

Reflections on the Importance of Independent Media

George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, allegorically entails Stalin's usurpation of government control through anthropomorphic animals seeking to establish order on a farm.¹ Squealer, serving as Napoleon's right hand and mouthpiece, declaimed propaganda and promulgated fabrications of reality around the farm. Misled, the animals of *Animal Farm* obviously submitted to Napoleon's exploitative rule. In due course, Napoleon was successful in eliminating other sources of information such as Snowball, considered to be the voice of truth. The animals' incapacitation of external knowledge through the exile of Snowball, and their naïvete enabled Napoleon to rise to power. This begs the question, had Snowball not been banished, would Napoleon have been able to instate his tyrannical rule? Orwell's narrative reveals a stunning truth to the influence of independent news sources and the outcomes without them. His book parallels faultlessly what happens when state media overtakes independent media.

In the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, President Mubarak's regime instituted various restrictions upon Egyptian media. A researcher at the Cairo Institute, Alexandra Dunn, stated "the Egyptian government swiftly modified and intensified its strategy of attacking media content and tools while simultaneously utilizing them for its own purposes."² Subsequently, Facebook and Twitter were banned, and at one point, Egyptian internet ceased.² Egyptian citizens' voices were consequently silenced in many regards by Mubarak's administration—although many apolitical and not involved in the conflict. Media transparency was abruptly and utterly lost. In many instances of state controlling the media, transparency is compromised as a result. For example, *Der Stürmer*, a Nazi publication, was used as a means of disseminating propaganda and vehement anti-semitism.³ Being that any non-government media was

¹ Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1945. Print.

² Dunn, Alexandra, M.A. "Unplugging a Nation: State Media Strategy During Egypt's January 25 Uprising." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 15th ser. 35.2 (2011). *The Fletcher School | Tufts University*. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.

³ Koonz, Claudia. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003. Print.

strictly prohibited, the citizens of Germany had no other material to indulge in. With zero transparency, mass manipulation becomes attainable, let alone plausible.

On the issue of population control, the absence of independent media leaves captive citizens vulnerable to state-fed messages. North Korea has mastered that art. An English teacher at Pyongyang University reminisced over her students' nescience, "[their] writing inevitably consisted of an endless repetition of [the Great Leader's] achievements, none of which was ever verified, since they lacked the concept of backing up a claim with evidence."⁴ Brainwashed by North Korean media, the students subserviently spat out lies as the authorities wished. It's quite astounding to witness North Korea's success in exploitation, simply rooted upon militarization and the lack of free press.

Deeply rooted in democracy is the 1st amendment, which advocates the freedom of the press.⁵ Jurist Hugo Black remarked "Criticism of government finds sanctuary in...the 1st amendment."⁶ Sans independent media democracy could not truly exist, nor could American citizens establish a society such as ours today. In fact, as Taiwan was democratized, restrictive official media control halted, and creative and opinion writings began to manifest.⁷ Summarizing, non-government news sources are rarely granted existence without close eyes from a watchdogging authority under a corrupt regime. However, those governments with the gift of independent press, explore a much greater society.

⁴ Kim, Suki. "What I Learned from Teaching English in North Korea." *Ideas | Ted*. Ted Conferences, LLC, 18 Mar. 2015. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.

⁵ "U.S. Constitution - Amendment 1 - The U.S. Constitution Online." *U.S. Constitution - Amendment 1*. USConstitution.net. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.

⁶ "Hugo Black." *Search Quotes*. Search Quotes. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.

⁷ Chen, Sheue Yun. "State, Media and Democracy in Taiwan." *Media, Culture & Society* 20.1 (1998): 11-29. *Sage Journals*. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.