Community media, their communities and conflict:  
A mapping analysis of Israeli community broadcasting groups

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Abstract

Community media organisations are famously difficult to define, as this media field is highly elusive and diverse, even if there is a certain degree of consensus about a series of basic characteristics. One key defining component is the objective to serve its community by allowing its members to participate in self-representational processes. Yet this component raises questions about what ‘community’ means, and how the community that is being served relates to other parts of society. This article studies a particular social reality – Israel – where community television is the dominant model, community television production groups are separated from the actual distribution of the produced content and different configurations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ characterise political reality. Following the methodological procedures outlined in Voniati et al. (2018), a mapping of 83 Israeli community broadcasting groups was organised, allowing us to flesh out the different ways in which these community broadcasting groups deal with their community/ies and the ‘other’. The analysis shows that many of these Israeli community broadcasting groups have fairly closed, singular-community articulations of ‘their’ communities. They rarely engage in interactions with other communities (limiting internal diversity) and their external diversity is even more restricted, with only one Arab-Israeli community broadcasting group able to be identified. The analysis did, however, identify a dozen groups with more open approaches towards their outer worlds, and thus the potential to assume a more conflict-transformatory role.

Keywords

Agonism, collaboration, community television, Israel, mapping analysis, multi-voice, peace-building

Introduction

Community media organisations are famously difficult to define, as this media field is highly elusive and diverse. In the academic work on community media, several approaches to defining community media exist, as Carpentier, Servaes & Lie (2003) argue (see also Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007). At the same time, a certain degree of consensus exists about a series of basic characteristics. Community media are frequently, and for good reason, seen as organisations that
allow the democratic to be translated into everyday life. As civil society organisations, they are locations where internal participatory-democratic cultures and horizontal decision-making structures are realised. As media organisations, in contrast to commercial and public broadcasters, they allow communities to participate in self-representational processes. These characteristics are nicely captured by Tabing’s (2002: 9) definition of a community radio station as ‘one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community’. Of course, care should be taken not to romanticise community media organisations as participatory heavens, as they do not always live up to the expectations that are created by these definitions and the ideological ambitions embedded within them.

In this article, we want to confront these definitions and approaches with a particular social reality, namely that of Israel, where community television is the dominant model, and where community television production groups are separated from the actual distribution of the produced content. This unavoidably also means that we need to bring in the specificity of the Israeli political context, characterised by a series of long-term, international and internal, ethnocultural conflicts (Galnoor & Blander, 2018). In particular, within this context of (violent) conflict, we are interested in how the communities of Israeli community media are defined, and how Israel’s community media position themselves within these (violent) conflicts that haunt the region. In order to generate answers to these questions, we organised a mapping of 83 Israeli community broadcasting groups. Even if this mapping has occurred at the expense of analytical depth, the overview it generates allows us to flesh out the different ways in which these community broadcasting groups deal with the different configurations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that characterise the Israeli political reality.

Articulating communities and rhizomes

As we mentioned in the introduction, community media are elusive organisations, characterised by participatory practices that aim to serve ‘the’ community. Tabing’s (2002: 9) community radio definition provides an indication of this focus on community service, but it also becomes visible in, for instance, the 2008 European Parliament’s Resolution on Community Media in Europe, which states that ‘community media are non-profit organisations accountable to the community that they seek to serve’. Another example is the ‘working definition’ of community radio adopted by AMARC-Europe, the European branch of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, an organisation that encompasses a wide range of community radio practices globally. Attempting to avoid a prescriptive definition (and focusing on radio), AMARC-Europe (1994: 4) labelled a community radio station as ‘a “non-profit” station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio’.

