

4-1-2024

# Cultural Resistance, Courtesy of Minecraft and Reporters Sans Frontières

Chloe Kiser

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kiser, Chloe (2024) "Cultural Resistance, Courtesy of Minecraft and Reporters Sans Frontières," *Intertext*: Vol. 32, Article 19.

Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext/vol32/iss1/19>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SURFACE at Syracuse University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intertext by an authorized editor of SURFACE at Syracuse University. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

---

## Cultural Resistance, Courtesy of Minecraft and Reporters Sans Frontières

Cover Page Footnote

Written for WRT 109



## Cultural Resistance, Courtesy of Minecraft and Reporters Sans Frontières

Chloe Kiser

**J**amal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist, author, and columnist for *Middle East Eye* and *The Washington Post*, was killed and dismembered in 2018. His murder was later revealed to have been an ordered assassination by Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia. This act can be attributed to Khashoggi's work, which revolved around speaking out against the Saudi government, earning him and select other journalists the title "guardians of truth." After his untimely death, Khashoggi was named *Time* magazine's Person of the Year. Still, many continue to mourn his death as it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain the truth. The atrocities faced around the world by journalists like

Khashoggi continue to fuel the work of organizations like Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières, or RSF) whose central purpose is to advocate for free speech across the world. RSF provides readers with typically banned journalism. The *Minecraft* Uncensored Library (UL) publishes the vital work of these reporters in digital "books," allowing access to those who suffer from censorship the most and serving as a permanent home for justice.

*Minecraft*, the second highest-selling video game of all time, serves not only as an educational resource for youth but also as a tool of rebellion against oppressive governments. RSF capitalized on the opportunity to spread information under the radar of strict censor-



Layout by Camren Wyche. Image from Uncensored Library.

ship guidelines via *Minecraft* servers, which are a free resource accessible by *Minecraft* account holders. Servers enable users to join other “worlds” through a single click. Considered a “sandbox” game, *Minecraft* consists of tasks such as slaying monsters, mining, and building houses without a set goal ever being assigned for its users to achieve. Its purpose is to allow players the freedom to play the game as they please. Due to rampant popularity, *Minecraft* is available on a wide variety of platforms including PC, mobile, and console devices. This accessibility allows for the entertainment and enjoyment of over 141 million people in 119 different languages, in places including countries under repressive censorship.

Because of its educational benefits, coun-

tries such as Mexico, Russia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt that are ranked for obtaining some of the highest levels of censorship in the world have allowed their citizens to install and enjoy *Minecraft*.

RSF recognized this opening and sought to create a loophole to share the work of journalists, furthering their demand for freedom of speech. On March 12, 2020, known as “World Day Against Cyber Censorship,” the UL was released to the public. Established as a *Minecraft* server, the UL allows players from around the world to access journalism that was long censored. By creating a *Minecraft* username and a customizable “skin,” users can access the server and see its authoritarian architecture. The massive scale of the

library utilizes the work of twenty-four builders employed through Blockworks, a design team focused on promoting the potential of educational, marketing, and media resources through *Minecraft* worlds. Built to mimic the look of the New York Public Library, the main building within the UL is presented in a manner that shows that there is no hiding RSF's primary message—that, inevitably, the truth will find a way. In the opening room, a map of the building is displayed on the wall, followed by the message #truthfindsaway. The rest of the map highlights the work of journalists within all 180 of the countries ranked on the Press Freedom Index, with special rooms highlighting the work in five countries ranked at the bottom.

RSF focuses on providing a voice to contradict the forced silence of journalists from countries around the world. The Press Freedom Index ranks 180 countries in order of highest press freedom to lowest. Among the bottom-ranked are Mexico at 128, Belarus at 157, Russia at 164, Egypt at 166, Saudi Arabia at 170, Eritrea at 174, and China at 179. In these countries, the concept of freedom of speech is not recognized the way it is in the U.S. The Internet is heavily monitored, and in most cases opposition to the government is a punishable offense—making the job of journalists within these countries even more vital and also more dangerous. RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire acknowledges that “journalism is the best vaccine against misinformation” and applauds those who brave danger to report what is most needed—the full truth.

