



**PUTTING A
NON-ESSENTIALIST
ONTOLOGY TO WORK
A RESPONSE TO
PETER DAHLGREN'S REVIEW OF
*THE DISCURSIVE-MATERIAL KNOT:
CYPRUS IN CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY
MEDIA PARTICIPATION***

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**CITATION: CONJUNCTIONS: TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION, VOL. 7., NO. 1, 2020
DOI: [HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG./10.7146/TJCP.V7I1.119816](http://dx.doi.org/10.7146/TJCP.V7I1.119816)**

It may hardly come as a surprise that it was a pleasure to read Peter Dahlgren's review of *The discursive-material knot: Cyprus in conflict and community media participation* (or short: DMK). His analysis was kind, perceptive, thorough, extensive and challenging. His engagement with the DMK text also consisted of four questions, with an invitation to respond to them. These questions were not so much critiques, but more like invitations to clarify, and – more importantly – to expand into a few territories that were insufficiently addressed in the DMK book. Even with a book of 471 pages, space was lacking, and I happily and gratefully accept Peter's invitation to add a few more pages to the DMK book.

But in order to avoid making this response a too solipsistic enterprise, only pleasing Peter (hopefully) and myself, I consider it wise to – wherever necessary – briefly summarise and position the DMK book, creating a foundation for my responses, and simultaneously moving beyond the provision of mere answers, hopefully thus also opening some new doors. Peter raised different issues, but still focused very much on the first platform of the book. This is why I will start with explaining the platform structure of the book and the strategy that I used to write it. This will then allow me to focus on the first platform a bit more, explaining the basics of the DMK, the supporting role of the structure/agency dimension, and how I see the difference between the concepts of ideology and discourse. This is also a good opportunity to think through the opportunities for (hegemonic) discourse critique a bit more. In the next part, I can then take a step back, and discuss the issues related to high theory, ontology and metaphysics. Finally, I will return to the DMK book's case study and the interdependence of the different platforms, arguing that empirical research can also feed into non-essentialist ontological reflections, while these reflections also provide support for the research itself.

Platforms and academic writing

The DMK book uses a structure and writing strategy inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) book *A Thousand Plateaus*, albeit in a more modest form, with only three platforms. But the idea is the same: Platforms are independent entry points, allowing the reader to start reading at different places, without getting too lost. Still, the platforms are interdependent, as they have been jointly created through a series of iterations, and they build upon each other. In this sense, the DMK book is one of the more modest experiments to communicate academic knowledge in ways that move away from the academic writing conventions in the Social Sciences and Humanities, as the deployment of the non-written academic text is one of my areas of interest. Some of my other, more experimental, projects are inspired by arts-based research, using installation art, photography, exhibitions and sound art (see Carpentier, 2020). For instance, one experiment consisted of a translation of an academic article on media democratization – interestingly enough, co-authored by Peter Dahlgren and Francesca Pasquali (2013) – into a sound art work called *Audionces*, produced together with Yiannis Christidis (2017a).¹ While some of these experiments want to disrupt the hegemony of the academic written text, other experiments – with the DMK book as an example – want to disrupt the equally rigid conventions of the academic written text, which can sometimes function too much like straightjackets and are also in dire need of some deconstruction.

And this brings me to Peter's first question, where he queried whether the book could not have been turned into two books (or into even more books, I could add). Obviously, this option had been considered, also because it would have been easier to market the book – a thought which must have crossed the minds of at least some people working at the publishing company – but the decision to split the platforms into several books would have made the format experiment, with the separate but interacting platforms, impossible. It would also have segregated the different academic communities that were targeted. I believe that the more theoretically-oriented discourse theory community would benefit from the confrontation with research that is still very much embedded in the Communication and Media Studies field (moving away from a focus on institutionalised politics), and that the Communication and Media Studies community could use a reminder that high theory matters and can be useful to support empirical research.