In unpacking the serving-the-community component of the community media identity, two elements are significant. The first is the complexity of the notion of community itself. Often, community is defined in relation to geography and ethnicity as structuring notions of collective identity or group relations (Leunissen, 1986). This is also related to community media organisations and how they aim to give voice to people affiliated with particular localities and ethnicities. For instance, ethnic broadcasts are an intrinsic aspect of community media, and many organisations have slots for different ethnic groups, which produce relevant content (Barker, 1999; Langer, 2001; McKelvey, 2007). Nevertheless, other types of relationships between media organisations and their communities are implied in the way the phrasing of AMARC-Europe’s definition continues, with the words ‘to which it broadcasts’ added. This is aligned with two reconceptualisations of the traditional (geography and/or ethnicity-based) approach towards community. The first reconceptualisation introduces the non-geographical as a complement to the structural-geographic approach to community. In particular, the concept of the community of
-interest (Newman, 1980) enables emphasising the importance of other factors in structuring a community. A second set of reconceptualisations is based on the cultural as a complement to the structural-geographic community approach. These approaches emphasise the subjective construction of community, as illustrated by Lindlof’s (1988) concept of interpretative community and Cohen’s (1989) community of meaning. Moreover, communities are not stable entities. Tönnies’ (1963) romantic perspective on the community should not render us blind to the many discursive and material conflicts that are a constitutive part of these very same communities, including the discursive struggles over the meanings of communities and the material struggles over memberships, territories and frontiers, within the communities, as well as in relation to their outside worlds. As Barrett (2015: 194) puts it: ‘Communities are contested spaces’, characterised by a ‘solidarity-exclusion dialectic’.

Second, the use of the community concept in its singular form is deceitful, as community media are a crossroads of a multiplicity of communities. For instance, Santana and Carpentier (2010) explore the wide variety of activist, ethnic-linguistic, subcultural and art communities that are being served by two Belgian community/alternative radio stations. Community media organisations act as nodal points in a wide network of communities, (civil society) organisations and individual people, bringing them into the organisation in varying degrees of interaction and involvement. This also implies that community media producers do not necessarily all identify with the very same community, but have established very different identifications with different communities (and the identities they incorporate). This is further complicated, as Rock (2005: 96) points out in a discussion of communities of practice, by the lack of unidirectional relations between an individual and a community: ‘each individual simultaneously inhabits different communities’. The community media responses to these contingencies are equally diverse: in some cases, the transgressions of ‘the’ community are celebrated and the multiplicity of communities are agonistically embraced, while in other cases the community media organisation withdraws into isolationism (Mattelart & Piemme, 1983: 416) or engages in internal or external antagonisms (Dunaway, 2005).

**Community media and (violent) conflict**

The role of community media organisations in the context of violent conflict has hardly been discussed, although a few exceptions, such as Rodriguez’s (2011) work in Columbia, and Carpentier’s (2017) work in Cyprus, do exist. In the discussions on the potential role of community media organisations in relation to conflict (transformation), the starting point is their capacity to facilitate internal and external diversity, as this opens up their discursive and material structures for dialogues that support agonism, or the rearticulation of the enemy into the adversary (Mouffe, 2013), with its peaceful and non-violent interactions, conflicted togetherness and pluralisation of the self (Carpentier, 2017).

As Fraser and Restrepo Estrada (2001: 18) remark – again in relation to community radio – ‘Community radio, through its openness to participation to all sectors and all people in a community/ies, creates a diversity of voices and opinions on the air.’ Community media are not homogeneous organisations serving a homogeneous community, but rather enable a diversity of people to produce media content that relates to a variety of societal groups and sub-communities, mixing minority and majority cultures, ethnicities and languages, often in the same community media (Barlow, 1988; René and Antonius, 2009; Sussman and Estes, 2005). Within a multiple-communities approach, a considerable number of authors argue that community media organisations facilitate a dialogue between these sub-communities or segments of society (Gaynor & O’Brien, 2011; Martin & Wilmore, 2010; Siemering, 2000). Internally, community media can act as physical meeting places for different social groups, and externally, they can be platforms for these different voices.
This capacity to foster diversity, intercultural dialogue and tolerance has made community media privileged partners in peace-building, conflict transformation and reconciliation projects. In a ground-breaking research project in the Colombian Magdalena Medio region, researchers from four universities and a regional network of community radio stations joined forces to provide rare evidence for this central role of community media in the struggle for peace (Cadavid & Moreno Martínez, 2009; see also Rodríguez, 2011). One of Rodríguez’s (2011: 255) key conclusions regarding her analysis of Colombian community media’s activities stresses the performance of peace-building: ‘Instead of transmitting messages about peacebuilding to audiences, Colombian citizens’ media involve audiences in, and subject audiences to, the felt, embodied experience of peace.’ In the analysis of the peace-building efforts of the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC), one of the authors of this article, Carpentier (2017), stresses the interrelationship of the agonistic signifying practices produced by CCMC’s radio station MYCYRadio, and the material practices of collaboration in CCMC’s premises in the Nicosia Buffer Zone, where members of the Greek-Cypriot community, the Turkish-Cypriot community and many other communities peacefully interact in the production of media content and in the management of the media organisation. Both these signifying and material agnostic practices are seen to be facilitated and strengthened by CCMC’s participatory nature.

