

Transformations of antagonism into agonism: community media as a participatory contact zone¹

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Abstract: *This article examines the participatory-democratic dimensions of community media in relationship with conflict transformation, building on the theory of agonistic pluralism (Mouffe, 2000; 2005). Focusing on the ethno-politically divided island of Cyprus, this inquiry is made through a research intervention that locates community media content production as a participatory contact zone (Torre, 2010) to explore how these potentially maximalist-participatory processes support transformations of antagonism into agonism, with an ethnographic study of a series of community media workshops that brought together Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teenagers to collectively produce multimedia content. Findings, based on qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2011) of the collected data, indicate that the teenagers' participation in this contact zone generated different forms and degrees of conflict transformation at personal, interpersonal and intergroup levels, distinguished with an awareness of difference, pluralist self-identifications, and confrontation against a homogeneous view of the self, while interactions with the "other" were characterized by non-violence, dialogue and teamwork, translating into new collective identifications and alliances based on, and advocating, respect for difference. The participatory-democratic dimensions of community media production, along with the embodied knowledges, supported these transformations by fostering critical thinking, free self-expression and collaborative action on shared grounds, while giving space to conflicts, which were handled by means of self-introduced decision-making tools.*

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Keywords: *Community media, conflict transformation, youth participation, critical pedagogy, critical media literacy, Cyprus conflict.*

Sommario: *Questo articolo esamina le dimensioni partecipativo-democratiche dei media comunitari in relazione alla trasformazione dei conflitti, basandosi sulla teoria del pluralismo agonistico (Mouffe, 2000; 2005). Concentrandosi sull'isola etno-politicamente divisa di Cipro, questa indagine è realizzata attraverso un intervento di ricerca che colloca la produzione di contenuti dei media comunitari come una zona di contatto partecipativa (Torre, 2010) per esplorare come questi processi potenzialmente massimalisti-partecipativi supportino la trasformazione dell'antagonismo in agonismo, con uno studio etnografico di una serie di laboratori di media comunitari che hanno riunito adolescenti greco-ciprioti e turco-ciprioti per produrre collettivamente contenuti multimediali. I risultati, basati sull'analisi qualitativa dei contenuti (Silverman, 2011) dei dati raccolti, indicano che la partecipazione degli adolescenti in questa zona di contatto ha generato diverse forme e gradi di trasformazione del conflitto a livelli personale, interpersonale e intergruppo, distinti da una consapevolezza della differenza, autoidentificazioni pluraliste, e il confronto contro una visione omogenea del sé, mentre le interazioni con l'"altro" erano caratterizzate da non-violenza, dialogo e lavoro di squadra, traducendosi in nuove identificazioni collettive e alleanze basate sul, e favorevoli al, rispetto per la differenza. Le dimensioni partecipativo-democratiche della produzione dei media comunitari, insieme alle conoscenze incorporate, hanno sostenuto queste trasformazioni favorendo il pensiero critico, la libera autoespressione e l'azione collaborativa su basi condivise, lasciando spazio ai conflitti, che sono stati gestiti tramite strumenti decisionali auto-introdotti.*

Parole chiave: *Media comunitari, trasformazione del conflitto, partecipazione giovanile, pedagogia critica, alfabetizzazione critica ai media, conflitto di Cipro*

Introduction

Community media are often considered as esteemed partners in peace-building and conflict transformation, on the basis of their capacity to foster inclusion, diversity and intercultural dialogue, and their agonistic problem-solving strategies (Rodríguez 2000, 2011; Doudaki & Carpentier 2011; Carpentier 2017; Voniati et al. 2018; Voniati 2021). Particularly during and in the aftermath of violent

conflict, these characteristics help to challenge the dominant discourses of antagonism that articulate the “other” as an enemy of the self, and alter these enemy stereotypes by enabling alternative constructions of the knowledge of, and relations with, the “other”. Despite this potential, however, there is still limited scholarly attention on community media in relation to conflict transformation – a gap which this article aims to address, focusing in particular on community media’s maximalist-participatory logic and practices.

To do this, the article zooms in on a particular site conflict, that of Cyprus: an ethno-politically divided island in the Mediterranean, with deep-seated antagonisms between its Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities brought about by their violent past – which remain dominant in a variety of social fields, including education and the media. Focusing on this context, it locates community media content production as a participatory contact zone (Torre 2010) between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teenagers, to explore how these potentially maximalist-participatory processes, characterized by self-organization and self-representation, may support transformations of antagonism into agonism (Mouffe, 2000, 2005).

The article consists of two main parts. The first part provides an overview of the theoretical background of the study, starting with conflict transformation and agonism, and moving to the role of (participatory) contact zones in conflict transformation. It then elaborates the role of community media in conflict transformation, with a focus on their potentially maximalist-participatory dimensions. Following a brief discussion of the context of the study, namely the Cyprus conflict, and the research methods employed, the second part presents the findings of an ethnographic study of the research intervention, organized in the form of a series of community media training and workshops with 3 mixed groups totalling 24 Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teenagers, examining the conflict transformation functions of this participatory contact zone.

