

Singapore-style press control? Not in Fiji

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the International

Communication Gazette

2014, Vol. 76(3) 255–274

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DOI: 10.1177/1748048513516903

gaz.sagepub.com



Abstract

Constraints imposed on the press in Fiji under the 2010 Media Decree have been compared with the system of press control in Singapore. The two systems are, however, quite different. The type of hegemonic control that has been achieved in Singapore is unlikely to be replicated in Fiji. The press in Singapore was brought to heel over a period of decades through regulation, including licensing, and legal intimidation in a sophisticated system that utilizes corporate control to ensure that journalists exercise self-censorship. A military dictatorship in place in Fiji since 2006 instead criminalized journalism ethics in the Media Decree and has engaged in repression and censorship of journalists. Fiji's press system, and the regime's attempts to control it, were the subject of intense scrutiny in advance of elections planned for September 2014.

Keywords

Fiji media, hegemony, media development authority of Singapore act, Media Industry Development Decree 2010, Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (Singapore), press control systems, press freedom, Singapore media

Fiji has been wracked by a series of coups since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1970. Coups in 1987, 2000, and 2006 resulted from political instability brought by ethnic conflict between an indigenous Fijian majority and an Indo-Fijian minority. Recurring military dictatorships drew sanctions, including expulsion from the British Commonwealth. The regime that took over in a 2006 coup promised elections in 2009, but postponed them until 2014 because it claimed political reforms were necessary to ensure genuine democracy. One such reform was the 2010 Media Industry Development Decree (Media Decree), which has been compared to restrictive press legislation in Singapore (Dutt, 2010; Seke, 2010). The political system in Singapore has been seen as a model for other countries not just for the high level of economic development it brought, but also for the political and

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social stability which resulted. Despite regular elections, the People's Action Party (PAP) has held power continuously since Singapore gained independence in 1959. This continuity has allowed for the accomplishment of social and economic goals, noted Sim (2001: 47), because it has simplified the political process for government.

Its ability to push through tough policies without incurring crippling political costs is envied by Taiwan and Hong Kong. . . . Its unique combination of openness and regulation is also praised and studied by Chinese Premiers. . . . British PM [Tony] Blair also highlighted Singapore as the best illustration of the parallel achievement on economic success and social cohesion.

The political control exercised by the PAP in Singapore is widely seen as hegemonic because it relies not on coercion but on consensus (Castells, 1988; Sim, 2006; Tan, 2013). This article considers, through comparative analysis, whether hegemonic control similar to that in Singapore is the likely outcome in Fiji under the Media Decree.

Hegemonic control

Hegemony is a concept most often associated with the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci, who described it as 'the organization of consent' (Simon, 1991: 2). According to Gramsci (1971), the ruling class creates and perpetuates control in a hegemonic society not by force but through cultural means via organizations such as schools, mass media, the church, trade unions, and other state or civil associations. By controlling the agendas of these organizations, it creates a 'false consciousness' through which its preferred values and political choices are seen by the wider public as normal and natural. Control over the mass media is seen as a key to exercising this type of 'soft' power. Durst (2005: 175) noted that Gramsci used the term hegemony 'to focus attention on the determinate role of socio-cultural formations in sustaining relations of domination.'

In his eyes, a group maintains its supremacy not simply through the direct domination of the coercive state apparatus but also through the organized consent of the governed in civil society. The dominant group thus needs to resort to legal constraint only as a last line of defense, when in times of a crisis of authority the effective self-identification of the governed with the hegemonic formations breaks down.

In Singapore, hegemony has been achieved in large part through government control of the press, both domestic and foreign (George, 2012; Tey, 2008). This control has been accomplished through legislation, including a requirement for licensing of newspapers, and a compliant judiciary. Far from freedom of the press, according to George (2012), this has meant freedom 'from' the press for government politicians in Singapore. The effect, noted Tey (2008: 202), has been

that this system ‘protects the executive from the intrusions of a press deemed liable to obstruct the legitimate actions of the government.’

The press control regime rarely achieves this control by crude, repressive, or punitive coercion, although this symbolic power is kept in reserve and can be used when required. Instead, the press control regime performs its task more by a behind-the-scenes, corporate-like regulatory framework, adjusted and fine-tuned to achieve calibrated control. (Tey, 2008: 203)

Television broadcasting is controlled by the government through arm’s-length ownership, which obviates the need for legislative control. The main instrument of legislative control over the privately owned press in Singapore has been the 1974 Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA). Through licensing and other requirements, this legislation has succeeded in making the press an instrument of hegemonic control in Singapore. The Media Decree in Fiji, by contrast, does not require licensing but instead aims to control the press by regulating content. It also criminalizes the code of ethics previously adopted by the Fiji Media Council. Whether this measure will help to achieve in Fiji the type of hegemonic control seen in Singapore may depend in part on differences in the contexts in which the legislation was put in place. An examination of the similarities and differences in the Singapore context and that in Fiji thus follows.

