



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**SELF-CENSORSHIP  
AMONG PRINT JOURNALISTS  
IN ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT  
MEDIA**

BY  
NEBIYU YONAS

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## **ABSTRACT**

In Ethiopia, where democracy is in its infancy and where press freedom is clearly stipulated but not freely implemented, journalists practice self-censorship. This, in fact, is a fairly typical experience for many journalists in many parts of the world.

This particular research focuses on how Ethiopian journalists in state-owned print media censor themselves and why they do so. The study also discusses how such self-censorship impacts news articles and various stories and how this affects freedom of speech and of the press. This study employed questionnaires and individual in-depth interviews, using the snowball sampling method. Data were also thematically analyzed based on related literature reviews and interview responses.

Journalists, both editors and reporters working in Ethiopian government media outlets, practice self-censorship, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally. They define self-censorship differently, depending on their experiences and perceptions. Practicing self-censorship, they said, can be useful or harmful and even both, depending on issues reported, the situation, and the potential impact on the public.

This study also indicates that journalists censor themselves mainly for political reasons but also for religious, cultural, economic and ethnic reasons, and out of fear of bosses, editors and government officials. They also practice self-censorship to be safe and to preserve jobs.

# ACRONYMS

AP	Associated Press
CJR	Columbia Journalism Review
CPJ	The Committee to Protect Journalists
ENA	Ethiopian News Agency
EPA	Ethiopian Press Agency
PRCPP	Pew Research Center for the People and the Press
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontières

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and statement of the problem

Self-censorship exists to various degrees in media organizations all over the world. For many reasons, journalists censor themselves in producing news and other kinds of stories. As a result, they may, consciously or unconsciously, withhold information and reshape the content of such stories.

Self-censorship is commonly defined as the “conscious suppression of one’s ability, right, or freedom to express oneself” ([www.bookrags.com](http://www.bookrags.com)). According to Kasoma, media self-censorship “is based on fear of persecution, which either the journalist or her/his close associate(s) have experienced” (2000: 93).

Many professionals – film producers, film directors, book publishers, authors, musicians – practice self-censorship. But journalists, in particular, are often accused of self-censorship because they face serious repercussions for swift and controversial reporting. Like media organizations elsewhere, private and state media in Ethiopia practice self-censorship when producing news.

This study investigates self-censorship and its causes in three media organizations owned by the state and run by the government: *Addis Zemen*, the *Ethiopian Herald*, and the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA). While examining self-censorship in the Ethiopian context, the study also considers how freedom of the press, in Africa and elsewhere, may affect the degree and kinds of self-censorship. Sources in Ethiopia and in Africa are used, wherever possible, though some references must be to Western media, where the bulk of media analysis occurs. The Western context will also dominate discussion of media freedom. To wit;

The concept of media freedom covers both the degree of freedom enjoyed by the media and the degree of freedom and access of citizens to media content. The essential norm is that media should have certain independence, sufficient to protect free and open public expression of ideas and information. The second part of the issue

raises the question of diversity, a norm that opposes concentration of ownership and monopoly of control, whether on the part of the state or private media industries. (McQuail, 2000:3 in Becker et al.)

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The study has both general and specific objectives. Generally, the research aims to explain the practice of self-censorship in Ethiopian state-run print media. Specifically, the study's objectives are:

1. To identify the journalists' understanding of self-censorship.
2. To examine the causes of self-censorship in news production.
3. To investigate how self-censorship affects news production.

## **1.3 Research questions**

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What does self-censorship mean to print journalists?
2. What are the causes of self-censorship in news production?
3. How does self-censorship shape or influence news produced by Ethiopian print journalists?

## **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The study focuses only on state-owned media, particularly *Addis Zemen*, the *Ethiopian Herald* and the Ethiopian News Agency. Journalists at these state publications, including the country's oldest and widest circulating publications may practice self-censorship due to pressure from the government.

## **1.5 Limitations of the study**

These are some of the constraints that the researcher faced:

- The study excluded private media outlets due to time constraint.
- The study examined self-censorship, not any other form of censorship.
- Some respondents did not fully complete the questionnaires.
- Some respondents were reluctant to state their views openly. Thus, the identification of interviewees is not given and their specific responses kept anonymous.

- Written material on self-censorship in Ethiopia was difficult to find.
- Transcribing and translating recorded interviews was time-consuming.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Self-censorship has been discussed and debated by scholars throughout the world. Even though a number of theses have been written about the Ethiopian media, only a few have touched upon self-censorship. These include Gezahegn's (2007), 'Music censorship in contemporary Ethiopia'; Hailegebriel's (2005), 'Ethical issues in news reporting and broadcasting with particular reference to the Ethiopian Herald newspaper'; Getachew's (2006), 'A study of source consideration and news selection in Ethiopian Television'; and Solomon's (2005), 'Censorship and ethics: Practices and problems in Ethiopian Television'. This study will expand this rare research, examine self-censorship more deeply, and perhaps spur more academic studies.