On the knot

The DMK book has three platforms, and it makes sense to explain, at this stage, the book's first platform a bit more. This platform develops a theory of entanglement – or knottedness – by combining discourse theory and new materialism. Even if discourse theory is a highly relevant theoretical field (I would say), and even if, within discourse theory, there is the clear acknowledgement that the material matters, discourse theory does not move too far beyond this acknowledgement, and gets a bit stuck in the idea that the discursive provides structures of meaning to the material – an idea which I share. But discourse theory does not provide much space for the idea that the material can actually 'talk back' – or 'act back' is probably better here – and that it can itself impact on the discursive through its own materiality. To use death as an example: Death also *invites* us, through its material pervasiveness, to develop the discourses that then allow us to socially construct it.² These discourses are crucial and indispensable to think, give meaning to, and cope with death, but we cannot ignore the materiality of the invitation either. Of course, it is not a matter of 'discovering' the 'original position', the starting point of the death knot: There is a dynamic, incessant and contingent interaction between the discursive and material, without one having priority over the other. But in order to theorise this interaction, discourse theory in itself does not offer sufficient tools to do justice to the role of the material. That is why some of the work done in new materialism has proven to be very helpful: It provides some of the theoretical concepts and frameworks that allow validating the dislocatory and invitational role of the material, without discrediting the role of the discursive (even if new materialism has the same tendency as discourse theory, that is to pay tribute to the importance of the 'other' component, without developing this 'other' component, and without developing a theory on their interaction).

In order to narrate the nature of the relationship between the material and the discursive, I used a second dimension for support, namely the structure and agency dimension. Peter's second question in his review refers to this support dimension. Here, Peter noticed the strong presence of Giddens in this part, and expresses his curiosity why Giddens (and not, say, Bourdieu) features here so prominently (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 7). What the DMK actually tries to do is to move away from the theorization of a bidirectional relationship between structure and agency. Instead, the DMK shows how structure and agency interact at discursive and material levels, and how the discursive and the material are entangled through their structuring and agentic workings. For instance, discourses provide and invest the material with meaning and thus structure them, while materials also, through their agency, have the capacity to dislocate discourses and to invite discourses to become articulated with them. Humans can, again through their agency, identify with discourses but these discourses also structure their subject positions and subjectivities, even if the subject remains overdetermined. Moreover, humans can produce and use materials, while at the same time, these materials structure (and in some cases disrupt and destroy) humans. Even if it was not my explicit intention to create a multidirectional version of structuration theory, the interlocking dimensions of discursive/material and structure/agency, with their dynamic movements, do exactly that. However relevant authors such as Bourdieu are, building on – and disagreeing with – Giddens's work has always proven helpful and fruitful for me.

Ideology (critique) and hegemonic discourse (critique)

Peter's third question deals with the distinction between ideology and discourse, so I will have to move a bit closer to the discursive component of the DMK. The specificity of the definition of discourse in discourse theory – which uses a macro-textual and macro-contextual approach to discourse (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 16–17) – is of vital importance for understanding both discourse theory, and the DMK. In discourse theory, discourse is not used as a synonym to language; discourse is defined as a framework of intelligibility, which means – put in simple terms – that discourse is not language; it is what is behind language and what is condensed in language. This definition of discourse places it close to representation, mediation and ideology, which is why Peter, I assume, formulates this third question: "Where does this leave the tradition of ideology critique?" (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 7). Peter quotes from the DMK book, where I write that discourse is "a concept related to (but not synonymous with) ideology" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 5), but he rightfully points out that this "discussion is very brief, and we never get a full treatment of this theme" (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 7).

Moreover, Peter is kind to refer to – already in his question – Laclau's (2006) position on this matter, or at least in the way that we can find it in his 'Ideology and post-Marxism' essay. This essay is definitely worth having a look at, also in regard to

how the discussion about ideology is placed in the essay, at the very end, almost as an appendix. On this one page, Laclau argues that in Marxist theory ideology is a deeply problematic concept, but – with a ring of generosity to it – adds that “We are however reluctant to entirely abandon the notion of ideology. I think it can be maintained if its meaning is given, however, a particular twist” (Laclau, 2006, p. 114). This twist consists of defining ideology as “a gigantic as if” (Laclau, 2006, p. 114 – emphasis in original), or, in other words, by defining it as “those discursive forms that construct a horizon of all possible representations within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is ‘sayable’” (Laclau, 2006, p. 114). First of all, I do not disagree with Laclau’s critique on the traditional Marxist use of the ideology concept: Its equation of ideology with false consciousness, and ideology’s later re-signification, using what I would like to call a blanket approach – thinking about dominant ideology as something that covers us, as a suffocating blanket – in order to understand ‘the social formation’, have produced theorizations that turned out not to be very useful. It led a number of key authors in discourse theory (in particular Foucault and Laclau) to disuse the concept altogether. It also resulted, in a way, in the replacement of ideology by the notion of discourse, with the discourse concept being cleansed from ideology’s necessarily negative nature.