Country comparison

Fiji and Singapore share several similarities but also exhibit some important differences. Both are island nations and former British colonies. Singapore has a population of about 5 million living on less than 700 square kilometers at the tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia. Fiji’s population of about 850,000 is spread out over more than 18,000 square kilometers of South Pacific islands north of New Zealand. Singapore gained its independence in 1963 and was a province of neighboring Malaysia for 2 years before becoming a sovereign nation. Lacking any natural resources—even its water supply has to be imported by pipeline from Malaysia—Singapore has nonetheless emerged as one of the ‘tiger economies’ of Asia. Situated on the main east–west world shipping route through the Straits of Malacca, Singapore leveraged its excellent natural harbor to become a center for world trade. It has also harnessed an impressive infrastructure and the industriousness of its workforce to become a world capital for information technology. Singapore’s rapid industrialization saw its per-capita GDP ranked 10th in the world by 2012, according to the International Monetary Fund, one spot ahead of the United States (International Monetary Fund, 2013).

Fiji gained independence from Great Britain in 1970, and its first 17 years of nationhood were relatively uneventful. A coup that followed the election of the country’s first Indo-Fijian prime minister in 1987, however, began a series of military takeovers and exposed deep ethnic tensions. Workers who had been brought

from India to work as indentured laborers in Fiji's sugarcane fields starting in the 19th century often stayed to raise families and start businesses, and by the 1940s the population of Indo-Fijians exceeded that of indigenous Fijians. The 1987 election saw the rise to power of the Fiji Labour Party, which was dominated by Indo-Fijians. That prompted the military, which was dominated by indigenous Fijians, to seize power. The suspension of democratic rule caused Fiji to be expelled from the British Commonwealth. A new constitution enacted in 1990 guaranteed political dominance by indigenous Fijians by allocating seats in Parliament in a race-based quota system. This increased emigration by Indo-Fijians and resulted in them becoming a minority (Premdas, 2002). Elections were again held in 1992, after which a new nonracial constitution was enacted in 1997. Fiji was readmitted to the Commonwealth, and in 1999 an Indo-Fijian prime minister again elected. This led to a civilian coup the following year, which was quashed by the military, led by Bainimarama. Elections in 2001 saw a government dominated by indigenous Fijians elected, but Bainimarama disapproved of some of its policies and claimed it was corrupt. He seized power in 2006. A court challenge found his coup illegal in 2009, after which Bainimarama abrogated the constitution and declared martial law, imposed press censorship, and suspended fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, and the press. Fiji was again expelled from the Commonwealth and also from the regional Pacific Islands Forum, which was dominated by Australia and New Zealand. Bainimarama promised elections in 2014 and, ruling by decree, enacted reforms he claimed were necessary to make 'genuine' democracy possible. In contrast to Singapore's economic success, however, Fiji suffers from high levels of poverty, ranking 123rd in per-capita GDP according to the International Monetary Fund (2013), behind Turkmenistan, Namibia, and the Republic of the Congo. Its main industries are sugarcane and tourism, but the latter has suffered badly as a result of political instability (Neubauer, 2013).

Singapore's economic success has been largely credited to the leadership of founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, who served in that post until 1990. A major component of Lee's nation building strategy was bringing to heel Singapore's press, which was dominated by expatriate journalists and had been harshly critical of his party's policies. As a result, the Singapore government moved to tightly control the country's media, for which it has been regularly criticized. Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) ranked Singapore last among developed economies in its 2013 Press Freedom Index (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2013). Freedom House (FH) awarded Fiji a press freedom score of 56 in 2013, which is only five points from its Not Free category (Freedom House, 2013). Fiji's ranking by FH fell sharply after its 2006 coup, before which its press had still been rated Free, with scores in the mid-20s. Its FH score worsened again after martial law was declared in 2009 and the Media Decree was enacted in 2010 (see Table 1).

Freedom of the press is theoretically guaranteed by Article 14 of Singapore's constitution, but it has been severely limited in practice. Along with prohibiting the publication of anything that would 'excite disaffection against the Government' or

Table 1. 2013 Press freedom rankings.

| | RSF rank | FH rank | FH score | FH category |
|------------------|----------|---------|----------|-------------|
| Fiji | 107 | 120 | 56 | Partly free |
| Singapore | 149 | 153 | 67 | Not free |
| Countries ranked | 179 | 197 | | |

Sources: Freedom House (2013); Reporters Sans Frontières (2013).

even ‘raise discontent or disaffection amongst the citizens of Singapore’. The Sedition Act (Singapore, 1964) prohibits the publication of anything that would ‘promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes’ (Sec. 3(1) e), or ‘excite disaffection against the Government’ (Sec. 3(1) a) or even ‘raise discontent or disaffection amongst the citizens of Singapore’ (Sec. 3(1) d). This proscription was the result of clashes between ethnic groups in the 1950s and 1960s. Singapore’s ethnic makeup is roughly 75% Chinese, 15% indigenous Malay, and 10% Tamil, whose ancestors were brought in as indentured workers from Sri Lanka. Freedom of the press was also guaranteed in Fiji by a constitution written by the military government and imposed in mid-2013, but a limiting clause specifically allowed for provisions of the 2010 Media Decree to remain in place. An independent commission tasked in 2012 with writing a fourth constitution for Fiji since nationhood in 1970 to replace the one abrogated in 2009 encountered resistance from the regime in the course of its consultations. The Kenyan chair of the commission, who insisted that restrictive laws such as the Media Decree would have to be repealed for the restoration of democracy, cited ‘massive interference’ and harassing emails from Bainimarama before a submitted draft was suppressed (Bhim, 2013).