The study may also be useful:

- for other researchers who would like to understand media self-censorship in Ethiopia.
- for those who set public policy affecting the media and media issues.
- for media organizations eager to shape public policy.

## **1.7 Organization of the study**

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One outlines the study's general background and research objectives. It also describes the study's significance and limitations. Chapter Two deals with the theory and scholarly opinions underpinning the study. Here, the study attempts to define self-censorship, and why and how it is practiced generally in Africa and particularly in Ethiopia. The chapter also discusses two important theories that frame the study: gatekeeping and social control. Chapter Three describes the study's methods, briefly discussing the triangulation approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research. The study relies mainly on in-depth interviews of journalists, which means editors and reporters. However, questionnaires also probed journalists' attitudes towards self-censorship.

Chapter Four deals with the study's finding and analysis in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The chapter also examines themes emerging from data gathered through in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Chapter Five discusses the study's summary and conclusions and presents issues for further studies.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Self-censorship defined**

Scholars define self-censorship in different ways, often depending on geography. According to Kasoma, “One of the most abhorrent forms of censorship, which hounds the press in Africa, is self-censorship. [...] Self-censorship is based on fear of persecution, which either the journalist or her/his close associate(s) have experienced” (Kasoma, 2000: 93). Aidan White, general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists,

adds: “Living and working in conditions of fear, poverty or employment insecurity, journalists often submit to self-censorship, the most corrosive and insidious form of censorship of all” (cited in Reportage Media Bulletin, summer 1996/97). Self-censorship describes fear sensed by media practitioners themselves or colleagues in the process and gathering news. Some fear politicians (Solomon, 2005:9). This fear may link to press freedom or lack of press freedom directly or indirectly and to freedom of expression.

### **2.2 Types of self-censorship**

Journalists in all Ethiopian media may practice:

#### **2.2.1 Self-censorship guided by the media organization’s editorial policy**

Ethiopia’s state-owned media endorse and circulate the same editorial policy, which its editors and reporters are required to follow. This may require selective reporting of facts and stories, which is a form of self-censorship. As Cronau says:

The process of self-censorship can develop in journalists from an internalizing of the values of the news organization in which they work. Over time, through training and a form of socialization, journalists develop a set of news values, an ability to know what makes for good news and what doesn’t. That set of values is absorbed from the news values of their media organization, and from other

journalists they work with from the culture of their workplace.  
(Cronau, cited in Reportage Media Bulletin, summer 1996/97)

### **2.2.2 Self-censorship out of fear of losing one's job or career**

Unless journalists follow the laws or editorial policy of their media houses, they may be fired. As Kohut notes, "The possible reasons for their expulsion may include [...] advertisers, friends of their boss, the reporter's relation with the source and other possible and related reasons" (Kohut, 2000).

### **2.2.3 Self-censorship to avoid stories affecting their media organization**

Journalists may censor themselves when reporting about their own news organization. As Kohut notes, "The possible reasons for their expulsion may include reporting stories that could damage the concerned news organization" (Kohut, 2000).

### **2.2.4 Self-censorship on specific stories due to pressure from within the organization**

Journalists may reshape or change the tone of news stories. In assessing U.S. media, Kohut notes how this problem is particularly acute in media with particularly close ties to the community (which may arguably compare to state-run media particularly close to the state): "Local journalists face especially difficult challenges. Nearly one-third (32 percent) acknowledge they have softened the tone of a news story on behalf of the interests of their news organization; only 15 percent of those in the national media say they have done so."

### **2.2.5 Self-censorship on stories that could hurt advertisers**

As Gans points out, "Journalists are employed professionals working for mainly commercial news media that try to supply what the news audiences will accept and what advertisers will pay for" (Gans, 2003:21). So they may avoid stories involving "profit pressures" or triggering "budget reductions" (Gans, 2003:24). The problem can be acute even in developed countries. Kohut quotes a joint survey by the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (PRCPP), noting: "About three-in-ten (journalists) believe that stories are ignored because they

might conflict with the financial interests of their news organizations or advertisers.”

### **2.2.6 Self-censorship to avoid defamation, invasion of privacy, national security issues**

Government attacks on the media often claim defamation, invasion of privacy or violation of national security, regardless of the validity of these concerns. In Botswana, for instance, Good (1994) notes, “the existence and occasional utilization of laws on sedition encourages self-censorship” (cited in Nyamnjoh, 2005:68).