At the same time, I do not want to step too much in Laclau’s footsteps here, and get too stuck in the traditional Marxist interpretations of ideology, as I do appreciate what has been done with the ideology concept by Cultural Studies (still “within shouting distance of Marxism” – Hall, 1992, p. 280) and by the more recent developments in the field of ideology study (e.g., Freeden’s (1996) morphological approach to ideology – see also Laycock, 2019). I tend to see ideology, as Peter picked up in his review, as a concept that is related to discourse, and that shares discourse’s macro-textual and macro-contextual definitional level (at least if we define the discourse concept in the way that it is used in discourse theory). Ideology and discourse simply have different historical conceptual trajectories, and are deployed in different academic traditions and fields, which give them slightly different loads. For instance, some (e.g., Freeden, 1996, p. 3) would argue that “political ideology” is tautological, which produces a fairly narrow definition of ideology, as is evidenced by the main structure of Freeden’s (1996) book, which focusses on liberalism, conservatism and socialism, complemented by feminism and green ideology. At the same time, there is something that can be labelled conceptual inertia, to describe a situation where the definitions from the past continue to influence the more contemporary definitions, frustrating the attempts to re-signify these (‘old’ versions of the) concepts. Like palimpsests, concepts still resonate the ‘old’ ways of thinking, which, for me, is the reason why I prefer to use discourse, and why I shy a bit away from using the ideology concept,³ because, these days, the discourse concept does what needs to be done for me.

But, as these discussions about these conceptual similarities and differences are fruitful, – where, as mentioned before, the latter originate more out of the different intellectual trajectories and their disciplinary situatedness – I think there is still a need to look at the more recent developments in ideology studies, to see what we can learn from these developments, in a respectful dialogue that allows us to improve our theoretical, analytical and critical capacities, without the desire of incorporating or collapsing one theoretical field into the other. This was, for instance, one of the reasons why Freeden was invited as one of the keynote speakers at the *Discourse Theory: Ways Forward* conference in February 2019, allowing him to provide a semi-outside reflection on the present state of discourse theory. In his contribution to the special journal issue coming out of this conference, which is still in preparation, the following critique can be read, which – I am sure – is meant to work both ways, and has to be understood as an invitation for more curiosity and collaboration: “a degree of self-contained introspection that – to the general detriment of scholarship in the field – hampers the formation of conceptual links with neighbouring specializations” (Freeden, in preparation).

What is also important in Peter’s question, though, is the notion of critique (when he is referring to the field of ideology critique). Throwing the (critical) baby out with the bathwater, when emptying the (Marxist) tub – if the reader can forgive me the slight overuse of this wonderful idiom – is still something to be avoided. Peter and I share a deep commitment to critique, but have always been careful not to blindly conflate the analytical and the normative. When we turn to ideology *critique* – or to ‘discourse critique’, as one could call it – then there is a need to specify what is being critiqued, and on what normative basis this critique is grounded. Simply critiquing ideology because it is ideology, or critiquing dominant ideology because it is dominant, would catapult us back into the Marxist theorizations of ideology, which I would consider problematic. This implies that specification is very much needed.

My starting point here is the discourse-theoretical (version of the) notion of hegemony, which is used to describe those discourses that have become all-encompassing, taken-for-granted, normalized and eventually sedimented. But here too, care

must be taken not to replicate the fallacy of the Marxist approach to ideology, which would result in a critique on hegemony simply because it is hegemonic and thus necessarily negative (or evil). One example that illustrates the awareness of this potential danger, and the desire to prevent hegemony becoming defined as necessarily normatively problematic, is Mouffe's defence of the hegemony of democracy (e.g., in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 967). But then the question becomes: When is a particular hegemony, or even a particular discourse with hegemonic ambitions, problematic? And when not? In order to evaluate the normatively problematic nature of particular hegemonies, normative frameworks⁴ need to be mobilized in order to be able to problematize. These frameworks are situated, I would like to argue, at two different levels: The level of the ethics of the hegemonic discourse, and the level of the ethics of the hegemonization of discourse. Together, they produce five normative questions that we can ask about a hegemonic discourse (or about a discourse with hegemonic ambitions).