Conflict, Conflict Transformation and Participatory Contact Zones

Conflicts are part of human life and relations, but when they intensify and take antagonistic forms, they can easily escalate into violence. Discourses of

exclusionist collective identity, that represent the other as an enemy of the self, act as a major source of violent conflict escalation (Jabri 1996: 140), as they work to normalize and reinforce discrimination and dehumanization of the other, while legitimizing or victimizing the self. Circulated and reproduced within and through social structures, these antagonistic discourses can translate into dominant ways of perceiving and relating with the other which bring about social polarization and divisions, and in more extreme cases, wars, as we continue to witness across the world.

This focus on the discursive aspects of conflict does not attempt to override or minimize the importance of the material aspects of direct violence and war, but it underlines that violent escalations often start with a fragmentation in the discursive field (Keen 1986; Kolstø 2009), leading to a formation of antagonistically-positioned conflict parties, as also emphasized in different conflict escalation models (Glasl 1999; Ramsbotham et al. 2011). These fragmentations are then conveyed to everyday social practices through “discursive and structural continuities of social life and the social construction of identities”, and in turn are normalized, internalized and emulated by social actors, sustaining the logic of “war as a social continuity” (Jabri 1996: 90).

Conflict transformation (Galtung, 1969, 1996; 2009; Curle 1971, 1990; Dugan 1996; Lederach 1996, 2003) is an approach that promotes constructive, peaceful ways of dealing with conflicts, by turning attention to the conditions that create and sustain violence. In this framework, violence is not considered as limited to direct physical violence, but also involves structural and cultural/symbolic forms (Galtung 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Spivak 1988), such as institutionalized discrimination and exclusionary discourses, which carry the risk of turning into direct violence if remain unaddressed. Conflict transformation is thus “a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict” (Miall 2004: 4), including the structures and cultures that give rise to violence and social injustices (Austin et al. 2012: 23).

Rather than attempting to eliminate or contain a conflict, conflict transformation deals with transforming antagonistic conflicts into agonistic ones (Carpentier 2015: 150), which involves, on one hand, the de-escalation of direct and indirect violence, and on the other hand, making latent conflicts

overt, by enabling non-violent expressions of differences and disagreements, so that they can be addressed without violent escalations. This involves altering the discourses of the other as “an enemy to be destroyed” (or, in other cases, as a group that to be excluded from the democratic polity), and transforming it into that of an adversary: “one with whom we disagree vehemently but whose right to contest the terms of our political association we respect” (Mouffe 2000: 102). The aim is not to deny or eradicate the conflict, but to allow for democratic communication and confrontations between adversaries, as opposed to essentialist and violent ones that accompany antagonistic conflicts (Mouffe 2005: 30).

Moving along these lines in his discourse-theoretical analysis of antagonism and agonism, Carpentier (2017: 172-180) points to three distinguishing pillars of antagonistic discourses: homogenization of the self, which in turn consolidates self-identifications based on characteristics that distinguish the self from the other; the “need” to destroy such an “enemy-other”, and radical difference and distance from the enemy so constructed, which, in extreme forms, may lead to demonization and dehumanization of the other in such a way as to normalize and legitimate direct violence. Here, it should be noted that these pillars are not separate standalone categories, but are interconnected, reflecting relations with and between self, the other and society.

Given these three main pillars of antagonism, transformations of antagonism into agonism, then, refers to a shift in each of these three pillars. In the first pillar, this involves moving from a homogeneous identification of the self-articulated in a dichotomy with the enemy-other, to a pluralization (of the self) that recognizes and accommodates difference and diversity (of the self and the other). For Connolly (1995: xx), this means construction of a pluralized “we”, reflecting the “[numerous possibilities of intersection and collaboration between multiple, interdependent constituencies infused by a general ethos of critical responsiveness drawn from several sources”. While difference and conflict still exist in self-other relationships, these are no longer viewed to be absolute or overarching, giving space to internal diversity and pluralism (Carpentier 2017: 178).

In the second pillar, transformation into agonism entails moving from relationships characterized by discourses (and realities) of violence and destruction of the enemy, to non-violent relationships characterized by the absence of

violence in all forms – physical, structural or cultural/discursive (Carpentier 2017: 179). While conflicts may still exist, these relationships allow for democratic, non-violent confrontations between self and the adversary-other, where conflicts are given expression in a democratic framework (Mouffe 2005: 52). This kind of an “agonistic” dialogue can be viewed as a confrontational cooperation (Lynch et al. 1997), underscoring a critical-dialogic engagement with issues and their different interpretations, and a non-violent contest between those, providing space for disagreement and dissent.