Multicultural balance

Fiji and Singapore share a history of ethnic tensions that have occasionally boiled over into violence. Fiji has been described as ‘one of the world’s most ethnically polarized countries’ (Davies, 2005: 47). Before independence, anti-British sentiment had been displayed by both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, notably during a 1959 oil refinery strike which resulted in property damage but no deaths or injuries (Heartfield, 2002). Riots that attended coups in 1987, 2000, and 2006 saw violence committed mostly by indigenous Fijians against Indo-Fijians and their businesses (Field, 2010; Premdas, 2002; Reed and Dunn, 1987). The reforms instituted by the Bainimarama government following the 2006 coup included the 2009 Crimes Decree, which created a new indictable offence of spreading any report, including by the internet, which is likely to incite dislike or hatred or antagonism of any community (Callick, 2010).

Singapore saw race riots in 1950 and 1964 that resulted in the prohibition in the 1964 Sedition Act of the publication of material likely to inflame racial or religious

tensions. The power of the press to engender ethnic violence in Singapore was demonstrated in 1950, when newspaper coverage of a high-profile custody case between the natural European parents of a 13-year-old girl and her adoptive Malayan parents led to rioting by Muslims. Coverage of the case was sensational, with Malay-language newspapers framing it as a conflict between Christianity and Islam. Rioting broke out when the verdict was announced that the girl would be returned to her natural parents, and 18 people were killed. An inquiry blamed press coverage for inflaming racial and religious tensions (Turnbull, 1995). The case has ever since been cited as an exemplar of the need for responsibility by the press in covering racial and religious issues in Singapore (George, 2012). Race riots that broke out again in 1964 resulted in 36 deaths and brought a call for regulation to prevent the press from inciting race hatred, and such a provision was included in the 1964 Sedition Act. After Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965 over racial policies, the government banned the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper for fomenting Malay nationalism and restricted the circulation of other Malaysian newspapers (Turnbull, 1995).

Lee versus the press

Lee Kuan Yew waged a campaign against the dominant English-language daily, the *Straits Times*, even before his election as Singapore's first prime minister under home rule introduced in 1959. The newspaper had opposed both his PAP and its platform of union with Malaysia. At an election rally, the Cambridge-educated lawyer and union organizer issued the first of what would become a series of warnings to the press.

Any newspaper that tries to sour up or strain relations between the Federation and Singapore after May 30 will go in for subversion. Any editor, leader writer, subeditor, or reporter that goes along this line will be taken in under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance. We shall put him in and keep him in. (Lee, Quoted in Hoffman (1959: 1))

In a front-page editorial, the editor of the *Straits Times* claimed that 'not since the Japanese conquered this island in Feb 1942, has the press of Singapore faced such a grave threat as it does today' (Hoffman, 1959). In a letter to the editor, Lee claimed he was only referring to the foreign-owned press.

We of the PAP believe just as zealously in the freedom of the press. If locally-owned newspapers criticize us, we know that their criticism, however wrong or right, is bona fide criticism because they must stay and take the consequences of any foolish policies or causes they may have advocated. (Lee, quoted in Seow (1998: 17))

In 1971, Lee accused the Chinese-language newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* of promoting communism and fomenting racial unrest by criticizing a decline in

Chinese-language education. Four employees of the newspaper were arrested under the Internal Security Act. Lee then accused the English-language *Eastern Sun* of receiving communist funds from Hong Kong to engage in covert operations, or 'black ops.' It soon closed after its senior staff quit. The newly created *Singapore Herald* criticized these moves, so Lee withdrew all government advertising from its pages and revoked its government press credentials. Other newspapers in the region rallied to assist the *Herald* by sending journalists to replace expatriates who had their work visas revoked. The *Hong Kong Standard* pledged a half million dollars to support the *Herald*. Lee summoned the publisher of the *Standard* to a press conference at the Singapore airport, along with her bankers from New York City. He demanded to know the source of the funds, and he convinced the Chase Manhattan bank to cut off funding for the *Herald*. This tactic backfired on Lee, as public sympathy and a resulting 'Save the Herald' campaign saw its circulation quadruple. Lee won in the end, however, when the government withdrew the newspaper's publishing license and expelled its newly unemployed expatriate journalists (Seow, 1998; Turnbull, 1995). According to George (2007a), Lee miscalculated when he assumed that the *Nanyang Siang Pau* would be silenced by the arrests, and when it continued its criticism it precipitated a crisis of credibility for the government.