The first level we need to look at is the ethics of the hegemonic discourse in itself. Of course, hegemonic discourses – or discourses aiming to become hegemonic – remain particular, and thus exclude other particular ideas and groups that identify with these ideas (or that are identified with/by them). The **first normative question** here then relates to the degree of acceptability and legitimacy of this exclusion, and the (proportionality of the) cost of this exclusion. At the same time, there is also the normative question about what is included, and what a particular hegemonic discourse articulates. This brings us to the **second normative question**, which is how a particular hegemonic discourse is articulated – or articulable – with the touchstones that I would propose, namely democratic culture and peace. For instance, I would find it hard to accept a hegemony of militarism, simply because this discourse is opposite to the logics of democratic culture and peace.

The second level we need to look at, to ground a discourse critique, is the ethics of the hegemonization of the discourse. In other words, how is a discursive project hegemonized, and how does it maintain its hegemony? How does it fight its fight for hegemony? Again – and this is the **third normative question** – we can look at the relation of the discourse with its outside, and ask whether hegemony is achieved/maintained through antagonist or agonist logics? If the discursive contenders (and those groups who identify with it, or, are identified by it) are defined through an enemy logic, we would again encounter a deeply problematic situation. In contrast, an agonistic struggle between adversaries, within a democratic frame, would be arguably normatively acceptable. Finally, the **fourth normative question** is internal, and raises the normative question about how the hegemonic objective and its strategies are translated into the discourse itself? Or, in brief, how ethical is the articulatory strategy? Is the utopia – that is often on offer – guaranteed, or is its impossible nature transparently articulated in the discourse as well? What is downplayed and cloaked when it should be made apparent? Some discourses are articulated in ways that are reminiscent of the enthymeme, or, in other words, they have a trojan horse built into them. One example is populism, which positions the people against the old elite, no longer deemed capable of representing the people. But populist discourse often problematically cloaks one of its key articulations, namely the idea that the new elite will offer a true and full representation of the people.

The **fifth normative question** overlaps with the different dimensions, bridging both the external/internal and state/process dimensions. This question is, more in particular, about the degree of respect for the subjectivities of those who are, and the rights of what is, discursified. When a discourse offers an identificatory opportunity, what are the normative consequences of that identification in relation to the other assemblages that a subject is (or will become) articulated in? If, for instance, a capitalist discourse offers the subject position of the consumer to people, how will the embrace of the consumer subject position affect their human subjectivity, knowing that they are also integrated in other assemblages, with their own discourses. What will happen to those that decline or resist the offer? But we could also use this fifth normative question to problematize discourses that, for instance, harm the rights of animals, or even the planet.

Table 1 Critiquing hegemonies: The five questions

	External	Internal
The ethics of the hegemonic discourse	Degree of acceptability and legitimacy of this exclusion (1)	Articulation with the touchstones of democratic culture and peace (2)
The ethics of the hegemonization of the discourse	Antagonist or agonist logics (3)	Translation of hegemonic objective and its strategies into the discourse itself (4)
	Respecting subjectivities & rights of those discursified (5)	

Let me use an example here, namely the struggle over participatory intensities, and the maximalist participatory discourse that we can, for instance, find in community media organizations (see Carpentier, 2011, 2016, 2017). This discourse has the decentralization of power relations as its explicit objective, aiming to strengthen the power positions of non-privileged actors. This inclusionary discourse is deeply supportive of the strengthening of democratic culture (Q2), but also careful in avoiding new exclusions by reconfiguring expert, owner and leader identities (or, subject positions, in the discourse-theoretical language), and preventing their annihilation through populist versions of this maximalist participatory discourse (Q1). Quite often we do find exclusions limited to non-democratic and authoritarian voices, a process that I consider acceptable and legitimate because of the discourse’s inclusionary objective (Q1). We can also see that the political struggle that this maximalist participatory discourse is engaged in is from a deeply agonistic position (Q3), which aims to respect the everyday experiences of all those involved (Q5). Of course, the maximalist participatory discourse does incorporate a particular utopia, namely that of fully balanced power relations – or full participation, as Pateman (1970) would have it – but the unreachability of this utopia, rendering it a fantasy that drives the efforts towards its eventually impossible realization, is frequently and explicitly articulated in maximalist participatory discourse (Q4).