In the third pillar, transformation into agonism involves a shift from a position of radical difference and distance in self-other relationships to forms of togetherness, which gives space for conflict (and its transformation) where different people can co-exist peacefully, and pluralistic alliances may be formed amongst them despite these differences, even when an overarching consensus does not exist (Carpentier 2017: 176-177). Coming together in this shared symbolic space, where adversaries legitimately exist (Mouffe 2005: 20), bridges the distance between self and other, and represents a form of conflictual togetherness, as opposed to the radically polarizing logic of antagonism (*ibidem*: 177). For Connolly (2005: 123), such togetherness requires nurturing of agonistic respect between various different constituencies, making room for difference and conflict, while respecting the freedom and agency of the other party. This is not the same as tolerance, which includes a sense of superiority, distancing self from the other (*ibidem*: 173). Instead, it represents a civic and pluralist approach towards the other based on recognition of shared humanity, and providing a presumptive space for different and sometimes conflicting identities to exist.

Interventions that aim at conflict transformation, as formulated in the aforementioned pillars, may involve many methods and tools, depending on a variety of factors, such as the context and intensity of the conflict. One of the possible tools is contact zones (Allport 1954; Pratt 1991), which bring together people and groups divided by (violent) conflict, with the aim to instigate a constructive change in self-other relationships, by reducing existing prejudices and negative stereotypes of the other. This way, contact zones work to alter the self-enemy divide, by providing spaces where conflict-ridden groups can meet and interact, obtain first-hand knowledge of, and learn about, the antagonized other, recognizing the other’s human side.

Some more recent works on contact zones (Torre 2005; Torre et al. 2008; Torre 2010, Torre et al. 2017; Askins and Pain 2011; Yükses & Carpentier 2018) move beyond this interactional focus, with an emphasis on participation as a way to acknowledge and reconfigure the differences and power asymmetries that come into play in contact zones. Here, following the political studies approach (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970; Servaes 1999; Carpentier 2016), participation is distinguished from access and interaction, which are viewed as its prerequisites, and understood as a redistribution of power among actors involved in decision-making processes, to the advantage of the less powerful. This power redistribution may range from minimalist to maximalist forms, with the latter striving for equal decision-making power for all actors involved in the participatory process.

In addition to enabling contact and interaction, participatory contact zones (Torre 2010) thus place their participants in an egalitarian setting of collective decision-making in order to redress the constructed inequalities between them. These participatory processes, providing for collaboration towards collectively determined goals (Torre 2010: v), support forms of collective empowerment which go beyond the self-enemy divide and offers significant potential for conflict transformation.

Community Media as a Participatory Contact Zone

Participatory contact zones may take many different forms, and community media participation is one of them, which this article particularly focuses on. As a participatory form of media “operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community” (Tabing 2002: 9), community media have a long history of use in conflict transformation, due to their close connections with the community, and their maximalist participatory-democratic characteristics, enabling self-organization and self-representation (Howley 2005, 2010; Downing et al. 2001; Carpentier 2011). These characteristics provide community media with the ability to foster inclusion, diversity and dialogue (Council of Europe 2009; Doudaki and Carpentier 2011; UNESCO 2015) and to facilitate non-violent expressions of differences and conflicts (Rodríguez 2011; Carpentier 2015) in a way that often challenges and combats the antagonistic and ethnocentric representations predominant

in mainstream media in conflict contexts (Bratić 2006; Bromley 2011; Kolsto 2009; Terzis and Vassiliadou 2008; Wolfsfeld 2004).

Though relatively under-studied, there are many cases and examples that evidence community media's constructive role in conflict transformation, particularly in conflict-prone or post-conflict societies, including a significant number of projects that have employed community media and participatory production practices as part of conflict transformation initiatives (Pavarala 2015). Some examples include; Radio Agatashya in Rwanda, Studio Ijambo (Wise Words) in Burundi, Radio Voice of Hope in Sudan, Open Broadcast Network (OBN) and Radio FERN (Free Exchange Radio Network) in Bosnia, Radio Blue Sky in Kosovo, Mars Radio and Cross-Radio in the former Yugoslavia, Koch FM and Pamoja FM in Kenya, AREDMAG in Magdalena-Medio Colombia (Bratić 2008: 495; Planšak and Volcic 2010; Rodríguez 2010, 2011; Gustafsson 2016; Casanova et al. 2019). All these initiatives share a participatory and reconciliatory character, with productions covering a variety of genres and formats including news programmes, dramas, documentaries, children's programmes, and campaigns (Bratić 2006: 2).

In the contexts of violent conflict and its aftermath, community media can support conflict transformation in a variety of ways. With their independence from the state and the market, and their critical distance from hegemonic discourses, they serve as alternative sources of information and producers of counter-hegemonic content in conflict-ridden settings, allowing different voices to be heard, which may help to bring to the public agenda other options, such as initiatives and possibilities for dialogue and reconciliation that are commonly marginalized in context of the prevalent war logic (Rodríguez 2000: 153; Bailey et al. 2007: 11).

With their maximalist-participatory logic, community media encourage dialogue, act as spaces for a meeting of social diversity and as platforms for launching the communities' own voices through their media productions, which all act as a strong basis for conflict transformation (Casanova et al. 2019: 1404). By involving conflict-ridden communities in the production process and allowing community-driven content production, community media participation provides these groups a space to work together, a platform for telling and sharing their own stories and expressing their feelings (Abah et al. 2009; Baú 2014; Harris 2008). In this way community media can connect isolated communities and offer a space for the humanization of people from opposite camps, helping the parties to listen to each other, understand each other's perspective on events,

and recognize their commonalities in terms of the loss, trauma and suffering experienced (Rodríguez 2000: 155; Baú 2015, 2018).