### **2.2.7 Self-censorship in the face of press law**

Journalists may fear government laws that affect or control the media. Tettey says that “among the hindrances to press freedom are the maintenances of anachronistic laws on libel and sedition, censorship, physical harassment of journalists and the violation of their premises and equipment, denying them access to inputs and audiences debilitating media laws, etc.” (Tettey, 2001:8).

### **2.2.8 Self-censorship to please bosses or government authorities**

According to Solomon (2005),

Journalists practicing self-censorship often favor government authorities over other groups with different views in a number of ways. For instance, information could be suppressed in such ways as choosing safe-side, avoiding sensitive issues or giving responsibilities to faithful bosses, suppressing the stories in favor of politicians in power, giving emphasis for official speeches over other significant events and unquestioning the news worthiness of events where government authorities involve (Solomon, 2005: 11).

## **2.3 Self-censorship in Africa**

For various reasons, journalists all over the world practice self-censorship. Media analysts and studies show that the problem is particularly rife in Africa, where democratic and open governments are still in stages of infancy and the key watchdog

role of media as accountable to the public is undeveloped. As Solomon (2005:11) notes, “Due to the deep-rooted problem of self-censorship, the journalists in government media in Africa seems unable to be accountable to the public.”

In some Anglophone countries in Africa like Nigeria, the media struggle is often one against self-censorship in the face of bad governance. As Eribo notes, “In the history of the Nigerian press, the worst form of censorship is associated with the dictatorial misadministration of military officers who frequently stage coups and counter coups in order to grab power and control the government of Nigeria” (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997:63-64). Such censorship, he notes, is a “product of a combination of internal and external factors,” starting with a “censorship of the press that [unlike in Ethiopia] started in the colonial period and has continued even after colonialism.” And, also perhaps unlike Ethiopia,

Foreign influence in the media [in Nigeria] is historically and practically evident. These external factors have been more positive than negative although censorship was introduced by colonial administrators. Western culture, capital, new technologies, and democracy have all contributed in no small measure to press freedom in Nigeria. Although the state of press in Nigeria is predominantly a struggle between the people and their rulers, a coalition of indigenous and external forces cannot be ignored in any discourse of press freedom in Nigeria. (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997:73)

And, of course, self-censorship may also be practiced in those African countries not colonized by the British yet with some tradition of media activism and media freedom. In Namibia, for instance:

The state owns and operates the radio and television systems. They give prominent coverage to officials but they generally report those critical of the government. Yet the regime and ruling party made repeated attempts to restrict reporting of their activities last year. Television reporters were twice assaulted, one TV program was dumped for libelous and malicious stories, a journalist was arrested for not revealing sources, and two defamation suits were brought by government ministers (Sussman, 1999:19)

## **2.4 Self-censorship in Ethiopia**

“The Ethiopian press derives from a different tradition than most African countries,” Wall notes. “Like Liberia, Ethiopia was never colonized and thus a nationalist press never developed” (Wall, 2000:7). This, of course, may spawn a unique form of self-censorship. RSF reports after the 2005 elections offer some insights. “Fourteen newspaper editors or publishers were rounded up in the space of one month in November 2005. From December onwards, other journalists were arrested and sentenced in defamation case” (RSF, 2007: 23).

Then, “After a disastrous year, 2006 in Ethiopia was a static one. Some 20 journalists spent it in cells in Addis Ababa, part of a group of at least 76 members of the opposition, civil society and the private press prosecuted for ‘treason,’ ‘conspiracy’ to overthrow the government and ‘genocide’” (RSF, 2007). As RSF notes in the annual report for 2007:

Self-censorship is commonplace, particularly on military issues. Ethiopian journalists are held to an imposed patriotism and foreign correspondents closely watched. Anthony Mitchell, working for the Associated Press (AP), was forced to leave the country on 22 January for having allegedly “tarnished the image of the country.” Foreign media have great difficulty in obtaining accreditation from the Information Ministry, which is essential to be allowed to work legally in Ethiopia (RSF, 2007 annual report).

## **2.5 Press freedom defined**

The earliest definitions of press freedom “reflected post-Second World War geopolitical construction and focused primarily on freedom from government control” (Siebert et al., 1956).

According to Lowenstein, “A completely free press is one in which newspapers; periodicals, news agencies, books, radio and television have absolute independence and critical ability, except for minimal libel and obscenity laws. The press has no concentrated ownership, marginal economic units or organized self-regulation” (Lowenstein, 1970, cited in Becker et al., 2007:6). This ideal is hardly attainable

anywhere in the world, let alone in Africa where many journalists work under distinctive internal and external pressures.