Singapore press laws

Newspaper licensing was a legacy of colonialism that Singapore inherited from Great Britain in the form of the 1920 Printing Presses Act, but this authoritarian control would become even more harshly applied under Lee (Ang, 2002). In a 1973 speech to the annual Press Club dinner, the prime minister issued another warning.

Every morning my task begins by reading five—four now—newspapers. And it's a tiresome business. I note the scurrilous, the scandalous. I can live with that. But when any newspaper pours a daily dose of language, cultural, or religious poison, I put my knuckle-dusters on as the first stage. If you still continue, then I say here are the stilettos, choose your weapons. (Lee, quoted in (Seow, 1998: 106))

Within months, the government announced the NPPA, under which all newspaper companies were required to convert from private ownership to public ownership and to trade their shares on the stock market. The act required that all directors of newspaper companies in Singapore be citizens of Singapore and also prohibited foreign funding of newspaper corporations without government approval. Only Singaporeans and corporations approved by the government were deemed eligible to hold management shares, which controlled editorial policy. A percentage of management shares was required to be held by government-controlled companies, which placed representatives on their boards of directors and at the heads of their executive committees (Tsun, 2008). At times, these representatives have included the prime minister's former press

secretary and the former head of Singapore's secret service. In 1977, the act was amended to restrict ownership of shares by any one person to 3% (George, 2007a).

The early 1980s saw a series of government measures that led to the creation of a newspaper monopoly. This transformation of the Singapore press was prompted by the PAP's loss of a seat in parliament in a 1981 by-election. The government, which had won all seats in the previous three general elections dating to 1968, blamed press coverage. In 1982, the *Nanyang Siang Pau* was forced to merge with another Chinese-language daily, the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, to form *Zaobao*, a broadsheet whose online edition is now the most widely read Chinese language newspaper site in the world (Ang, 2007). The newspaper became the cornerstone of Singapore News and Publications Ltd (SNPL) (Turnbull, 1995). In 1984, a merger between the Straits Times group and SNPL was announced, leading journalists to demonstrate in protest of the consolidation of all Singapore newspapers into one publishing company. The government denied it was behind the move, but according to a former Singapore solicitor general (Seow, 1998: 123), 'Lee's fingerprints could be seen all over the merger agreement.' Singapore Press Holdings began trading on the Singapore stock exchange as the country's sixth-largest listed company, its largest industrial group, and its only monopoly. MediaCorp, which owns 80% of broadcast outlets in Singapore, is wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, an investment company owned by the government.

After achieving dominance over its domestic press by the mid-1980s, the Singapore government then moved against the foreign press, which had become popular in Singapore and had begun to report on domestic issues (Tsun, 2008). It did so by amending the NPPA to enable the government to restrict sales of foreign publications deemed to be interfering with domestic politics (George, 2007a). *Time*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, and the *Economist* soon were 'gazetted' and had their circulations limited after they refused to publish unedited replies by the government to articles critical of Singapore's policies. In 1990, the Act was amended again to require licensing of foreign newsweeklies that sold more than 300 copies in Singapore. Hong Kong-based *Media* magazine, which covered the advertising business, reduced its circulation in Singapore from 1,500 to 299 as a result (Wallace, 1995).

Foreign media outlets have also been fined for criticizing Singapore's judiciary. *Newsweek* magazine and two of its employees were fined S\$1,500 for contempt of court in 1974 for observing that some rulings suggested that the courts were 'little more than extensions of the one-party system' (Tsun, 2008: 902). The *Asian Wall Street Journal* was fined S\$9,000 in 1991 for contempt of court over an article that suggested the judiciary in Singapore was biased in a defamation ruling against the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Tsun, 2008). A commentary in the *International Herald Tribune* that suggested Singapore's leaders relied on a compliant judiciary to bankrupt opposition politicians resulted in fines for contempt of court totaling S\$20,500 in 1995 (Thomas, 1995). Lawsuits for defamation over the same article brought by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and former prime minister Lee Kuan

Yew were settled out of court for US\$678,000 and US\$214,285 respectively (Glaberson, 1995). As a result, according to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *International Herald Tribune* stopped printing articles critical of Singapore (Wallace, 1995). The *Asian Wall Street Journal* was fined for contempt of court again in 2008, this time a record S\$25,000, over an article that questioned large damage awards for defamation levied against opposition politicians who suggested PAP leaders were corrupt (Anonymous, 2008a). The Internal Security Act, which allowed for detention without trial, has also been used against journalists, as has the Official Secrets Act. Five defendants were fined a total of S\$21,000 under the Official Secrets Act in 1994 after the *Business Times* published an estimate of the country's economic growth rate from a leaked government document (Goad, 1994). A relevant fact about the most draconian legislation in Singapore—the Internal Security Act, the Sedition Act, and the Official Secrets Act—is their rare deployment against the press, noted Tsun (2008: 883).

Singapore's elaborate press control regime performs its role not so much by crude and illiberal control but through political and punitive coercion Within a framework where the political leadership's first priority is to win the arguments to gain acceptance and consent, these repressive laws serve more as a deterrent backup and a potent symbol.