Unlike designing and communicating discourses about peace and reconciliation, which is often the case in conflict interventions, community media participation serves a performative function, giving people a means to express and perform identities, lifestyles, cultures and interactions that are not pervaded by a war-driven logic, enacting and normalizing non-violence in a variety of ways (Rodríguez 2011: 82). Instead of disseminating messages about how to solve a conflict in non-violent ways, community media themselves inter-mediate conflicts, by opening communication spaces between conflict-torn communities, in which “peace can be performed, felt, learned and appreciated” (Rodríguez 2000: 151).

The participatory contact zone of community media production thus becomes “a dynamic site for community building and reconciliation” (Harris 2008: 162-3; Baú 2014: 273). These participatory processes also foster empowerment of local populations in the processes of peace (re) construction by supporting people’s self-efficacy and strengthening of confidence in their own potential to exercise control over matters affecting them in the process of rebuilding their lives (Baú 2018: 63). With these functions, community media play a crucial role in healing and reconciliation processes both during and after violent conflict, acting as a platform for solidarity, mutual understanding and recognition (Gustafsson 2016: 124) and often creating bridges between local and national peace-building efforts (Baú 2015: 805, 2018: 61).

Here, it is worth remembering that building these kinds of participatory contact zones is a difficult endeavour, and may not be possible at all in some contexts, depending on the intensity of conflict, as well as certain cultural and social dynamics. These dynamics may also restrict the participatory aspects of such practices, for instance by stipulating and determining whose voices are to be included and what kind of stories can be told, even in community media (Baú 2018: 77-8). The participatory aspects of these initiatives should also not be romanticized, since they remain embedded in societal power relationships and thus may contain traces of power imbalances at the local level, which are reflected in productions as exclusions and discriminatory discourses towards other marginalized groups in society (i.e. immigrants, gay people) (Carpentier 2017: 361).

One should thus avoid an over-celebratory approach towards community media in terms of their role in conflict transformation, as they do not always constitute progressive, pluralistic or peaceful initiatives (Carpentier and Doudaki 2014: 16). Community media may equally take the form of repressive and reactionary initiatives that work to trigger antagonisms and fuel conflicts, and in certain settings become a cause of overt violence by spreading hate speech, essentialist discourses and dehumanizing images, as in the case of their use by alt-right, ultra-nationalist, fascist, racist or xenophobic movements that pursue exclusionist agendas (Atton 2006; Howley 2010; Figenschou and Ihlebæk 2018; Haller et al. 2019; Holt 2020). In the context of (violent) conflict, these forms of community media may be prevalent, and may even be supported and legitimized through the dominant culture of war.

Despite these limitations and challenges, however, community media participation offers significant potential in conflict transformation in terms of re-establishing conflict-damaged relationships and discourses and rebuilding peace (Baú 2018: 78). Forming a collaborative space, where collective self-representations are produced and expressed, these zones allow for alternative constructions of knowledge of the other by altering and reconfiguring ways of talking with and about the other, and of the conflict situation, which translates into changes in the perceptions of and relations with the other, as individuals and as a group. Through co-produced content, these alternative participatory representations and discourses are shared with the larger public, mediated and remediated not only in the field of media, but in a variety of social fields. All together, these processes, along with their outputs, help to alter prevalent dichotomous representations and discourses of self - versus the enemy-other, and challenge, reverse and make obsolete the ideological model of war (Carpentier 2011) that is dominant in conflict-ridden societies.

Context: Cyprus Conflict, Education, and Media

Cyprus is an island country in the Eastern Mediterranean which has long been a site of protracted conflict, also known as the Cyprus Problem. The

history of the Cyprus conflict can be traced back to the 1950s, when the armed struggle against British rule fuelled an outbreak of communal violence between the two largest communities inhabiting the island; Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, amid rising waves of nationalism. The federal state established in 1960 based on a power-sharing agreement was short-lived and the re-emergence of communal violence resulted in a geographical and ethnic division of the island in 1974, effected by the military intervention of Turkey following a coup d'état supported by the Greek junta. Since then, the two communities have been living on separate sides of the island, divided by a United Nations (UN) Buffer Zone: the Republic of Cyprus and the self-declared, internationally unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Cyprus came close to reunification with the “Annan Plan”, proposed by the UN in 2004, but the plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriot community in a referendum. The last UN-mediated peace talks started in 2015 but came to a halt, and the island remains divided to this today.

The Cypriot educational field has been very much part of the Cyprus conflict, with the school system on both sides traditionally used for nationalistic and ethnocentric propaganda that demonizes the other (Kanol 2010: 32), preparing young people for a segregated life by promoting antagonistic narratives on, and images of, the other community (Bryant 2004; Zembylas 2011). Cypriot mainstream media on both sides have also played an intrinsic role in this impasse, not only by reflecting the existing antagonisms between two communities, but also by shaping and reproducing them through “us versus them” portrayals of the two communities (Bailie and Azgın 2008; Christophorou et al. 2010; Voniati 2021), hindering the potential for conflict transformation.