International media organizations, often positioning themselves as watchdogs of media practitioners throughout the world, try to set freedom of the press standards for all countries. At a minimum, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) lobbies for “the rights of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal” (CPJ, 2004). Press freedom groups such as Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) issue annual reports measuring “the amount of freedom journalists and the media have in each country and the efforts made by government to see that press freedom is respected” (RSF, 2002b).

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

Two theories seem particularly pertinent to the issue of self-censorship: gatekeeping theory and social control theory.

### **2.6.1 Gatekeeping theory and its historical background**

Social psychologist Kurt Lewin first coined the phrase ‘gatekeeping’, referring to a mother who, as a gatekeeper for a family meal, decides what food ends up the dinner table (Lewin, 1947, cited in Gatekeeping, 2006). He then noted how gatekeeping could determine the passage of a news item through communication channels in a group (Lewin, 1947). Acknowledging Lewin’s comments, in 1950, White (1964) related the idea to journalism. In the 1970s McCombs and Shaw modified this idea, noting how audiences understand the value of a news item. Hence, they linked gatekeeping to agenda setting (McCombs et al., 1976). More recently, Fourie summarized that history: “The gatekeeper concept is now 50 years old and has slipped into the language of many disciplines, including gate keeping in organizations” (Fourie, 2004: 54). Fourie refined the definitions of gate-keeping and gatekeepers, noting:

Gatekeeping can be defined as the process through which certain information passes a series of checkpoints (gates) before being finally accepted as news material. Gatekeepers are the people or groups that have an impact on this process. They are part of the news organization and their influence can also extend beyond the

daily tasks of news identification, newsgathering and publication.  
(Fourie, 2004:54)

Fourie's definition identifies gatekeepers and gatekeeping as a pre-publication process, with those journalists (editors and reporters) who, directly or indirectly, select news or any information and make final decisions for publication. Berger's definition of gatekeepers is similar: "Individuals in media organizations who decide what will be shown or written about" (Berger, 1995: 64).

### **2.6.2 Core assumptions and statements about gatekeeping theory**

Gatekeepers are crucial to gatekeeping theory. While gatekeeping controls the flow of information, gatekeepers decide what passes and what stops (Gatekeeping, 2006). In the context of journalism, gatekeepers control what the public knows about events by allowing some stories to be published and keeping other stories from being published. Berger expands that idea as follows: "Gatekeeping theory demonstrates to us that the news we get is, in the final analysis, someone's view of what is important news or news that will attract and keep the attention of readers or audiences – not necessarily what is important news" (Berger, 1995: 65).

Gatekeeping theory may also describe how editors and reporters decide what news is. "Media gatekeeping showed that decision-making is based on principles of news values, organizational routines, input structure and common sense" (Gatekeeping, 2006). As journalists, acting as gatekeepers, select news, they may make decisions that may have vastly different consequences. "In some circumstances it [gatekeeping] can be useful. Gatekeeping can also be dangerous, since it can lead to an abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass" (Gatekeeping, 2006).

### **2.6.3 Scope and application of gatekeeping theory**

"Gatekeeping theory relates to the mass media and organizations. In mass media the focus is on the organizational structure of newsrooms and events" (Gatekeeping, 2006). Gatekeeping theory explains how newsrooms operate by gathering news, processing information and producing news items.

#### **2.6.4 Implications of gatekeeping**

“The primary effect of gatekeeping,” according to Fourie, “is that it changes the media’s original message in some way. What readers read in a newspaper or hear or see on radio and television is thus seldom an accurate reflection of reality” (Fourie, 2004: 205). As he notes, gatekeeping “seriously influences the content of newspapers. It leads to the evaluation of news and the creation of news reality” (Fourie, 2004: 205). So, for example, reporters or editors may smooth, soften, or change the tone of news stories. Consequently, what is published would more likely reflect the perceptions of reporters and editors rather than reality of the news event.

To Bass, “The most important gatekeeping activity occurs within the news organization, involving two stages, newsgathering and news processing” (Bass, 1969, cited in Fourie, 2004). His model outlines how writers, reporters, local editors and translators gather news and how editors and copyeditors turn it into copy and a completed story. This model shows that journalists who gather and process news are gatekeepers and how individual preferences are crucial to gatekeeping. The journalists identify events, select details and supervise publication.

At each step, gatekeeping theory suggests, these journalists, as gatekeepers, impose the values of their newsroom to produce a newspaper that reflects more their perceptions of news than the reality of it. So journalists’ individual preferences are crucial in gatekeeping. As Van Heerden emphasizes, “Gatekeeping remains a necessity so long as it is not used consciously to obscure facts or slant the perception of the reader or audience. When used deliberately to mislead, gatekeeping becomes unacceptable” (Van Heerden, 1996, cited in Fourie, 2004).