OB markers

The PAP's tight grip on media in Singapore has allowed it to retain political power continuously since 1959. Elections are a foregone conclusion because opposition parties, knowing they have no chance to defeat the PAP at the polls, never nominate enough candidates to win the election, hoping at best for a few candidates to be elected in a protest vote. This is largely a result of the fact that the press is discouraged from covering opposition politicians. According to George (2007b: 901), the Singapore media did not publish photographs showing crowd sizes at opposition political rallies for more than 20 years.

If such photographs or video footage were used, they would show upwards of 10,000 thronging some opposition rallies with only a few hundred showing up at PAP events The consistent refusal by all newspapers and broadcasters to use any wide-angle images of rally crowds could hardly be anything other than a politically motivated blackout.

The *Straits Times* finally ended the two-decade blackout late in the 2006 Singapore election campaign, but only after the pictures were published online by bloggers. The concession, noted George (2007b: 901) 'did little to ameliorate the perception of bias' on the part of the *Straits Times*. Politics is not even an allowable topic for press coverage in Singapore, as journalists are discouraged from

covering public policy issues. After *Straits Times* columnist Catherine Lim was critical of the government in 1994 for a lack of promised consultation and for large pay rises given to senior ministers, then-prime minister Goh Chok Tong responded that she should enter politics if she wished to comment on government policy (Chua, 1994). According to Lee (2006: 67), Goh's rejoinder to Lim was the first use of what are known in Singapore as 'OB markers,' which denote what is 'out of bounds' for acceptable political discourse. 'The PAP summons the use of OB-markers to publicly rebuke political transgressors or "trouble-makers," a tactic that is highly effective in a society where "face" is of utmost importance.' In refusing to delineate the OB markers, noted Lee (2006: 67), the government often uses them retroactively, thus achieving 'a sophisticated mode of auto-regulation to enforce mass subjugation and discipline.'

'Calibrated' coercion

Control of the domestic press in Singapore is subtle and sophisticated and relies on a legislative mechanism that has been constantly refined over a period of decades. It is a system that has no need for censorship because it coerces journalists into censoring themselves. Self-censorship by journalists has thus been called 'Singapore's shame' (Gomez, 1999). George (2007a) has described the system of press control in Singapore as 'calibrated coercion.' Recourse to draconian measures such as the Internal Security Act or the Sedition Act by the government, notes George (2007a: 135), might risk 'stripping the consensual aspect of its rule and exposing the raw coercive power underneath.' Instead of censoring, jailing, or fining journalists to bring the press into line, the government has crafted a framework of ownership and management control that has turned the Singapore press into 'willing ideological vehicles of the state' (George, 2007a: 135). 'Even as it maintains and updates its arsenal of coercive powers, the Singapore government appears to have committed itself to the principle of strategic self-restraint, calibrating its coercion to get the job done with as little force as necessary' (George, 2007a: 135).

The legislation that brought the press in Singapore firmly under the thumb of the ruling PAP was the NPPA, which was periodically amended to remove any possibility of challenging the government's hegemony. Its amendments, according to Tsun (2008: 890), created a 'much more sophisticated regulatory framework against the press—far beyond the imagination and contemplation of politicians and the citizens in 1974.' The creation of management shares, according to Tsun (2008: 886), was an idea that 'worked so well in terms of achieving the desirable level of calibrated control that the political leadership found no reason to resort to using the Internal Security Act.' By employing a 'sophisticated idea from corporations law,' the influence of government could infiltrate to the highest level of the corporate entities it had created. 'Management shares allocated to banks and other establishment figures... served as a critical mechanism for the government to influence a newspaper's workings without directly interfering with ownership and provided effective control of the board and top editorial positions' (Tsun, 2008: 885).

While the NPPA retained the trump card of licensing approval, according to George (2007a: 135), its mandated public ownership and subsequent refinements qualify as nothing less than ‘unique legislative innovations of subtle genius.’ By shifting the burden to the press to practice self-censorship, noted George, critics tended to blame the newspapers instead of the regulatory system under which they publish. ‘This is quite unlike 1971, when, as the “Save the *Herald*” campaign demonstrated, critics viewed newspapers as victims of government repression’ (George, 2007a: 135).

The PAP has achieved effective guidance of the press without either nationalizing ownership or brutalizing journalists Not all these stakeholders are happy with the system, all of the time. However, none of them has been so unhappy as to opt out of it entirely. (George, 2007a: 135)

Public trading of newspaper company shares meant that the PAP did not have to deal with powerful press-owning families like the one that owned the *Nanyang Siang Pau*. The creation of management shares to be held by government nominees, noted George (2007a: 135), also institutionalized a ‘mechanism for the government to influence a newspaper’s editorial direction without totally subverting the market.’