While the material and discursive legacies of the violent conflict and division remain dominant in the lives of Cypriots, there have also been continuing efforts for conflict transformation, with the initiatives of a variety of social and civil society actors, organizations and collectives that include various projects and programmes that promote and enable contact, communication and cooperation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, including contact zones in the field of education. There also exist diverse movements and alliances for peace, within which community media organizations and initiatives have over time become an

important part (Carpentier 2015, 2017; Voniati et al. 2018). However, the prevalent antagonisms, grounded in a self-enemy divide, continue to limit these efforts.

The Research Intervention

Given the context summarized above, this article reports on the findings of a research intervention involving a series of community media training and content production workshops that brought together Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot teenagers, organized in collaboration with Cyprus Community Media Center (CCMC), and schools and youth organizations across Cyprus's north and south. In line with the maximalist-participatory logic of community media, the workshop design drew on critical-radical pedagogy (Freire 1985, 2005; Giroux 2011), emphasizing critical media literacy, learning by doing and radical empowerment. In this scope, a total of 12 training workshops were held, which were followed by 2-day production workshops that brought together 3 mixed-community production groups to collectively produce community media content, with 8 participants in each group, totalling 24 participants of ages between 13 and 18. During these workshops each production group produced 2 different multimedia (video/radio/text) outputs on collectively decided topics, including video-interviews on Recycling and Environmental Awareness and the United Nation's role in Cyprus, and live radio podcasts, which covered a variety of topics from student life to bullying at school, from common words in Greek and Turkish to public opinion on the LGBT community in the two sides of Cyprus.

These (potentially) maximalist processes were examined through an ethnography of the research intervention, where data was collected through participant observations (participant-as-observer) (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011), which were supported by the analysis of the 6 multimedia outputs produced at the workshops, and in-depth interviews with 18 workshop participants: all studied using the qualitative analysis method (Silverman 2011). Adequate support was provided for the analysis, with the generation of sensitizing concepts, and further development of the theoretical framework through a series of iterations between theory and analysis. To ensure the confidentiality of

research participants in reporting the findings, all names were anonymized using pseudonyms. For the workshop participants, who were under the age of 18, the participant's informed consents were accompanied by the permission forms signed and delivered by their parents, agreeing to the recording, transcription and use of the data content.

Participatory Contact Zone of Community Media and Conflict Transformation

The findings of analysis highlighted three main forms of transformations enabled through the participatory contact zone of community media production: at personal, interpersonal and intergroup levels, corresponding to the three pillars of agonism: pluralization of the self, non-violent relationships and conflictual togetherness (Carpentier 2017), which were realized to varying degrees, depending on a set of supporting and limiting factors.

Transformations at the Personal Level

Pluralization (of the self), which is considered as the first pillar of an agonistic approach to conflict transformation, was manifested to different degrees across the different workshop groups and in different phases of content production processes, extending from an agonistic awareness of difference and diversity, to a pluralization of self-identifications and a confrontation with, and resistance against, a homogeneous view of the self, identities and conflicts.

Agonistic Awareness

During the workshops, agonistic awareness, referring to an awareness of difference and diversity, was seen to develop as the teenagers started interacting with those from the other community, of which many had no direct knowledge other than dominant enemy stereotypes. This continued throughout the content production processes, where the teenagers, encountering a multiplicity of different ideas, perspectives and worlds during the interactions and discussions with each other, with the facilitators and with external actors (such

as interviewees and guests), started approaching these differences as manifestations of diversity. The reflections of one teenager, on the group discussion about a short video screening, well describes this process:

MELİKE: I personally was thinking of it [the video] as a... as a smart way to [get people to] start to recycle [...] that was what I was seeing. Other people were just thinking of how media can control emotions and can make you feel empathy to an object, such as a [plastic] bag [...] Different opinions... Which really, actually stayed in my head for a while [...] I was like ‘how can this be? My thought was so clear to me’. I was kind of shocked that others didn’t think the same. But it makes sense that not everyone would think the same. (Interview, June 2017).

During the topic discussions and related participatory co-decision-making processes, this awareness intensified, as teenagers found the chance to “listen to the different views and perspectives” that people had (Andri, Interview, July 2017) and discuss and link these views. This level of pluralization was also reflected in the teenagers’ choices on how to approach their collectively decided topic in the radio and video productions, and at times was used as a tool to bring diversity into the live radio podcasts, where teenagers shared their perspectives on differences between public and private schools or between the two sides of Cyprus, in relation to a variety of topics, from the recycling habits to the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community.

Pluralized Self-identifications

A second and related development was the diversifications observed in the teenagers’ self-identifications, as they came to recognize the multiplicity of possible self-identifications that went beyond their ethnic/communal identities (as a Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot).