#### **2.6.5 Social control theory and its historical background**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of social control emerged to describe how social systems force individuals to conform to specific rules, no matter the belief system. According to McQuail, under this theory, “authority must prove its legitimacy by way of ideology and the ‘consciousness industry’” (McQuail, 1984).

### **2.6.6 Core assumptions and statements**

According to McQuail, “Social control refers to systematic tendencies to propagate conformity to the established order and reaffirm the legitimacy of existing authority, by way of ideology and the ‘consciousness industry’” (McQuail,1984), It follows that individuals need to comply to the established order or norms; and consider also the “legitimacy of the existing order” consciously. The social control theory seems all about complying to certain laws or norms.

Social controls can be formal or informal. Formal social control is internalized through laws statutes, rules, and commands that function to maintain norms. Under this sort of control, individuals – in this case journalists – may be forced to abide by the government laws or press laws to maintain the established order. Punishments include fines and imprisonment.

Unlike formal social control, under informal social control, individuals follow the customs, traditions, norms and other social values of traditional society. Without explicitly stated rules to enforce, sanctions can be informal: ridicule, sarcasm, criticism, disapproval.

### **2.6.7 Scope and implication**

Breed (1955) discusses social control theory in relation to policy, which he defines as “the more or less consistent orientation shown by a paper, not only in its editorial but in its news columns and headlines as well, concerning selected issues and events”. This is to mean, journalists follow or stick to the genre of the concerned media house when writing headlines and news columns. Thus they select issues or events in the process of abiding by the policy of their media houses. For instance, state-owned media outlets use their own ways of writing headlines or articles, which differ from independent media houses. In this regard, policy can be a starting point to set rules and regulations.

In connection with setting news policies and its followers, Breed classifies newsmen into two:

Newsmen are divided into two main categories. “Executives” include the publisher and his editors, “Staffers” are reporters, rewrite men, copy

readers etc. In between there may be occasional city editors or wire editors who occupy an interstitial status. (Breed, 1955:327)

Breed insists that conformity to rules is “not automatic” even though “the publisher does set news policy and members of his staff usually follow this policy.” To excuse deviant behavior, Breed cites ethical journalistic norms, the staff’s liberal attitudes and perceptions; and the publisher’s hesitation to force the staff to follow newsroom policy.

According to Breed (1955), “Policy is covert, due to the existence of ethical norms of journalism; policy often contravenes those norms. No executive is willing to risk embarrassment by being accused of open commands to slant a news stories.” This breach of ethical norms can create “conflicts among the interests or attitudes of staffers and executives” (Breed, 1955:327).

# CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the qualitative and quantitative methods used to carry out the study. This triangulation approach offers “a combination of research methods [that] will produce a better and deeper understanding” (Hansen et al., 1998: 1). The chapter also explains the methods of data collection method, such as sampling, individual in-depth interviews, self-completion questionnaire, and analysis of official documents such as editorial policies.

### 3.2 Qualitative research

The study’s main approach is qualitative, using in-depth interviews of journalists, i.e. reporters and editors. “Qualitative research is concerned with the interpretation of subjective meanings, description of social context and the privileging of lay knowledge” (Fossey et al., 2002: 723). The research examines the journalists’ *emic perspective*, what anthropologists define as an insider’s perspective on their environment (Babbie and Mutton, 2001).

The study’s key qualitative method is interviewing. Lindlof (1995) describes the importance of interviews:

In qualitative research, one interviews people to understand their perspectives on a scene, to retrieve experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information, to obtain descriptions of events or scenes that are normally unavailable for observation, to foster trust, to understand a sensitive or intimate relationship, or to analyze certain kinds of discourse. (Lindlof, 1995: 5)

### 3.3 Quantitative research

The study used self-completion questionnaires to fill the gap that emerged after the individual in-depth interviews. According to Holland and Campbell (2005: 242),

“Quantitative research prioritises descriptive analytical breadth of coverage and produces data in the form of numbers that can be aggregated and analysed to describe and predict relationships.”

The self-completion questionnaires included such question as what type of pressures the journalists are facing in their daily work and whether they put limitations on themselves when reporting (appendix A).

### **3.4 Data collection methods**

Qualitative research attempts to go beyond surface features to reach a deeper understanding of the subject. To do this, in-depth interviews were deployed in the study. Quantitative methods – in this case using questionnaires – filled the gap noted in interviews. Official documents also helped to fill in data and verify respondents’ claims.

#### **3.4.1 In-depth interviews**

24 journalists (editors and reporters) working in Ethiopian government media – the *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zemen* and Ethiopian News Agency– were interviewed about self-censorship. The interviews, each semi-structured and unstructured, probed the concept, the possible practices, and the likely cause of self-censorship in the state-owned media.

