

## **Chilling or Cosy Effects? Zimbabwean journalists' experiences and the struggle for definition of self-censorship**

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### **Abstract**

The definition of censorship denotes direct or overt restriction on free expression or freedom of the media. The popular understanding of self-censorship involves a person's involuntary self-silencing. A journalist's wilful, personal, intentional self-censorship, at times motivated by selfish motives, is often overlooked especially when there is complicit acceptance of political perspective or financial interest, or normalization/naturalization of unethical practices. Systems and ideologies can condition individuals to self-censor using what Louis Althusser has termed Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses, including interpellation. The Zimbabwean Crisis that has resulted in the polarization of Zimbabwean media along political lines demands an evaluation of the notion of self-censorship. Instead of merely focusing on the involuntary nature of self-censorship, there is need to assess instances when journalists self-censor and selfishly comply with political and commercial interests at the expense of serving the lofty ideals of the public good and public interest. Numerous examples exist where Zimbabwean journalists were abused and their rights violated leading to the adoption of self-preservation by such journalists and others when faced with the choice of whether to write or not to write, to tell or not tell. However, journalists are systematically recruited into party and commercial systems, and they have comfortably adopted a cosy demeanour to the extent of collaborating with powerful interest groups and formations. When journalists self-censor not because of fear of violence or threats or other safety concerns, it undermines the transcendental ideal of providing information as a public good and in the public/national interest.