Introduction

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For some decades now, scholars interested in the function of media outlets that sit 'on the margins' (Rodriguez, 2015) have belonged to a range of complementary but diverse disciplines – primarily communication and media studies, but also sociology, social movement studies, politics, cultural studies, history, literature and creative arts. There are undoubtedly more. It is this diversity that makes our field rich with interdisciplinary approaches and methods, but hosting a range of disciplines also has its drawbacks. In many ways, we might see the various perspectives brought to the study of alternative and community media as one of the main culprits regarding a certain 'vagueness' around definition, or perhaps a disparity of views on what it is we are all talking and thinking about.

This journal makes its first appearance at a time when the study of alternative, independent, community, citizens', radical, grassroots and activist media – and their varied forms of communication – is expanding, as it has been for some years now. Importantly, much of the research moves beyond the media outlets themselves to the people involved – volunteers and employees, amateurs and professionals, communities and citizens. This research also considers the impact on, among other things, politics, democracy, social harmony and inclusion, and public sentiment surrounding key contemporary issues. The existence of an alternative (perhaps radical) media sector is sometimes accepted as evidence of the 'health' of a society, its transparency, its ability to absorb opposition and to confront the difficult questions that non-hegemonic media most often propose. And, as with most sub-sections of media and communications studies, the pervasive digital media forms have elicited a great deal of new, excited scholarship about the emancipatory and revolutionary potential of digital offerings.

The recently published *Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (Atton, 2015) provides a comprehensive montage of global scholarship in the field. This journal – a long time coming, partly due to the large issue we present as Volume 1 – aims to continually update and expand that work by providing a rolling publishing opportunity for diverse scholars to disseminate their latest empirical and theoretical work on community and alternative media forms. We use those terms for ease of expression, with an underlying assumption that researchers have a broad understanding of the varied forms of non-mainstream media to which we refer. Our first volume is a perfect example of the variety of scholarship we expect to publish regularly in the *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*, with the added benefit in this first offering of publishing contributions from a range of respected international scholars who form our Editorial Advisory Board.

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We asked our Advisory Board members to contribute short essays on the current state of and future directions for the field. Readers will find 15 essays in here from scholars such as Clemencia Rodriguez, who calls for an increasing focus on ‘human agency’ as the centre of research on alternative and community media; Natalie Fenton, who notes that while we are witnessing a burgeoning of alternative media in the digital age, there is no corresponding dispersal of the power of multinational media; Bart Cammaerts, who calls for a stronger delineation between alternative distribution, alternative content and alternative forms of organisation; and Nico Carpentier, who calls for a recognition of a ‘trans-hegemonic’ rather than counter-hegemonic role of community media, which understands this media’s ‘embeddedness in fluid civil society’. John H. Downing – a pioneer in the field – delivers a series of personal reflections about the past 50 years of his interactions with small-scale media and muses on the impact of the internet, social media and smart phones on social movement media, while Dorothy Kidd speaks of her own ‘start’ in social movement media in 1987 and argues that social movement communications is the most robust approach ‘to explain the complex, longitudinal shifts in media power’. Others from our Editorial Advisory Board consider social movement media and environmental activism; participatory media and the state; the challenges faced by scholars in ‘teaching’ alternative media; critical media in Africa; Indigenous media and voice; and community media on the blockchain.

In this first issue, we are also pleased to present eight full-length research articles from a range of international scholars, both senior and emerging, dealing with various facets of alternative and community media in disparate political and cultural environments. Kenza Oumlil offers an analysis of the self-representation of Arab-American women in the media, despite their oft-repeated representation as ‘oppressed victims in need of saving’. Oumlil sees alternative media as providing opportunity for new stylistic innovations that inspire social change. Australian research team Bonita Mason, Chris Thomson, Dawn Bennett and Michelle Johnston contribute further insight to the ways in which non-mainstream media might be used to counter cultural stereotypes. Using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, their study tracked and examined transformations in journalists-in-training as they increasingly became exposed to the stories and perspectives of Aboriginal Australians. Cindy Vincent shifts the focus to one of alternative media’s strongholds, San Francisco, focusing on the ‘lumpenproletariat’, the poor and the homeless, through a study of the alternative *POOR Magazine*. Renee Barnes hones in beyond a community of interest such as that served by *POOR Magazine* to the focused hyperlocal media, examining the New Jersey-based news website Baristanet. She finds audience involvement in the news content to be surprisingly low, despite the audience for Baristanet sharing an offline geographic region. Her work poses more questions about the nature of community media in the digital era, particularly for outlets operating entirely online.

A good deal of important empirical and theoretical work in this field emanates from our Spanish-language colleagues, and this journal is making a concerted effort to expand the dissemination of Spanish-language scholarship through regular book reviews, and occasional translations of important works to broaden their dissemination and audience. Katherine Reilly brings a community radio case study from South America, examining communicative sovereignty as expressed at Radio Mundo Real in Montevideo, Uruguay. Emerging researcher from Aarhus in Denmark, Jessica Gustafsson, takes us to another significant presence in the Global South, Kenya, examining the role of two community radio stations during a time of conflict and death surrounding the 2007 and 2013 general elections. Like some Latin American scholarship, this work is particularly concerned with the contribution of community radio in geographies experiencing armed violence and displacement. Pedzisai Ruhanya, from the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, keeps the focus on Africa and times of crisis, examining the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’ from 1997 to 2010 and the role of independent newspaper *The Daily News*

in opposing the state to support oppositional forces against repression. For our final article in this volume, we hear from emerging scholar from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, Brian Semujju, who examines the 'Community Audio Towers' that exist in Uganda as an alternative to community radio. The Community Audio Towers are found to be even more independent than their relatively 'mainstream' community radio counterparts as they are self-sustaining and usually do not involve NGOs or organisational structures to govern their activity.

Our Book Reviews Editors – Arne Hintz, Kerrie Foxwell-Norton and Claudia Magallenes-Blanco – have provided reviews in the final section of this issue on works by Martinez and Sierra, Kitchin, Elmer, and Robie to offer readers a taste of some new literature in the field. If you are the author of a recent book, or would like to draw our attention to a new work, please email our Managing Editor, Ben Green, at editorial@joacm.org. Please also use this email address to contact the Editors, Chris Atton and Susan Forde, if you have suggestions for future special issues or themes.

We do hope you enjoy this very first volume of the *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*. We acknowledge support from Griffith University's ePress, the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, and the IAMCR's Community Communication section to develop and publish this journal. From this point on, we will be publishing on a rolling basis and will be releasing an open Call for Papers on the website, www.joacm.org. You will receive regular notifications through scholarly networks, and through our Facebook (facebook.com/joacm.org) and Twitter pages (twitter.com/JournalofACM), to alert you to the publication of new articles and book reviews.

References

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