#### **3.4.2 Questionnaires**

The study involved 45 questionnaires distributed to journalists working in the state-owned media agencies identified earlier; out of which only 39 were filled in. The 39 respondents included 21 editors (three assistant editors, nine editors, five senior editors, three deputy editors and one editor-in-chief) and 18 reporters (13 reporters and five senior reporters).

According to Deacon et al., questionnaires are “printed documents that people complete on their own. This is the most structured form of questioning because no intermediary is involved in presenting the questions or recording answers” (Deacon et al., 1999: 64). Bryman identifies the research strength of such questionnaires, noting how “objectivity is maintained by the distance between observer and observed along

with the possibility of external checks upon one's questionnaire" (Bryman, 1988).

### **3.4.3 Official documents**

The *Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Zemen* follow the editorial policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency. The editorial policy of the Ethiopian News Agency was also reviewed. Important sections in both editorial policies are included in the appendices (appendix B and C). Reflecting the common ownership, the policies are mostly identical.

## **3.5 Sampling method**

This study used non-random sampling of the 'snowball' method. Deacon et al. note how snowball sampling works in research:

It is often adopted for practical reason and is mainly used where no list or institution exists that could be used as the basis for sampling. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, a snowball sample grows through momentum: initial contacts suggest further people for the researcher to approach, who in turn may provide further contacts. This method is consistently used in research into either very closed or informal social groupings, where the social knowledge and personal recommendation of the initial contacts are invaluable in opening up and mapping tight social networks (Deacon et al., 1999).

The research for this study started by contacting friends in the three media outlets cited above. They introduced other staff members, helped find willing interviewees, arranged a place for interviews and organized colleagues to answer questionnaires.

## **3.6 Data collection and analysis procedures**

The collected data were analyzed in terms of literature and research questions. Respondents' answers were analyzed by assigning themes and noting relationships among responses and generalized concepts, differences and similarities in meaning or interpretation of ideas related to the research. The interviews took place in appropriate places where the interviewees felt more comfortable and their privacy was secured as far as ethical consideration is concerned.

### **3.7 Difficulties encountered**

In carrying out the study, the researcher did not get the maximum amount of materials about self-censorship in the Ethiopian context. Some journalists refused to be interviewed and a few did not have time to fill out the questionnaires. A small number of respondents did not fill out the questionnaires completely; some questions they skipped – purposefully or accidentally – could affect the number of responses on a specific issue but it did not impact dramatically the quality of the data. The study’s time constraints also hindered the researcher.

### **3.8 Overview of the study objects**

The study mainly focused on three government media outlets: the *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zemen* and the Ethiopian News Agency. Each is briefly discussed below.

#### **3.8.1 The Ethiopian Herald**

The *Ethiopian Herald*, a state-owned newspaper first published in 1943, circulates in English every day except Monday. Currently, the media outlet employs approximately 41 journalists. Among them is an editor-in-chief, three deputy editors-in-chief, a senior editor, three assistant editors, six permanent editors, two senior freelance editors, four freelance editors, a senior reporter, two reporters, two beginner reporters and five typists (secretaries). The Herald is a general interest newspaper covering local and international government, political issues, societal issues, art and culture, business and sports. About 10,000 copies are published and distributed throughout the country (Ministry of Information, 2008)

#### **3.8.2 Addis Zemen**

*Addis Zemen*, a state-owned daily newspaper, was first published in 1941. It became a daily in September 2001. It is published daily by the Ethiopian Press Agency. It is a sister paper of Ethiopian Herald and the language is Amharic. The average circulation numbers are 18,443 according to the Ministry of Information April 2008. The newspaper is distributed across the country and abroad. It covers issues such as news (both local and international), economy, politics, societal issues, entertainment and sport. Currently,

there are 60-70 employees (as employees quit their job or get hired sporadically). These include: an editor-in-chief, three deputy editors, five senior editors, 12 editors, five assistant editors, eight senior reporters, two reporters, three beginner reporters, 12 proof readers, 12 secretaries and others.

### **3.8.3 Ethiopian News Agency**

There is a debate concerning when the Ethiopian News Agency was established. According to Semeneh, in an article published in *Minch Magazine*, “There are two bodies which argued about the date of the establishment of ENA. The first one said it was established in 1942 where as the second one argued it was in 1944” (*Minch*, 2000:8). At any rate, ENA was properly established as independent official organization during the reign of Emperor Haileselesie on June 6, 1968 following a proclamation which was issued in *Negarit Gazetta* number 15 (*Ethiopian Journalism Review*, 2002: 9). Today, the legalized ENA has a responsibility to respect the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution and abide by the principles and objectives of national policies, which are incorporated in the Constitution itself.