**Israel: Political and social contexts**

This brings us to our discussion about community broadcasting in Israel, which first necessitates a brief overview of the Israeli political and social contexts. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, Israel has been a multiparty parliamentary democracy consisting of legislative, executive and judicial branches that are based on the principle of checks and balances. The executive branch (the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister) is subject to votes of confidence by the 120-seat unicameral Knesset (the Israeli Parliament). Members of the Knesset are chosen through general elections held every four years, in which all Israeli citizens over the age of 18 years have the right to vote. At the apex of Israel’s independent judiciary branch stands the Supreme Court, which serves also as the High Court of Justice (Galnoor & Blander, 2018).

Israel has two official languages by law: Hebrew and Arabic. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), Israel’s population at the time of data collection (2015) was 8,345,700. Of this number, 75.0 per cent (6,251,600) are Jews, 20.7 per cent (1,730,900) are Arabs (most of them Muslims) and 4.3 per cent (363,300) are Christians and of other religions (Nossek & Adoni, 2017). In many aspects, Israeli society is a multicultural society made up of various ethnic and sociocultural groups. The Israeli population may be divided according to several distinct, yet to some extent overlapping criteria: political – right vs. left; sociocultural – religious vs. secular; socioeconomic – different degrees of socio-economic status (SES); ethnic – Ashkenazi Jews, from European background, vs. Mizrachi Jews, from Middle-Eastern and North African origin; sociocultural – veteran Israeliis vs. new immigrants (who came to Israel in the last decade of the twentieth century, Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia; and finally, the national criteria – Arabs and Jews (Nossek & Adoni, 2017).

These different divisions – particularly the religious vs. secular and the Jewish vs. Arab – are a (potential) source of internal tensions and conflict, threatening the country’s social and political stability. Israeli society is an illustration of how conflict produces dynamic change and social transformation, but also causes a decline in social formations. The longer Israel exists in a state of (violent) conflict and the more general and intensive this state of conflict is, the more salient the impact of conflict is on its social structure, intensifying its militarist and nationalist elements (Nossek & Adoni, 2017). Moreover, since its establishment, Israel has been involved in a series of wars and long-lasting violent conflicts with neighbouring states and an ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, with its two intifadas (1987–93 and 2000–05). Still, Israel reached long-standing peace
agreements with Egypt and Jordan as well as an unfinished set of agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), known as the Oslo Accords, which led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority (tasked with limited self-governance).

Community television history and practice in Israel

The Israeli media system is a composite model that comprises remnants of the authoritarian model (the vestiges of Britain’s historical mandate in Israel (from 1920 to 1948) and the threats to Israel’s existence) alongside public broadcasting (radio and television) and components of a regulated commercial model. Israeli law does not explicitly define freedom of expression. Since the establishment of the state, the legislature has not modified some of the laws dating back to the British Mandate, which limit freedom of the press. In practice, however, media products do meet the usual standard of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and these are defended by the High Court of Justice (Nossek & Limor, 2011).

Community television was first introduced in Canada and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fuller, 1994; Howley, 2005), while Israel had to wait until 1986. In July of that year, the Knesset enacted the law regulating the establishment of cable television in Israel (Amendment No. 4 to the Telecommunications Law). The law also created the option to establish community broadcasting, facilitating the communication of issues regarding community life and social activities (Caspi & Limor, 1999). This clause in the law, permitting community broadcasting came out of the precedents that the Kibbutz Movement had set, by developing and running independent, closed-circuit community broadcasts for its members (Shinar, 1993; Tamir, 1993).