Fiji media

After the country’s first few coups, some in Fiji believed that the news media were largely to blame for the political instability. According to Robie (2003: 104), ‘Many powerful institutions, such as the Methodist Church in Fiji, and politicians in the Pacific believe there is no place for a Western-style free media and it should be held in check by Government legislation.’ Specific complaints against the Fiji press included sensationalism, racism, and a lack of training and professionalism (Robie, 2003). Starting in the mid-1990s, three successive governments promised media reform (Robie, 2004). In the late 1990s, the UK-based Thomson Foundation studied Fiji’s media and found instances of poorly researched or insensitive reporting and unbalanced writing (Robie, 2009). It recommended that a Media Council, funded by media industry members and including public representatives, be established to replace the existing Press Council that it found ineffective. It also recommended that the country’s numerous journalism codes of ethics be combined into one. As a result, a Fiji Media Council was formed that included an independent complaints committee. Successive governments, however, criticized it as ineffective (Robie, 2004). Following the 2000 coup, the government introduced a draft Media Control Bill that would have turned the self-regulatory Fiji Media Council into a statutory body, with the government appointing most of its members. It also would have turned the existing Media Code of Ethics into a legal regulation, albeit one without enforcement powers (Naidu, 2003). The draft bill encountered resistance from journalists but received little public comment (Robie, 2004). It was not passed

into law, according to the *Fiji Times*, 'partly as a result of political pressure from the media' (Panapasa, 2008).

Following the 2006 military takeover, the Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) ordered a report on the press in Fiji which consulted individuals, political parties, government ministers, nongovernment organizations, judges, church leaders, and trade unionists in 2007. Most media outlets refused to participate in the consultation process, however, because they considered the FHRC to be pro-regime and the report's author, Fijian-born University of Hawaii political scientist James Anthony, to be biased. The review was supported, according to Robie (2009: 86), by 'some critics seeking greater fairness and balance.' The report was harshly critical of Fiji's news media and the Media Council. Despite knowing of public dissatisfaction with its operations for a decade, according to Anthony, the press in Fiji had done little to change and had instead sought 'refuge in the concept of media freedom to defy public scrutiny of their hegemonies of operations' (Anthony, 2008: 37). The report noted that many were critical of the English language press, which on some important issues was seen to have 'a point of view, an ideological predisposition, an apparent private agenda that has destructive consequences for a brittle, heterogenous society such as Fiji is' (Anthony, 2008: 45). It also noted a wide gulf between the press and Bainimarama's military regime.

The relationship between the media . . . and the present interim government and large sections of the English language reading public is, in my view, 'irretrievably broken' [as] is the relationship between the media and important sectors of the people of Fiji. (Anthony, 2008: 33–34)

The report noted the testimony of one anonymous 'informant' within the interim government who blamed the 1987 coup on 'very misleading, religion-driven, racial incitement' by the media. 'Much was *created* by the media. The media, in short, particularly the English language print medium and its appendages, were engaged in the dark arts of inventing reality' (Anthony, 2008: 56). This person told Anthony that the military had undertaken an analysis of the media's role in polarizing Fiji's races.

The power of the media was found to be in the hands of about eight whites (mostly expatriates) operating in the shadows, acting in concert as members of a private club, deciding not only what to print, but also what *not* to print. (Anthony, 2008: 56)

Another informant, in what Anthony called 'perhaps the most thorough submission made to the inquiry,' detailed 'abuse piled upon abuse by the media.'

The person submitting argued that the time for talk is over and government must now step in. He argued for a Singapore-style intervention . . . for a Media Tribunal with

strong powers, capable of delivering swift and severe sanctions where appropriate. (Anthony, 2008: 42)

Self-regulation by the Media Council had failed, according to Anthony, and the method of selecting its members, he wrote, 'simply smells' (Anthony, 2008: 40). His inquiry, Anthony concluded, had revealed that 'the people of Fiji want an exposé of the violation by the media industry of their right to a free and independent media' (Anthony, 2008: 94). The report recommended establishment of a Media Tribunal independent of government control to hear complaints against the media and a Media Development Authority patterned after one in Singapore. Such a body would also organize training to raise the standard of news reporting and meet the need for technical expertise; build cooperation between government, media, and public; and develop a program of community broadcasting. The activities of the Media Tribunal and the Media Development Authority, it recommended, should be funded by a 7% tax on media revenues. The report also recommended legislation to penalize 'publication or broadcast of any material that can incite sedition or that is in breach of the Public Order Act' (Anthony, 2008: 97). It urged that no work permits for expatriates in the media industry be renewed and that no further work permits be issued. It also recommended that further attention be paid to foreign control and interlocking directorships of Fijian media organizations. The report was released shortly after the publisher of the *Fiji Sun* was deported because the interim government claimed he was a danger to national security after the *Sun* published an investigation into overseas bank accounts held by the finance minister (Anonymous, 2008b). The Anthony report's findings and recommendations received almost universal condemnation in the media, and its author was accused of racism. 'What does skin colour have to do with media freedom or how media organisations here operate,' asked one media executive. 'There are not many expatriates in the media industry anyway and we only bring in expats because we cannot find the necessary skills needed for the job here' (Anonymous, 2008c).