Once on the UL server, users can wander the map or access a specific country's “room.” They are then immersed in a space designed

to highlight the adversities faced by journalists within that country and, with the writers' consent, the original works of these writers. Just by clicking on one of the podiums labeled “English,” users can read the articles from journalists of that specific country translated into English. Alternatively, in the same room, virtual jukeboxes are available to allow users to listen to the articles read out loud in their original language. The Uncensored Library is not categorized by specific subject or author. Rather, it offers multiple unlabeled works and allows players to read and discover what each journalist believes so strongly in. While the premise of the UL is an impressive feat and a great starting point toward bringing attention to issues of censorship, the server has room to expand by providing specific coverage of topics such as the Tiananmen Square massacre—offering resources to be utilized as educational tools.

The beauty of the UL is its creative use of resistance to censorship. RSF is not simply sitting on the steps of these oppressive governments with picket signs and petitions, trying to change laws. Instead, like Stephen Duncombe's example of dancing on the streets in the *Cultural Resistance Reader*, the very act of rebellion, sharing once-censored works of journalists through alternative means of distribution, puts power back into the hands of the people, giving the public access to the truth. According to Blockworks' webpage in the Uncensored Library, the act of resistance through *Minecraft* “gained over 47.3 million impressions across social media, over 25 million visits to the library and resulted in a 62% increase in donations for our client, Reporters Without Borders.” By utilizing *Minecraft*, a resource that would not



normally include written works, RSF walks on the edge of legality in countries that heavily oppose giving freedom to the press to write about issues involving opposition to the viewpoint of the government.

RSF's act of resistance falls precisely in line with Duncombe's belief that "content and medium may carry a message, but the meaning and potential impact of the message lie dormant until interpreted by an audience" (7). Anyone with a *Minecraft* account, whatever their country of residence, race, gender, or other categorization, can join the server and access the UL. But, as Duncombe suggests, the use of this resource is only ever fully manifested in the hands of the oppressed. While a virtual library that contains banned works from journalists reporting on government affairs and general topics that face censorship is impressive, without an audience that cares and interacts with the works, the impressive feat remains useless. Simply put, if people don't get involved, nothing changes. RSF took the risk of potentially failing and overcame that risk. By utilizing *Minecraft*, a game popular with younger generations, the group was able to not just reach those who wished to read uncensored work within their countries, but also gain attention from children and teenagers.

Secondary websites such as YouTube and Reddit have also been vital in advertising the UL. Both content creators and the general population use these sources to review the server and give walk-throughs, spreading the mission of RSF to more than 20 million visitors who have since gained access to and therefore awareness of the pressing issues of oppression. RSF has managed to maneuver the work of journalists, an inte-

gral part of the public's understanding of the truth, through strict censorship guidelines and into the hands of readers. These readers interact with the works and are then able to form their own opinions, furthering the protest of censorship. Countries with strict censorship laws treat access to information as dangerous: when people become informed, they develop their own opinions and beliefs. This makes citizens harder to control. Some who have written pieces that violate these laws that are built to silence criticism have been persecuted or killed. Reporters like Khashoggi and the RSF believe in honoring the idea that freedom of speech is a right—not a privilege—for all.

By thinking outside of normal channels, Reporters Without Borders has achieved the challenging feat of spreading censorship awareness by moving once-banned journalism into the public sphere for those who need it most. This act of rebellion liberates the works of those whose oppression by censorship can force them into prison, career exile, and even death. Fighting for the freedom of the press honors those who have faced scrutiny and worse in the pursuit of truth for the public good.

#### Works Cited

- Reporters without Borders. "Who We Are?" <https://rsf.org/en/who-are-we#our-action-2848>.
- "The Uncensored Library." Blockworks, [www.blockworks.uk/the-uncensored-library](http://www.blockworks.uk/the-uncensored-library).
- The Uncensored Library. [uncensoredlibrary.com/en](http://uncensoredlibrary.com/en).
- Duncombe, Stephen. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. Verso, 2002.