According to the statistical evidence (cited in *Ethiopian Journalism Review*, 2002), towards the end of 2001 annual budget, the total number of employees was 268 among which 94 were female workers. From the total number of employees, 104 journalists work in the head office in Addis whereas the rest was assigned in 37 regional branch offices. The numbers are thought to be similar today. Currently, ENA is one of the mass media under the auspices of the Ministry of Information, which is administered by a board accountable to the House of Peoples’ Representatives.

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

As stated in the introductory chapter, the main objective of the study is to find out why journalists practice self-censorship in news production and to detect what self-censorship means to them. This section is therefore dedicated to a scrupulous discussion of the following research questions:

- What does self-censorship mean to government print journalists?
- What are the causes for the practice of self-censorship in news production?
- How does self-censorship shape or influence the news that Ethiopian print journalists produce?
- How does self-censorship impact or relate to freedom of expression?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of practicing it?
- And finally, what feelings do journalists develop when they practice self-censorship?

### **4.2 Self-censorship defined by journalists**

The research found that different meanings were accredited to the notion of self-censorship according to the journalist's understanding and experience. Here, journalists refer to both editors and reporters. Editors in this research include editor in chief, deputy editor in chief, senior editors, assistant editors and other editors, whereas reporters represent both senior reporters and regular reporters or freelancers.

Different editors and reporters from Addis Zemen, Ethiopian Herald and ENA were interviewed about their understanding of self-censorship. Based on the informants' responses, journalists in all these three government media outlets practice developmental journalism. However, when it comes to their perception of self-censorship, some differences are noticed. For instance, regarding journalists who relate the definition of

self-censorship with following and respecting policies, those who work under the Ethiopian Press Agency (Ethiopian Herald and Addis Zemen) abide by the editorial policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency, whereas those who work in ENA stick to ENA's editorial policy.

A few respondents from ENA mentioned that they practice self-censorship due to the presence of political appointees who are very much concerned with sensitive and political issues in ENA. These politically appointed individuals who hold high positions in the news organization would not tolerate or allow any issues that reflect the bad or negative image of the government, especially the ruling party. To the contrary, respondents from *Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Zemen* said that journalists can criticize the outcome of any policies but they cannot criticize the policy itself. For instance, journalists may comment on the impact and outcome of the education policy, but they never dare to say that this particular policy is good or bad. Besides, some journalists working in *Addis Zemen* believe that they practice self-censorship because of the trend that their colleagues practiced. The following are some of the explanations of self-censorship that representative respondents from the three media outlets came up with:

- “Self-censorship is a kind of limitation which steal one’s self-confidence and prevents somebody from doing the right thing. In short, it is a sort of banning which you impose on yourself.”
- “For me, self-censorship is similar to editing. It is a way of checking and cross-checking frequently whatever has been written or produced before it gets published or broadcast.”
- “It is a pre-planned thinking before writing or producing something. It is in fact a way of opposing any counter-productive articles or programs that go against the editorial policy and government laws.”

- “In Ethiopia, self-censorship occurs enormously, especially in the media. It stems from fear. It can reach the journalist from different angles and you cannot resist its consequences. As a result, every journalist practices it.”
- “The word ‘self-censorship’ is not good. It is better to call it a very strict editing or a sort of follow-up work.”
- “For me, self-censorship means to save oneself from making any mistakes. I often check any information at hand before it reaches the public and I ask myself what consequences and interpretations would this information bring to the public.”
- “Honestly, the government does not prohibit you from writing your article professionally and ethically. But it is the trend that forces the journalist to practice self-censorship. We passed through a trend in which we experienced to transfer very limited information to the society. You usually witness when your senior colleagues practice it and you would also join them believing that should be the proper way because of the trend they experienced.
- “It is about being on the safe side.”

#### **4.2.1 Similarities in the definitions of self-censorship**

Most of the journalists interviewed associate the concept of self-censorship with maintaining the editorial policies and government laws. They believe that they practice self-censorship when implementing what is stated in the editorial policies. Journalists, for instance, are expected to follow the principles and objectives of the editorial policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency. The principles which are stated in chapter three of the editorial policy include serving the public, integrity, fairness, respect and accountability (appendix B). Others refer to government laws and policies in general. Generally, their definition mostly revolves around laws, policies, principles, the Ethiopian Constitution and selection of news items. In this regard, the gatekeeping theory, as defined by Fourie (2004) in the literature review – “the process through which certain information passes a

series of check-points (gates) before being finally accepted as news material” – is applicable. By “series of check-points” he refers to government laws, editorial policies and even editors themselves. These determine or decide what information to pass or discard before any news articles are published.