About high theory and metaphysics

All this might still sound horribly theoretical, and I can reassure the reader: It is. My point, though, is that discourse theory, new materialism and their harmonization is “useful theory” – to quote from Peter’s review (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 5) – and that it is necessary theory. Even if I would still like to defend the development of theory that is not directly (or not even remotely) useful for empirical research – theory for theory’s sake – I tend to value and prefer the combination of high theory and empirical research in my own research practice. The DMK book, and especially its third platform (see below), is a conscious demonstration of the applicability of high theory for empirical research. This is also why there is so much attention spent, in the DMK book, on the elaboration of the methodological procedures of Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA) and Discursive-Material Analysis (DMA), as these are the necessary bridges between high theory and empirical research. But I would like to add that high theory is also necessary for the field of Communication and Media Studies, which is pre-empted by Peter’s remark that discourse theory is still a “minority interest” within this field, which is, according to him, “to the detriment of the field” (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 5). Even if we are working hard to change this (see Van Brussel, De Cleen & Carpentier, 2019, for our latest initiative), I have to agree with Peter on both accounts. Discourse theory has only a weak visibility in Communication and Media Studies, and this invisibility does not help our field.⁵

This lack of apparent enthusiasm for discourse theory might extend beyond discussions about the value of discourse theory and new materialism for the field of Communication and Media Studies. It actually might say something about the field itself, and in particular about the field’s relationship with high theory. My argument here would be that Communication and Media

Studies often has an awkward relationship with high theory. There are many reasons for this. Strong currents in the field advocate for realist approaches that tend to have less appreciation for high theory, especially when combined with quantitative methodologies, that sometimes – but not always – strengthen this tendency. The hesitations towards high theory not only stem from an ontological perspective, but also from a communicative perspective. High theory is still too much frowned upon, because of its complexity – captured by the ‘accusation’ of being jargonesk – which is seen to stand in the way of broad knowledge dissemination. This, in turn, almost – and I stress almost – positions practicing high theory as an undemocratic act. There are two things to keep in mind here: Not all academic authors can be expected to write all the time in the most accessible ways; internal diversity, also in relation to the deployed levels of abstraction, is desirable and necessary; moreover, it is sometimes good to intellectually challenge your reader. And we have to keep in mind that jargon is only jargon because that particular academic repertoire has not been widely accepted yet, and the current power plays do not work to its advantage. In addition, there is the paradox of (inter)disciplinarity, where our – sometimes only formal – interest in interdisciplinarity is compensated by a desire to develop and deploy concepts that are considered authentic to the field. I can still remember the ecstatic mood when mediatization became popular, as ‘we’ (in Communication and Media Studies) finally had another concept that was ‘truly ours’. Without discrediting the value of the mediatization concept in any way, the mechanism of conceptual disciplinarity is provincial and unnecessarily restrictive. If we want to engage in phenomenon-centric scholarship (and not only in media-centric and society-centric scholarship), as I have recently argued (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2019), then we will need interdisciplinary approaches that allow us to activate all the necessary theories and concepts. And that includes looking across the disciplinary fences for high theory, to self-confidently bring it home, and to make it ‘ours’ (the latter is only for those who experience that need, I would add).

The question then also becomes whether we need metaphysics in Communication and Media Studies. Peter, in his review, explicitly asks whether the ontology of the discursive-material knot, which I combine with the ontic notion of the assemblage, is “merely an axiom, a premise that he invites us to share, or is it a full-blown ontological claim at the level of metaphysics? In either case, how does it square with the anti-essentialist stance of both DT[A] and DMA?” (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 7). This fourth question is one about the nature of the DMK beast, but I need to first deconstruct his question in two ways. First, and I hope Peter forgives my knit-picking, I would prefer to call it a non-essentialist, instead of an anti-essentialist, stance. It appears to be a detail, but it is not, because “anti-” suggests a dichotomy, which is a logic that I do not want to get trapped in. It always reminds me of Nietzsche’s (2006) ‘The Shadow’, where Zarathustra tries to run away from his shadow, never being able to separate himself from it. Non-essentialism, as a concept, creates a sufficient manoeuvring distance for me, while others prefer post-essentialism or post-foundationalism. Whatever the concept that is preferred, I should clarify – putting Butler’s (1997) wonderful essay ‘Contingent foundations’ on the table – that I believe that essences and foundations do exist, but that these are particular discourses that have been constructed as essences and foundations.