When the topic was gender and gender roles, the teenagers were involved in the discussions mainly as a female or male, and as a member of youth. When the topic was the situation of the refugees in Cyprus, they approached and discussed the issue as a Cypriot citizen, and sometimes as a rights defender (Field Notes, December 2016-January 2017). While examining discrimination against gay people at school in their productions, they spoke as students, and some as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

While inquiring into the recycling habits in the two sides of Cyprus, they approached the subject (again) as citizens, and sometimes as environment activists (Video, Group 2, April 2017).

The different and interchangeable roles assumed by the teenagers throughout the participatory content production process, as amateurs, as media makers, as teammates, researchers, interviewers, co-leaders and co-owners of the process, also facilitated, even temporarily, such a pluralization of self-identifications. During these self-organized processes, the teenagers had to frequently change hats, being responsible for, and taking different roles in, the different phases of the production process – as a cameraperson, a speaker on the radio, a video editor, and so on – which aided the multiplication of self-identifications in a way that supported a move beyond the divisions brought by ethnic/communal identities.

Agonistic Confrontation

A third manifestation of pluralization (of the self) was agonistic confrontation, referring to an active confrontation with, and resistance against, homogenization – of the self, identities and conflicts. During the training sessions, discussions involved talks about various forms of homogenization, such as the standardization of sexual identity and gender roles, and prejudices against marginalized populations, as considered to be reinforced by the news media. Discussions on community media's pluralistic stance against one-sided or dichotomous perspectives, positions and lifestyles, and related examples and role-plays facilitated this process and helped teenagers to better recognize, question and think outside of such homogeneous representations (Field Notes, December 2016-February 2017).

In the production workshops, agonistic confrontation manifested itself both during content development – in the teenagers' decisions on the topics of production – and in the resulting multimedia outputs. One major concern shared by the teenagers in all groups was that despite the many diverse problems that they have as young people, their lives were largely dominated by the Cyprus problem, bringing about another form of homogenization. In their discussions and productions, the teenagers therefore referred to the diverse problems they faced in their lives. As described by two teenagers:

MELİKE: I wanted to see some different things other than the Cyprus problem because it's all what is talked about in Cyprus [...] But I could see a lot more problems in Cyprus that needed to be spoken about apart from the Cyprus problem [...] So, when they [other teenagers] spoke about [the] environment [...] I was like 'I kind of want to go there because it's really important, it's something that's global.... Cyprus problem is only for Cyprus. (Interview, June 2017).

ANDREA: At the end, we all wanted to do the environment topic because it is a social problem. It's something that everyone ha[s] something to say [about]. (Interview, June 2017)

When talking about agonistic confrontation, it may be worth emphasizing that these were non-violent confrontations, based on empathy and respect. They were directed towards highlighting and representing the diversity of issues and perspectives, understanding different points of view, and diversifying, or adding to, existing ones instead of strongly defending own opinions, attacking, rejecting or invalidating other points of view, or promoting, or insisting on the discussion of, one issue over another.

Yet there were also certain considerations that sometimes limited these confrontations, such as conflict sensitivity. If we return to the example of choosing environment (recycling) over the Cyprus problem as the topic of production, one (other) reason for this decision was the tendency of the teenagers to abstain from a controversial topic in their productions, which might “raise some eyebrows” (Field Notes, March 18, 2017).

Transformations at the Interpersonal Level

The second level of transformations into agonism was in the pillar of non-violent relationships: on one hand emphasizing an absence of violence in all forms in interactions, and on the other hand enabling non-violent expression of conflicts, instead of the avoidance or suppression of those. During the workshops, non-violent relations between the teenagers were materialized to different degrees, ranging from a mere absence of violence, to an agonistic dialogue on topics of shared interest or concern, and various forms of collaboration initiated in the teamwork setting.

Absence of Violence

Perhaps needless to say, but still worthy of note, no violent behaviour or speech were observed among participants during the workshops. This absence of violence was discernable in the interactions between teenagers during the various discussions held, that occasionally took heated forms, as well as in the non-violent handling of the manifold differences and conflicts encountered throughout the collective decision-making processes. In all groups, conflicts that arose during these processes were handled in a “calm” and “civilized” manner (Andri, Interview, July 2017), by allowing for non-violent expressions of differences, promoting democratic communication (i.e. equal speech, equal treatment of ideas), and making use of self-introduced decision-making tools.

ANDRI: There were more disagreements on the actual (radio) show [...] Some people disagreed with this and some people agreed with that [...] but it wasn't like heated disagreements, it was more like 'oh, this person has a different opinion, we should listen to him, so we know like all the different opinions or what they believe'... (Interview, July 2017).

Sometimes, the decision-making tools were in the form of simple gestures:

EMRAH: If there were two people speaking at the same time, we kind of just compromised through eye contact. And after the other person spoke, I would be able to speak as well, so there was no real feeling of being rushed or not being able to say what you want. (Interview, July 2017)

In all the workshop groups, non-violence was also among the topics of discussion that sometimes came up in the live radio productions, where teenagers talked about, and against, various forms of symbolic violence they encountered in their daily lives, from bullying at school to discrimination against gay people at school and in everyday lives (Field Notes, January-April 2017).