The law stipulated that community broadcasting had to be produced specifically for the community, and efforts were made to prevent its commercialisation or exploitation by partisan politics. The law conceived community broadcasting as a means of conserving the social dynamics of the community, and of improving aspects of community life by documenting them, covering local and community events, providing updates on community affairs, airing opinions, cultivating community pride, placing issues on the public agenda, identifying needs and problems, and defusing tensions (Shinar, 1993; Tamir, 1993). The model envisaged by the legislator therefore integrated the establishment of community broadcasting with provisions that would allocate more screen time to groups that had no other outlet for public self-expression.

With this legislation in place, the Council for Cable Broadcasts (which later became the Council for Cable and Satellite Broadcasts) was set up. The Council’s members were five government officials and six members of the public; the members representing the public consisted of two people appointed by the local municipalities, two consumer representatives who were appointed by the responsible minister, and two representatives of educational and cultural organisations. According to the telecommunications regulations of 1987, a council permit was required in order to be considered a registered regional broadcasting association. A broadcasting association, the activities of which were by definition confined to a particular region, could be an educational organisation (a school or an institute of higher education), a community organisation (e.g. a community or youth centre) or any public institution that met a series of criteria. In 2006, the Council for Cable and Satellite Broadcasts decided to change the system of community television broadcasts, establishing one cable and one satellite channel broadcasting the same items, with a special production company responsible for the channels’ management. The community channel became national in reach, with each broadcasting association being allocated timeslots. Moreover, a broader definition of communities was formulated, also including communities of interest and other non-geographically defined communities (Nossek, 2007).

From 1994 onwards, various organisations, working in collaboration with the council, began to lend their moral and material support to a wide variety of groups, encouraging them to become involved in television broadcasting. According to data provided by the council, in 2005 – after
about 10 years of the implementation of the law – 283 groups produced audiovisual material. Often these were 30-minute TV magazines, as only a few groups produced full-hour broadcasts. A total of 199 groups broadcast their material on the cable system and 84 on the satellite community channel. In 2005, 2044 original broadcasts were broadcast on the cable system and 540 on the satellite system. The council estimated that about 7000 people had been involved as active participants in the production and broadcasting of community broadcasts. Among them were 750 elderly citizens who were members of 23 different groups (Nossek, 2007).

We can divide these almost 300 groups into two main clusters, based on legal definitions. Cluster one comprises the educational groups or organisations defined by the law as ‘schools or institutes of higher education’. This group includes high schools with communications or cinema studies programs that take part in community broadcast production. Some educational organisations regularly broadcast in a magazine format, while others have a live slot. Some participate in the broadcasting activities organized by their local community centres. The group also includes higher education institutions, such as the School of Media Studies at the College of Management in Tel Aviv and the academic broadcasts produced by Haifa University and Bar-Ilan University. Cluster two consists of the community groups (or organisations), encompassing a wide range of organisations.

The Israel Association of Community Centres (IACC) sees the community channel as a vehicle for people who have no media production background to describe their lives in the community and tackle subjects that would otherwise not attract (mainstream) media attention. There are about 180 community centres in Israel, 50 of which broadcast regularly. Senior citizens’ groups are also classified under this heading. For example, the Multimedia Center for the Elderly, a training center for senior citizens, and the Association for the Development of Services for the Elderly in Israel have worked together in forming broadcasting groups for more senior adults (Nossek, 2003). Several local authorities and municipalities have also formed municipal communications centres for groups of youngsters and adults to collaborate in producing community broadcasts. These centres, which offer training and broadcast production facilities, generally operate inside independently run community centres or, in other cases, in community centres that are operated partly by the IACC. The third group includes organisations that work with a non-geographically defined community. These include the Iranian Immigrants’ Organisation, which broadcasts in Farsi and Hebrew; ESRA, an umbrella organisation for the English-speaking community in Herzliya; Kfar Shmaryahu, which produces English-language broadcasts, particularly for immigrants who have difficulty learning Hebrew; and the Zippori Center, a center for community work and education in Jerusalem (Nossek, 2007).

**Mapping community broadcasting groups in Israel: Methodology**

In this article, we want to confront the theoretical discussions on community media, and in particular their potential for community building and conflict transformation, with the existing Israeli community broadcasting groups, embedded in a very particular context. In order to analyse the fairly large number of Israeli broadcasting groups, a mapping analysis was deployed. A refined set of procedures for mapping analysis was developed in an earlier research project (aimed at mapping Cypriot community media – see Voniati, Doudaki & Carpentier, 2018), and these procedures were adjusted to map Israeli community broadcasting groups.

