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We live in an age when the advent of the internet and social media has generated a sort of enthusiastic hysteria about the increasing participation by the public in the journalistic sphere. Not only are journalists able to contact members of the public much more easily as sources for news, but individual citizens can also access the public sphere themselves without the need for any journalistic mediation. Thus there is much discussion about the nature of news, the authenticity of information and measures for quality in this eclectic environment. This book is a welcome pause for reflection on what true 'alternative and independent' journalism is--how it is defined and practised, and what contribution it makes to the public sphere. More importantly, it attempts to show how so-called 'alternative journalism' is no flash in the pan. It has a long history as old as news itself, and the book attempts to define and isolate the characteristics that mark this particular sub-genre.

At first glance, this book appears to follow a similar path to Atton and Hamilton's 2008 Alternative Journalism (Sage)--like them, Forde deals with the history of alternative journalism and its place within the broader political economy of the media, as well as its journalistic practice. However, the book is the product of over fifteen years of research on community media and alternative journalism in Australia, incorporating Forde's own quantitative and qualitative data on alternative journalism practice gathered over time, as well as her research into community media done in collaboration with Michael Meadows' team at Griffith University. The book therefore provides Forde with a welcome opportunity to distil this research into an insightful analysis about the nature of journalism as practised in this unique media sector. Given that Atton and Hamilton make only fleeting reference to Australia and omit it altogether from their international case studies, this material is a welcome supplement. Forde herself goes beyond Australia, incorporating results from her own research in the United States and the United Kingdom. She acknowledges the limitations of this focus primarily on the major Western democracies, and draws on the work of other scholars to include insights from the developing world.

Forde approaches alternative journalism as a genre, and through textual analysis and practitioner interviews tries to define its norms and capture its defining characteristics as a practice. Her principal thesis is that alternative journalism is more than oppositional journalism, aimed at providing a counter-voice to the dominant mainstream commercial news. While it does do this, it also exists alongside the mainstream media, and often remains oblivious to them, focusing instead on doing its own thing in its own way for its own audience. This it does not necessarily serve with the aim of usurping or supplanting mainstream media, but acts mainly as an outlet so that a broader range of voices can have access to the public sphere. Forde neatly sums up the key characteristics of alternative journalism as 'mobilize, localize, contextualize' (p. 173), and concludes by saying that no matter where journalists do their work, if their journalism achieves any of these ends it can be classified as alternative.

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