Agonistic Dialogue

With the gradual intensification of interactions during the co-production processes, non-violent relations often moved to a level of agonistic dialogue. Starting from topic discussions, casual interactions gave way to critical exchanges and contestations on topics of shared interest or concern

(Field Notes, March-April, 2017). These interactions were characterized by free self-expression, active listening and reflexivity, enabling teenagers to freely discuss and support their ideas, even against opposition, while at the same time encouraging them to get to know each other better, and to learn from each other.

EMRAH: It's always great to be able to say what you believe and also hear what someone else believes. It may be something you never even thought of or heard in your life, the person that you're talking to may just change your opinion drastically. (Interview, July 2017)

These kinds of authentic critical exchange were also part of some multimedia outputs. One example was the radio podcast, where teenagers, while discussing their views on sexual identity, questioned the tendency of adults to view the choices they make as a means for getting more attention. At other times, they took the form of challenging authority, as in the case of the video production on the role of the UN, where the reasons for their presence in Cyprus were critically questioned through interviews which brought together the different perspectives of UN officers, NGO representatives, and members of the general public on this topic (Video, Group 3, April 29, 2017).

Particularly during the radio podcasts, these dialogues sometimes involved a critique of society and institutions:

KATIA:..the fact that we're still learning about religion like the priest telling us that being gay, being homosexual is bad...

PELİN:..and is a sickness of the mind...

KATRIN:..that puts, it puts us 500 years backwards. Supposedly we were supposed to be 500 years forward.

YIANNIS:..Do you think there is any logical explanation to why the church and religious people have animosity towards LGBT[Q+] community?

ELENA: They're afraid of change...

Teamwork

A third manifestation of non-violent relations was the teamwork initiated between the teenagers during content production. In fact, the possibility of engaging in teamwork with teenagers from the other community was one of the

factors that encouraged (at least some of) the teenagers to join the workshops. As noted by one Greek Cypriot participant, the video production process was an opportunity to “meet Turkish Cypriot teens, to see how they see things, to exchange opinions, to see how well we cooperate together for a specific task” (Dinos, Interview, June 2017).

In addition to the interactive and collaborative aspects of teamwork, the team tasks and roles were collectively decided by the teenagers, and such decisions were made based on willingness, personal interests and experience, instead of ethnicity or group membership. As explained by one teenager, while describing how they built the production teams:

YIANNIS: We all discussed what we each wanted to do – say, who wants to take the interviews, write the questions for the interviews, take the B-roll [supplemental video footage], take the extra audio, talk about the subject [...] it is sort of just happened, it was natural. (Interview, July 2017).

While producing the outputs, the intensity of teamwork increased further:

LOIZOS: I was with Suna in the video editing and Dinos, Melike and Maria filmed the intro and then found statistics on the internet about recycling [...] We discussed, for example, we said that there would be a Turkish-speaker being interviewed, then Greek, then Turkish, then Greek, and so on. (Interview, June 2017)

Disagreements were common during the teamwork, yet were handled in non-violent ways, combining different decision-making tools, improvised according to the requirements of the task, and of the interaction itself. As described by one teenager, handling these disagreements required listening to, and respect for, the other’s opinion, and at times making mutual compromises to enable a balance between each other’s aspirations:

DINOS: We found the different data about recycling in the north and in the south, but we disagreed about what should we put. We wrote all our information on a whiteboard, and then erased things that I didn’t want to keep, or that Melike thought was too much [...] So, I wrote three sentences of information, we cut it into one, then put Melike’s information together with mine [...] Even if I wanted some information in, I understood that we have to stand back a little bit, let the other choose this time and next time you will choose... That’s how it worked. (Interview, June 2017).

Transformations at the Intergroup Level

The third level of transformations into agonism was in the pillar of conflictual togetherness. At the intergroup level, the transformations identified in this pillar ranged from a respect for difference, to new collective identifications, which diversified and expanded the categorizations of “we” beyond ethnic identities – as teenagers, students, media makers, or citizens of Cyprus – and to alliances for advocacy that promoted respect, not only for the members of the other community but also for the disadvantaged groups in both communities, and for the environment.

Agonistic Respect

During the workshops, the development of agonistic respect – for difference and diversity – was particularly manifest in the topic selection phase, where teenagers came across those from the other community, who were supposed to be radically different from them (Maria, Interview, June 2017), discussing ideas and perspectives very different from theirs, trying to see their connections and differences and arrive at a collective decision.

Despite the complexity and conflicts brought about by these processes, they in turn helped teenagers to develop and perform agonistic respect in their interactions, by learning to “respect difference”, “how to listen to others’ opinions”, and to “work together with people who have different opinions” from theirs, while respecting their personal thoughts and decisions (Andri, Interview, July 2017). Self-introduced subjects (by teenagers) during the topic discussions, such as bullying, racism and inequality, and their relationship to the Cyprus problem, also allowed for intensive exchanges between teenagers on the issues of difference, and treatment towards difference, further supporting agonistic respect (Field Notes, January-April, 2017).

This was also translated into the multimedia outputs, in which all workshop groups had a specific emphasis on being respectful towards people who are different, especially towards marginalized people and communities, on raising awareness on these issues at school and, and in the case of the recycling video, on extending the scope of this respect to include the environment (Field Notes, January-April, 2017).