2010 Fiji media decree

Shortly after the Anthony report was released in 2008, relations between the press and Fiji's military regime deteriorated. Within a week, the Attorney-General warned the publisher of the *Fiji Times* against publishing a planned article (Vunileba, 2008). Two months later, Bainimarama met with the Fiji Media Council, according to the *Fiji Times*, and complained that 'the media hates him and his administration.' The *Times* reported that the prime minister 'called on the media to be pro-Fiji and likened it to Singapore media, not pro this government or any government but pro-Fiji nation' (Anonymous, 2008d). Two months later, the government announced that all existing media laws, including those in the Constitution and the Public Order Act, as well as various media codes of ethics, would be incorporated into a new Media Promulgation (Matau, 2008). A

constitutional challenge to the 2006 coup was upheld by Fiji's High Court in 2009, however, prompting Bainimarama to abrogate the constitution, dissolve parliament, sack the judiciary, and impose martial law, including censorship. Martial law and censorship remained in place until early 2012.

Near the end of 2009, the government announced consultations on a new Media Decree, but planned at first to exclude the country's two largest media organizations from the process. The *Fiji Times* and Fiji TV would not be consulted, a statement from the prime minister's office announced, because 'they have demonstrated through their perverse publication and broadcast respectively that they do not recognise the contemporary Fijian legal system, the status of the Bainimarama government, are partisan and not Fiji focused' (Anonymous, 2009). That plan for exclusion was later reversed, but media organizations were given only a few hours to review the proposed Media Decree before giving their input (Anonymous, 2010). In addition to creating a one-member Media Tribunal and a five-member Media Industry Development Authority, the Media Decree sharply limited cross ownership and foreign ownership of Fiji media. The latter provision required the owner of the *Fiji Times*, Australia-based News Limited, to sell 90% ownership in the newspaper to local interests. The Media Decree also provided for fines of up to F\$1,000 for journalists found in contravention of former ethical guidelines, up to F\$25,000 for publishers or editors, and up to F\$100,000 for media organizations (Foster, 2010; Singh, 2010).

One analysis found the Fiji Media Industry Development Authority established by the Media Decree to be very similar to Singapore's Media Development Authority, which was set up in 2003. The power vested in the minister responsible for the appointment and dismissal of each authority was found to be almost identical, as were the functions and powers of each authority. Both the Media Decree and the 2003 Media Development Authority of Singapore Act, the analysis noted, protected their respective authority from liabilities and empowered officials of the authority to demand documents from journalists and news organizations. The courts in each country, it noted, were given similar powers to impose sanctions on journalists and news organizations. Differences noted in Fiji's Media Decree included its use of existing media codes to establish guidelines for journalistic behavior, its establishment of a Media Tribunal to handle complaints, and the ability of parties to a complaint to challenge rulings of the Tribunal in the Fiji Court of Appeal. 'Overall, the decree was drafted in the same vein as the Singapore Act and many of the sections were copied word-for-word by the Fiji decree' (Dutt, 2010: 86). This analysis was mistaken, however, as were those who assumed that Fiji's system of media control was patterned along the lines of that in Singapore. Wording of Fiji's Media Decree may be similar to legislation in Singapore, but its scope was considerably broader. The Singapore Media Development Authority, which replaced the Singapore Broadcasting Authority, regulated only broadcasting and online media, while the press was regulated by the NPPA, which regulated ownership rather than content.

Comparability of control

The 'genius' of Singapore's sophisticated and subtle press control system, according to George (2012: 30) is that it turned the country's newspapers into 'non-adversarial establishment institutions' by forcing them to trade on the stock market. This cleverly used the business model of the press against it and provided for enduring 'market' censorship. 'The PAP's introduction of the NPPA showed its intuitive grasp of neoliberalism, even before the phenomenon had been identified and named' (George, 2012: 45) The PAP, noted George, harnessed the global trend toward commercialization of the press to tame its democratic purpose. Singapore is thus the archetype of a growing group of states that promote capitalism by dampening democracy. Such neoliberal regimes, noted George (2012), are suspicious of democracy and prefer rule by elites. A pattern of suppression and co-option was seen in the PAP's treatment of not just Singapore's press, added George (2012), but also of its students, churches, and trade unions. Dissidents were first neutralized by using the Internal Security Act, which allowed for detention without trial for 2 years. Specific legislation was then passed, using the PAP's monopoly on political power, in order to stem dissent. 'Finally, it co-opts and rewards those who are prepared to partner the PAP in its nation-building movement' (George, 2012: 99). Coercion, in the form of license denial or withdrawal of government advertising, was used in addition to detaining journalists, but the use of overt repression was limited in this system because it tended to erode the legitimacy of authority. The 'paradox' in this system, according to George (2012: 114), was the PAP's use of illiberal methods to entrench itself and restructure the media system, but its setting of self-enforced limits on coercion. An important feature of this system, noted George (2012: 116), was the use of 'meta-censorship,' or the suppression of instances of censorship by regulators who required media to 'keep mum about instructions they receive.'

