured. His close analysis of the variants, and extensive, nonreductionist mapping of their conceptual interrelations, is magisterial. His own "discursive-material" contribution to that universe of study is valuable, grounding discursive practices and strategies in the social bodies that produce, circulate and engage with them. The metaphor of the "knot" binding together the discursive and the socio-organizational/processual nicely captures their analytical distinctions while safeguarding their marriage (if I may be allowed a further metaphor!).

Ethnic and National Strife

The conflict in Cyprus has long historical roots. The Turkish/Muslim minority, long favored by the Ottoman empire, was often utilized by the Ottomans' British colonial successors to head off Greek Cypriot demands to join Crete in its successful 1913 bid to be defined as part of Greece. The disasters of the early 1920s "exchange" of Greek and Turkish minorities in Turkey, Greece, and the eastern Mediterranean are still a live memory throughout the region. Religious identifications have been exploited to fortify these understandings. Turkey's military seizure of northern Cyprus in 1974, with thousands killed, many of them still unaccounted for, is a very live memory. In the febrile Middle East, Cyprus's role has also been significant as a "stationary aircraft carrier"—a sardonic term used by some Cypriots—and thus a country of interest to the West.

I summarize these dimensions here for the benefit of readers with no exposure to the Cyprus issue. Clearly, the nationality components of the conflict dovetail with language, ethnic, and religious ones. Carpentier lucidly takes the reader through substantial detail pinpointing the sequence of specifics from the 1500s to 2016, as a foundational exercise enabling richer understanding of the nuances of the media activists and audiences he explores in part 4 of the monograph. As an exploration of comparative ethnic relations, this part of the monograph is a worthy contribution in and of itself. Carpentier uses

intensively the Mouffe/Laclau terminology of *agonistic* and *antagonistic* conflicts, recognizing as he does so that these may and do coexist in the same society, to explore the roles, actual and potential, of community media activism for resolution of the Cyprus conflict from underneath.

Community Media

Many terms used in this branch of media studies are flawed (*alternative* media, *counterinformation* media, *activist* media), often because they attempt to encapsulate the vast variety of such formats, projects, and purposes in a single term. Carpentier grounds this section of the monograph to a degree on his earlier *Understanding Alternative Media* (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007) and on his earlier monograph *Media and Participation* (Carpentier, 2011), but extends those discussions considerably here, incorporating, as he does so, a great deal of the mini-explosion of studies that have appeared since his earlier contributions. He offers a highly multifaceted set of perspectives, disrupting the boundaries implicit in the standard terms deployed.

Where this study makes a mark empirically in this research area is in its detailed attention to both the makers of the media projects (and their operative processes) and their listeners. Already some 15 years ago, I complained in a *Media, Culture, & Society* article that audiences and readers were dismayingly absent from studies of community media. Carpentier's study is a very useful contribution to filling the huge hole that still persists.

Cyprus Studies

Cyprus has been widely defined as one of the most intractable conflicts, given its persistence over two generations. Indeed, intractability has become something of a stereotype. Successive waves of United Nations and European officials have come and gone without anything changing. Carpentier's study, as noted, is unusual inasmuch as it engages with an entirely different form of attack, namely, the emergence of two on-the-ground small media projects seeking to begin a participatory and wide-ranging series of conversations among people outside the corridors of power. It is far too early to be able to predict outcomes, but inasmuch as it will be ordinary folk who will have to make any resolution of the conflict perdure, their early initiatives in that direction are of interest not only to Cyprus, but in many other locations around the planet.

It is certainly well past time that "community" media studies, in the Anglophone research literature, take on board dimensions of community that are not rosily romanticized. (In other languages, *community*'s nostalgic dimension is largely lacking.)

There are some gaps, despite the book's length. Maybe Carpentier's knot metaphor, given its emphasis on stability and tightness, fails to capture the processual dimensions with which this study, in all other respects, engages very strongly. A detailed engagement with Clemencia Rodríguez's 2011 study *Citizens' Media Against Armed Conflict*—precisely, a study of "community" media within the long-running civil war in Colombia—would have been very illuminating. Nonetheless, this book is a very worthwhile contribution in several directions at once.

References

Bailey, O., Cammaerts, B., & Carpentier, N. (2007). *Understanding alternative media*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and participation: A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Press.

Downing, J.D.H. (2003), Audiences and readers of alternative media: The absent lure of the virtually unknown. *Media, Culture & Society, 25*(5), 625–645.

Rodríguez, C. (2011). *Citizens' media against armed conflict: Disrupting violence in Colombia.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.