A crucial component in this mapping analysis is the development of an operational definition, which is the touchstone of the mapping analysis, facilitating the decision about whether a particular entity is included in the mapping analysis. As all (operational) definitions are always context specific, they cannot simply be transferred from one socio-political context (e.g. Cyprus) to another, but instead require adjustments to fit the socio-political context of the space that will
be mapped. In the case of the Israeli community broadcasting group mapping, six criteria for inclusion were used:

- bidirectional communication (intra- and inter-community)
- a regular timeslot
- regular frequency of broadcasting
- at least a nucleus of activists or producers
- group-defined purposes and goals for broadcasting
- a space where physical contact and meetings can take place.

In a second stage, a so-called mapping index card (MIC) was developed, which allowed for the registration of key characteristics related to each selected entity. In this particular case, the MIC consisted out of nine questions, which were answered through telephone interviews with key resource people (often community broadcasting group leaders) throughout 2015. In addition to a series of identifying questions at the beginning and the end of the MIC, these questions were related to the number of active group members, the group’s main activities, the community/ies to be served, the interactions and collaborations with other groups and each group’s position in relation to the Israeli conflicts.

The actual mapping analysis was implemented by a research assistant, Haim Or, who was trained by the core research team. Further, the mapping was supported by a database file that was made available by Channel 98 (the Cable and Satellite Community Channel) at the beginning of the project. This file included 112 groups – all of which matched our operational definition – but a preliminary review revealed that six groups had ceased to be active. No contact could be made with another 16 groups, and it is reasonable to assume that at least some of them also ended their activities. The contact person of one group refused to participate. Another six promised to be get back to the research team but failed to do so. This eventually resulted in 83 completed interviews and completed MICs, which were then analysed using qualitative textual analysis (Silverman, 2006).

**Which communities to serve?**

Through this mapping analysis, we have first gained access to the self-definitions of Israeli community broadcasting groups, and their relations with the different communities in Israel. Three main categories of community can be distinguished: geographically defined communities; communities defined on the bases of ethnicity, country of origins and language; and communities of interest. In many cases, these community definitions overlap and (sub-)categories are combined.

**Geography**

Most of the groups broadcasting on the community TV channel in Israel define themselves and their activities on the basis of their geographic location. Seven groups operate within the city of Tel Aviv. Two of these (Social Television and Hayarkon 70) are exceptional and will be discussed later. Seven groups also operate in Jerusalem, where the definition is related to neighbourhoods. Haifa has a total of eight groups. Many other cities have more than one group, but no more than three.

**Ethnicity, language and country of origin**

Another category of communities served by these groups comprises those that define themselves according to the ethnicity and/or country of origin of their members or their mother tongue. Practically the entire range of countries of origin is represented on Israeli community television. There is a group for those who immigrated to Israel from the Latin American countries and who speak Spanish, a number of groups for Russian speakers (immigrants from the former Soviet Union,
including Russia and Ukraine), a group serving French speakers (immigrants from France and Belgium) and a group identified with the English-speaking community. Prominent by its absence is the community of immigrants from Ethiopia, which does not have any representation or magazine of its own.

Another sub-category is constituted out of groups that focus on cultural preservation, producing what can be referred as ‘folklore magazines’ (without implying any negative connotation). These are mainly groups of Mizrahim (Jews who immigrated from ‘the East’, mostly from Middle Eastern and North African countries and their decedents), but not only these people. The magazines these groups produce, it seems, are the most successful and most viewed, with relatively high budgets. Among these groups are the groups that serve the Bukharan-Persian community, the Iraqi and Libyan communities, and the Kurdish and Romanian communities.

**Communities of interest**

There are also groups whose main unifying characteristic is a particular agenda, a common interest or a shared destiny. Again, several sub-categories can be distinguished. One sub-category consists of the socio-political activists; it contains two of the most important groups in community television: Hayarkon 70 and Social Television. The objective of these left-wing groups is to construct an alternative agenda to that of the mainstream media, to provide a platform and voice for marginal groups and to advocate a clear agenda that supports civil society and human rights. There are also groups of activists who deal only with environmental topics and struggle for a ‘green society’. In recent years, many of these groups have become involved in the issue of environmental quality.