The regime in Fiji used several of the same tactics, but seemingly without setting limits on its use of coercion, which reduced the likelihood of it achieving hegemonic control. The seizure of political power through military force was followed by using its monopoly power to regulate the media by promulgating the Media Decree. Several years after it came into force, little information had emerged about complaints made under the Media Decree and their disposition, despite calls for transparency. A TV Decree enacted in 2012 permitted the minister responsible for communication to revoke the license of any television station found to have contravened the Media Decree. The TV Decree was enacted shortly after Fiji TV aired interviews with two former prime ministers about the ongoing constitutional review and was reportedly warned by the regime that its 12-year broadcasting license might not be renewed (Ashdown, 2012). Fiji TV's broadcasting license was subsequently renewed, but for only 6 months at a time. The State Proceedings (Amendment) Decree, which was also enacted in 2012, shielded government ministers from defamation lawsuits. Trade unions were hampered by provisions of the 2011 Essential Industries Decree, and the country's powerful Methodist church was prevented for several years from holding its annual meetings.

The lifting of martial law in 2012 was seen as a positive step toward democracy, but it was quickly followed by enactment of the Public Order (Amendment) Decree, which restricted many of the freedoms that had been limited by martial law (Foster, 2012). Academics who criticized the Fiji regime were removed from their teaching positions (Ashdown, 2011). A Political Parties Decree enacted in early 2013 gave existing parties that planned to field candidates in the 2014 elections only 4 weeks to register under strict conditions, prohibited them from accepting donations from businesses or NGOs, and banned union officials from leading them (Callick, 2013a). That resulted in 14 of the 17 parties being dissolved, and the decree was amended to provide for fines and prison sentences of up to 5 years for executives of media organizations that even referred to a former political party (Callick, 2013b). Government advertising was withdrawn from the *Fiji Times*, which had been critical of the regime, but it appeared in the pro-regime *Fiji Sun*, and the favoritism was estimated to be worth millions of dollars. The *Times* was also fined F\$300,000 for contempt of court in 2013 for publishing an article on soccer reprinted from a New Zealand newspaper that questioned the independence of the country's judiciary, most of which had been imported from Sri Lanka (Lagan, 2013). The end result of the military government's media-related decrees and intimidation, noted several observers, was rampant self-censorship by journalists (Bhim, 2013; Hooper, 2013; United Kingdom, 2013; U.S. Department of State, 2013). According to online edition of *Time's* magazine, 'Fiji's once-dynamic press has been reduced to a docile government mouthpiece since the army seized power in a 2006 coup' (Neubauer, 2013).

Not only did the regime reject the draft constitution that recommended the restoration of human rights, it seized several hundred copies that had been ordered printed by the head of the constitution commission and burned some in front of him (Callick, 2013c). Contents of the draft constitution were quickly leaked online, however. Bainimarama also cancelled a planned 'constituent assembly' that would have vetted the government-written constitution, which was instead simply imposed. According to the *Economist*, by eliminating public discussion of the constitution, Bainimarama had 'blown his chance to preside over the creation of a new political order that is durable and legitimate' (Anonymous, 2013). Equally damaging to the regime's image, which it hired a U.S.-based public relations company to manage, was the posting online in early 2013 of a video depicting a beating administered to two escaped prisoners. Stories of beatings by the country's security forces, including of journalists and political dissidents, were common in Fiji, but the video revealed such abuse to viewers worldwide. Far from denouncing the beatings, Bainimarama promised to stand behind his men if they were identified from the video (Siegel, 2013).

Conclusions

Singapore's system of political control is hegemonic because it is based not on coercion but on the consent of citizens and even journalists. As George (2012:

201) observed: 'The PAP has mastered the concept of hegemony: while coercion underwrites PAP domination, consent is the main medium of political transaction.' George (2012: 202) described the continually refined system of political control in Singapore as 'networked hegemony' because it mitigated the traditional vulnerability of dictatorships—a lack of information—by seeking feedback from stakeholders and adjusting its policies accordingly. The PAP has thus found a way to entrench its authority and 'buck the global democratic trend' (George, 2012: 201). Fiji's system of control, on the other hand, is based more on coercion than on consensus. The military dictatorship there has not only shown a lack of restraint in its use of coercion, but it has also shown a high-handed disregard for consultation, which may lead to a low level of acceptance of measures it has enacted. Far from seeking or manufacturing consent, the regime in Fiji instead isolated itself from stakeholders and even rejected input it had solicited, such as from the constitution commission.

While Singapore's system of political control is sophisticated, Fiji's is crude. It is doubtful whether Singapore's system of control could work in Fiji, or in any other country that lacks the unique characteristics of Singapore. George (2007a) listed Singapore's small geographic size, economic success, low unemployment, and high standard of living as factors that enabled the government to control its press without significant public dissent. Fiji's low standard of living, high unemployment, and unique political, historical, and cultural antecedents make it an unlikely candidate to replicate Singapore's hegemony. The main factor preventing such a system from being achieved in Fiji, however, may be simply a lack of enlightened leadership.

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