New collective identifications

These forms of agonistic respect in turn activated a critical reconsideration and re-articulation of communal identifications, with a respect for, and appreciation of, their diversity, and created a potential for a discovery of various shared identifications with those from the other community.

This helped teenagers to recognize their pluralist-collective identifications, as teenagers, students, youth, Cypriots, and active (global) citizens – in addition to, and moving beyond, their original group identifications as Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot, discovering their commonalities, and developing shared identifications.

ANDREA: We are all 17-18 years old teenagers. I didn't find many differences between us [...] As I mentioned before, we have the same habits, the same way of thinking in some topics. (Interview, June 2017)

LOIZOS: For example, Melike had her IGCSE [International General Certificate of Secondary Education] exams, we had our exams. They go to cafes in the north, we go to cafes in the south, so our daily routine wasn't so different at all... (Interview, June 2017)

Another example of these new collective identifications was voiced in the recycling video produced by one of the workshop groups, which started as, "Due to problems in the environmental pollution on both sides of Cyprus we, as Cypriot teenagers, decided to come together and research how aware people are on this topic" (Recycling Video, Group 2, March 19, 2017) underlining teenagers' emphasis on their collective identity as "Cypriots".

Alliances

A more intensive form of conflictual togetherness was identified in the formation of alliances between the teenagers, based on a recognition of the plurality of the self, of others, and through a discovery of shared grounds. As teenagers got to know each other better and moved from casual to more intensive forms of interaction by expressing their opinions, listening to others and identifying their shared concerns, interests and problems, self-organized alliances naturally formed to address the collectively-selected topic of productions. In the multimedia outputs produced, this process was translated

into discourses of togetherness based on new collective identifications, and advocacy for non-privileged groups in both communities. In the discussions on institutionalized discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, advocacy against marginalization and exclusion was particularly manifest (Radio Podcast, Group 3, April 29, 2017).

The video production questioning the role of the UN in Cyprus was another example of these alliances. The video not only put the UN's role in Cyprus under the spotlight, reflecting the teenagers' towards with the status quo, but also covered a discussion of forms of possible action that can be undertaken to improve the existing situation – questioning how the two communities can exist together without a need for the UN, which additional actions the UN may take to facilitate this, and what the role of youth could be in this process (Video, Group 3, April 29, 2017).

Agonistic Transformations: Supporting and Limiting Factors

Still, not everything was straightforward. During the workshops, some withdrawals occurred, and there were certain forms of group segregation and self - exclusion, though these could be addressed to a large extent through facilitation and the interactive and participatory dimensions of community media production.

The level or intensity of the interactions, together with the factors impacting on the level of interactions between the workshops' bi-communal group of participants was a key element that supported (or limited) agonistic intensities in all the three pillars, in particular that of non-violent relations. This further supported and bridged the transformations at personal and intergroup levels, by facilitating pluralization of the self and conflictual togetherness. Among other factors, familiarity, or lack thereof, was an important element that supported or limited interactions. Accordingly, initial unfamiliarity between the teenagers often limited interaction, giving rise to forms of social anxiety, including contact anxiety and a negative form of conflict sensitivity, and at times caused group segregation or self-exclusion. As familiarity increased gradually during the time spent together, with teenagers getting to know each other, so did the intensity of interactions.

Overall, the collaborative environment, maximalist-participatory setting, and the critical pedagogical approach of community media content production processes, as well as the embodied knowledge gathered throughout, were found to support these transformations by fostering critical thinking, free self-expression and collaborative action on shared grounds. These processes opened up free, inclusive and dialogic communication between the participants, where differences were welcomed and given voice, and the various disagreements that arose were handled in non-violent ways. This encouraged and generated critical exchanges and dialogues between diverse and often-times contrasting insights and experiences, supporting empathy, mutual understanding and respect between the otherwise conflict-divided youth.

Conclusions

Given these findings, one general conclusion is that participation matters for conflict transformation. Contact zones function better, and better serve their conflict transformation aims if they involve a participatory dimension.

Another main conclusion that follows is: participation in and with community media matters. As a participatory contact zone, community media production processes contribute to conflict transformation in some distinctive ways – as an enabling environment, as a maximalist participatory process and as a pedagogical tool, which made possible and supported more intensive forms of transformations in the context of this study.

Accordingly, the participatory contact zone of community media production encouraged and equipped the conflict-divided youth to intervene in their social environments through critical, creative and self-reflexive action on shared interests and concerns, and activated forms of collective empowerment that supported a shift beyond the self-enemy divide, by altering and transforming the way of thinking of, relating to, as well as talking to, with and about, the members of the other community, which enabled agonistic constructions of the knowledge and representations of the “other”, as well as the “self”.

Though the research had its own limits, it could be considered as a modest contribution to an understanding of how community media practices, with

their participatory-democratic dimensions, do support conflict transformation, along with the factors that enhance and limit this function, in such a way as to inform further research and conflict transformation initiatives in Cyprus and elsewhere.

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