Another area that encompasses a number of groups are those associations whose goal it is to bring people together, to strengthen Jewish identity and to encourage people to become more religious. It is important to note that no group is identified with the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community, since its members do not watch television because of religious restrictions. Only very few groups are identified with the national religious community, and these also have a clear geographic focus. Finally, a third sub-category consists out of groups that have common interests – for example, those engaged in agriculture, those with diabetes, sports fans, disabled veterans and other rehabilitative groups.

Even if a diversity of communities is being served, and there are sometimes groups that serve different types of communities at the same time, there are not many collaborations between the broadcasting groups, which would allow to target multiple communities and create inter-community dialogues. Most of the groups stated that they did not, and were not willing to, engage in joint productions with other groups, whether they were different from or similar to themselves. The rare collaborations that do exist are between homogeneous groups, or between high school groups and groups of senior citizens.

**Israeli community broadcasting and conflict**

Very few of the groups deal with (violent) conflict in an explicit and consistent manner. The large majority of the broadcasting groups are hesitant to use this communicative platform to create content that deals with (violent) conflict, either alone or in cooperation with other groups. Urban groups hardly cover (violent) conflict at all, with cultural and geographical distance used as the explanation. Put more simply, when asked about their relations with neighbours, other sectors and different groups, the answer was often that this form of outreach was not relevant to them, mostly because of the homogeneity of ‘their’ community. Other types of arguments that were mentioned frequently were the desire to stay away from controversial topics and/or a lack of professional and technical tools to deal with (violent) conflict-related issues. Looking at these arguments more in detail, they range from more practical reasons – the lack of funds, the lack of
mobility, the absence of contact persons for cooperation – to ideological reasons, grounded in the argument that a focus on conflict-related issues is not the role of community television. The latter argument is based on the fact that, according to the regulations of community television, they are not allowed to engage with political issues. Especially when the respondents were asked specifically about Arab–Jewish relations, the matter was seen as political and complex, and they avoided producing relevant items.

Still, there were a number of exceptions, as 12 groups\(^8\) did engage with topics related to violent conflict. They often touched upon aspects of coexistence, and the approach to conflict was to engage in dialogue. It is worth noting that most of these magazines were produced by groups from mixed cities (six), or cities neighbouring Arab municipalities (two). Two others were focused on social issues, one was in a city next to Tel Aviv and the remaining one was the only Arab-Israeli group.

This brings us to the almost complete absence of Arab-Israeli groups from Israeli community television. With the exception of the community broadcasting group in Kfar Kara, there is no magazine that ‘belongs’ to Arab communities. None of them is broadcasting in Arabic. As our mapping data do not provide us with details about absent groups, we can only speculate about the reasons, and ask whether their absence is caused by a lack of resources from the community channel, the Communications Ministry and the like, or whether such groups do not wish to use a channel that is associated with the Israeli establishment. Another possible explanation is the low number of cable television subscribers among the Arab-Israeli minority,\(^9\) which implies a very low potential number of viewers. The Arab-Israeli minority is not the only group that is not represented in the 83 Israeli community broadcasting groups: Circassians, Druse and Bedouins (and Ethiopian Jews, as mentioned before) are absent as well, and the same possible explanations can be suggested here.

Of course, conflict should not be reduced to violent conflict, and to the deeply problematic Jewish–Arab relations. Israeli society is also characterised by a series of other conflict areas, as mentioned above, which include the tensions between religion and secularism, the tensions between the periphery and the centre (which is mainly a socio-economic tension), and the conflicted relations between new immigrants and veterans. Interestingly, the community broadcasting groups barely touch upon socio-economic or religious-secular topics. A number of groups do deal with immigration, assimilation and relations between immigrants and veteran residents, but there are very few of them. They are often located in the neighbourhoods and cities where there has been massive immigration and where the activities of the broadcasting groups are geared towards (new) immigrants.

**Conclusion**

Community media behold the promise of participation, democracy and diversity, which also potentially opens up spaces for conflict transformation. As discussed in Carpentier (2017), though, there is no guarantee that community media’s participatory agenda automatically results in active support for conflict transformation. This case study, located in Israel, confirms that this articulation between participation and agonism can indeed be absent (at least to a high degree).