My second little act of deconstruction of Peter’s question is that I disagree with the ‘or’ and ‘at the level’ in his question, when he writes “a premise that he invites us to share, or is it a full-blown ontological claim *at the level of metaphysics*” (Dahlgren, 2019, p. 7, emphasis added). I would like to resist the dichotomy between the axiomatic premise and ontological claim, and I would like to disconnect the ontological claim from metaphysics. In the first case, I think any theoretical claim, formulated at whatever level – including the ontological – is a proposal and an invitation. I solemnly hope that the writings of one person – including myself, obviously – cannot provide direct access to an absolute truth. In contrast, I would argue that academic knowledge is the negotiated outcome of a series of signifying practices, keeping in mind the existence of irreconcilable paradigms, that produce a diversity of juxtapositions in academic knowledge. We may desire for homogeneous knowledge, and for an unfettered access to this reservoir of knowledge, but that is – in the Lacanian meaning of the word – a fantasy. This renders the DMK book a signifying practice, and an intervention that takes part in the academic struggles over truth and that modestly aims to contribute to the construction of a(n academic) discourse (which necessitates more than one person, as I actually argue in the DMK book).

The other issue is then whether this ontological claim is a metaphysical stance, which also brings us to the question about the relationship between ontology and metaphysics. I understand that my position on this matter is debatable, but I feel fairly comfortable with the concept of ontology from a non-essentialist position, but less with metaphysics, because the latter has – for me – still stronger resonances of essentialism and universalism. Of course, projects to create a non-essentialist metaphysics exist (see Deleuze, 2001; and interpretations by Hughes, 2009 and DeLanda, 2013), and we should indeed try to push the

metaphysics concept further in that direction, always keeping in mind that knowledge about the universal is knowledge about a particular that has been constructed as the universal.

There is also something charming in the thought experiment of using the old meaning of metaphysics (“τα μετά τα φυσικά” / “τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά” / the beyond the physical) to think about the DMK, which indeed moves beyond the physical (or better: beyond the material), but then I would be introducing yet again a hierarchy between the discursive and the material, by taking the material as the starting point. The problem with this way of thinking is that the DMK also has the opposite objective, namely to push the discursive beyond its limits, so we would have to move into conceptual *spielereien* like *metaphysicognostica* (which refers to “τα μετά τα φυσικά και τα μετά τα γνωστικά”⁶ / “τα μετά τα φυσικά και τα μετά τα γνωστικά” / the beyond the physical and the beyond knowledge). However pleasurable it was to create this concept,⁷ it might also be overdoing things a bit. More importantly, when trying to de-essentialize metaphysics, here too we are faced with conceptual inertia, and its old meanings that continue to haunt us, which renders the re-signification of the metaphysics concept a bit of an uphill struggle. And it is not my struggle in the first place. I will thus settle for calling the DMK a theoretical framework with ontological claims, and repeat the invitation for this framework to be shared, to be deployed and to be constructed as knowledge, where it can join other – similar and competing – theoretical frameworks.

The two other platforms, and contingency at the ontological and the ontic level

This then finally brings us to platforms 2 and 3 of the DMK book, which should not be left out of my response. Platform 2 contains a re-reading of three theoretical bodies of knowledge: participatory theory, community media theory and conflict theory. There are two basic ideas behind platform 2; one idea – and one motivation for writing platform 2 – is that these three theoretical fields can be enriched by looking at them through the lens of the DMK. In particular, the ontology of the DMK allowed to bring out gaps in these theoretical fields, which could then be addressed by highlighting the (rare) literature that deals with them. The material nature of participatory processes could be emphasized more, for instance, and Noortje Marres’s (2012) book *Material Participation* could nicely support this additional emphasis. The opposite logic applied to conflict theory, where the discursive nature of enemy constructions could receive more attention than it usually does as the discursive component is often reduced to a psychological dimension. So Jabri’s (1996) work, *Discourses on Violence*, became important to highlight here.