In discussing this absence, there is a need to be careful, and not to deprecate the role that community media organisations play for particular communities, serving these communities by offering them self-representational opportunities. Moreover, we should be careful to demand from community media organisations that they always – in every context – play an active role in conflict transformation. In contexts of (violent) conflict, though, one might also hope that the democratic and participatory capacities of community media organisations are not confined to the ‘own’ communities being served, but rather spill over into the relationships with the outside world, and with other communities. In the Israeli context, we tend to see this absence (of the articulation of
participation with agonism) as a missed opportunity, in a political configuration which could definitely use more support for agonism.

Crucial to our understanding of this absence is the articulation of community with which the community broadcasting groups identify. Of course, if we consider the entire field of community broadcasting groups, the (external) diversity is considerable. The list of communities served by all 83 community broadcasting groups together is substantial and quite impressive, allowing many different communities to speak to themselves and the outside world. At the same time, there is a structural limit to the external diversity, as some of the key actors/communities in Israeli society are not represented in the community broadcasting field, with, for instance, only one Arab-Israeli community broadcasting group.

This problem is worsened by a series of other issues. The first is a lack of internal diversity. Many of the community broadcasting groups are focused on serving one particular community, which has both homogenising and segregating effects. Even if these homogenising effects are not total, and the community media producers, through their identifications with multiple identities (and not just the identity of the community being served), bring some degree of (internal) diversity, the singular-community definition impedes on opportunities for conflict transformation. Second, many of the community broadcasting groups are characterised by an introverted position, rarely reaching out to other actors (and communities) in Israeli society; this is strengthened by a law-abiding position when it comes to avoiding politics. This avoidance strategy, grounded in a very strict (and restrictive) interpretation of the legal framework, also leads to hesitations about dealing with conflict, which is not restricted to violent conflict but also includes tensions related to, for instance, class and religion.

Still, there are some grounds for optimism and hope. As mentioned before, we should not remain blind to the fact that the existing community broadcasting groups do allow for participation in and through the media field, which is an asset that should be acknowledged explicitly. Moreover, our analysis also shows that a dozen groups do have the potential to create mixed production groups. This potential for cooperation might be found in mixed cities, and in other locations where neighbouring Jewish and Arab communities can (fairly easily) interact. In addition, the functioning of the two alternative broadcasting groups, Hayarkon 70 and Social Television, indicates that a more lenient understanding of the law actually works to bring political issues into the broadcasts. These initiatives might form growth cells, allowing for the activation of the conflict-transformatory component of (a larger part of) the Israeli community media field, opening up another avenue for strengthening the practices that may lead to peace in Israeli society.

References


Notes

1 We use the label ‘community broadcasting groups’, which is the legal definition in Israel, throughout this text.
2 For a discussion of these policy initiatives at the European level, see Jiménez and Scifo (2010).
4 See also Van Vuuren (2008: 16–17) for a discussion of alternative representations of community, and the potential conflict between different groups that originates from contrasting articulations of community.
This article uses texts from Carpentier (2017).

Rodríguez (2001) calls them ‘citizens’ media’.

A broadcasting association is not permitted to operate under the auspices of a political party or in the interests of a political party; it must permit residents of the region to participate freely and without discrimination; it must act on behalf of the residents in several defined fields (education, consumerism, documentation of public records and culture); it must be an entity managed by an elected public board and open to public scrutiny; it has to be a non-profit organisation; and it must prove itself capable of supporting the community.

The following groups (and their magazines) have touched on conflict-related topics at least once: Gonenim-Jerusalem; Hablender-Akko; Zman Haifa-Haifa; Talak Western Galilee-Western Galilee; Gimlaei RM-Ramat Gan; Hayarkon 70-Tel-Aviv; Ligdol u’Legadel-Karmiel; Hatzlevitza Haheverit (Social Television)-Tel-Aviv; ESRAvision-Raanana; Kishrei Shoham-Shoham; Temunot Yerushalayim-Jerusalem; Magazine Kehilati Kfar Kara-Kfar Kara.

The main TV reception technology used by the Arab-Israeli minority is satellite dishes, aimed at channels in Arabic, mainly from neighbouring countries and pirate cable TV.