The second idea is that the empirical analysis of the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC) needed two types of theoretical support, generating frameworks that could then act as sensitizing concepts: First, there were the theoretical concepts affiliated with the DMK itself, with – most importantly – the discursive, the material and their knot. But there was a second theoretical framework needed, given that a particular kind of assemblage was being analysed. CCMC was a participatory-agonist assemblage, and in order to understand the specificity of this assemblage, it was vital to – also theoretically – understand how participation, community media and conflict worked. A simple cut&paste operation would be insufficient, though, as there was a need to reconcile and integrate these two bodies of knowledge: the DMK and the cluster of participatory, community media and conflict theory. That is why there was also an analytical reason for the latter to be subjected to a theoretical re-reading through the lens of the DMK, as this theoretical alignment would facilitate their analytical deployment.

Platform 3 then turned the attention to the CCMC case study itself, but not without providing an extensive historical contextualization of the Cyprus Problem. This, in turn, necessitated another theoretical re-reading, of theories of nationalism this time. Here, it was fascinating to note how strong the discursive component of theories of nationalism were, with the exception of the primordialist approaches towards nationalism, which were deeply essentialist. There appeared little space to think about the material dimensions of nationalism, unless from these essentialist perspectives. This analysis then allowed me to bring out these authors whose work enabled to strengthen the theoretical backbone of the material component of the DMK approach towards nationalism. All these theoretical re-readings provided sufficient support to analyse the CCMC as one particular participatory-agonist assemblage that contributed to the democratization of the Cypriot media space, and that contributed to peace-building on the island. Most interesting, though, was that in the case of the CCMC, the participatory dimension and the agonist dimension were mutually reinforcing.

In particular the third platform remains important in relation to some of the questions that Peter raised, because this third platform not only provided insights into the workings of CCMC as participatory-agonistic assemblage, but also into the workings of the DMK. This research project, with its argumentation and empirical evidence, and supported by academic truth-seeking procedures, also generated support – always imperfect, though – for the ontological claims of the DMK, showing the strength of the integration of high theory and empirical research. For instance, the dynamics of contingency and rigidity, of openness and closure – dynamics which are political – play a key role in the DMK at the ontological level. But the case study of a particular assemblage – the CCMC – also allowed demonstrating the interplay of contingency and rigidity in social practice at the ontic level. Even though the argumentation could never lead to total and full closure, it can still produce a convincing case for the structural presence of contingency and rigidity.

A rather painful but ultimate illustration of the workings of contingency is the closure of the CCMC in the summer of 2019, despite several rescue attempts (in which I was involved, albeit only in a limited capacity and very much in vein). The analysis of the multiplicity of causes of this closure is the object of ongoing research, but the point here is that the organizational structure of the CCMC, with its rigidities, ranging from organizational routines and management, a demarcated space (a container building in the Nicosia buffer zone) filled with technology, a civil-society – and peace-movement-related – network, a programme schedule, etc., disappeared. This transformation is obviously deeply unfortunate, but also one of the best examples of the workings of contingency, where this community media organization – as happens so often – turned out to be a Temporary Autonomous Zone, as Bey (1985) labelled these kinds of contingent structures that appear unannounced, eventually disappear and possibly reappear, to create a new assemblage somewhere else, quite likely to be structured by the discursive-material knot.

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Endnotes

- 1 The translation process of an academic article into a sound art work was also documented in a book chapter (Christidis & Carpentier, 2017b).
- 2 For a discussion on the social construction of death, from a variety of perspectives, see Van Brussel and Carpentier (2014).
- 3 Although I have used the ideology concept, for instance, as the subtitle of Carpentier (2011), which is 'A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle'.
- 4 Normative frameworks themselves are discourses that struggle for the position of the empty signifier of the ethical, where we have to keep in mind that "no normative order which is, in and for itself, ethical" (Laclau, 2000, p. 81).
- 5 Similar remarks could be made for other academic fields, but here I prefer to refer to the academic field in which most of my activities are embedded, namely Communication and Media Studies.
- 6 In Greek, the concept of the discursive does not work too well here, so knowledge was selected instead.
- 7 With thanks to Vaia Doudaki for the co-creation of this concept.