#### **4.2.2 Differences in definitions of self-censorship**

Differences in the definition of self-censorship were observed. Certain respondents believe that practicing self-censorship arises from the internal fear they sense within themselves. Another respondent related self-censorship to following the trend that is practiced in the media outlets he/she performs his/her duty. One respondent considered self-censorship as a serious form of editing. For some, it simply means banning the journalists from doing the right thing. For others, it refers to limitations imposed on the journalists, and as a result, these limitations steal the journalists’ self-confidence. “To be on the safe side”, “to secure oneself for being accountable” or “to think of bosses (editors) and the society” were some of the reasons given by the respondents.

Nevertheless, some respondents talk about some sort of fear that the journalists possibly sense, which in return encourages them to practice self-censorship. In this aspect, the researcher could notice some similarities with the definitions given by Francis Kasoma when he mentioned the possible practice of self-censorship, which arises from fear by journalists and their colleagues (Kasoma, 2000: 93).

Those respondents whose definitions of self-censorship are related to being on the safe side regarding their career could have meant that acted as gatekeepers in a certain way simply to keep their jobs. As Cronau says, “living and working [...] in condition of employment insecurity” is a reason why they practice self-censorship. The findings show that some practice self-censorship out of fear while others practice it to be on the safe side. This implies a sort of panic action; they do not want to lose their jobs as they have lots of commitments.

The researcher could also notice that older journalists practice self-censorship and the recently or newly appointed journalists would imitate them. The study also revealed that additional forms of understandings of self-censorship exist. These include pleasing the bosses, losing one’s confidence, holding responsibilities, making one-self

free from any mistakes, and considering it as a serious form of editing.

### **4.3 Do government journalists in Ethiopia practice self-censorship?**

The study attempted to find out whether journalists working in state-owned media practice self-censorship or not. It is concluded that all 24 interviewees practice self-censorship in some form. However, some of them exercise it once in a while, others practice it often and quite a few of them said it is conditional and it depends on the issues they deal with. The following are some representative responses:

- It is impossible to say that I don't practice it. As long as you work in the state-owned media, you always think of your boss, your government (the ruling party) and the society as well. Therefore, when different information reaches you differently and start to report that particular information, you take into account all those things.
- Mostly since I write on societal issues, a question of censorship is not that much [emphasized]. However, once in a while, for instance when articles go extremely against the government policy, I practice self-censorship even though such issues are rare.
- Yes, I do it sometimes. As I work for [a] state-owned newspaper, I sometimes withhold or avoid issues, which do not meet the interest of the newspaper. Or else, I may write the story by changing or softening the tone of the news.

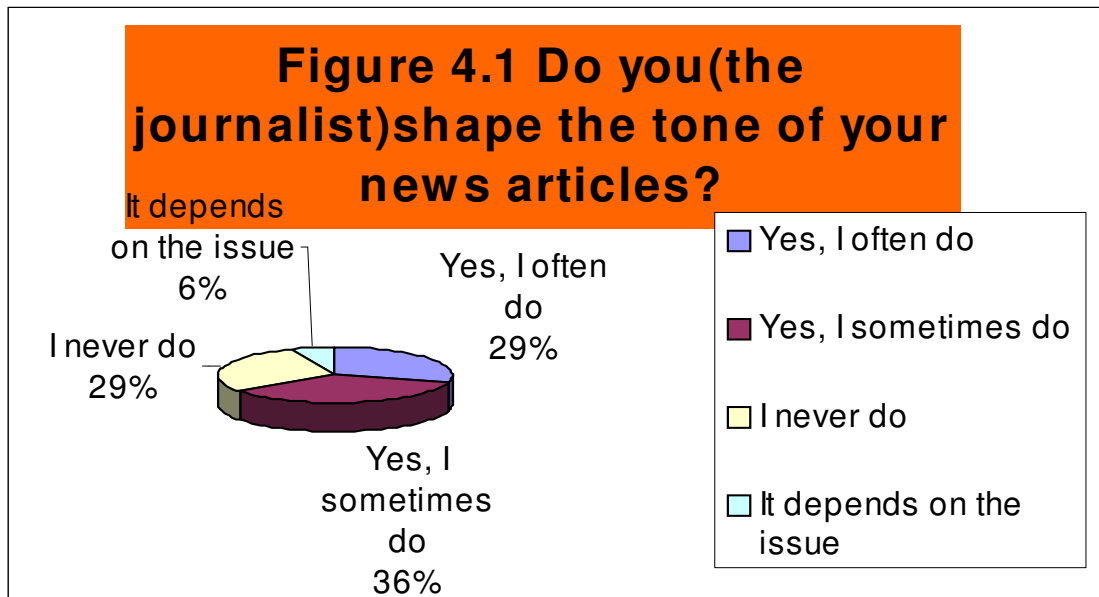
### **4.4 Reasons for practicing self-censorship**

Journalists practice self-censorship for different reasons. The reasons for practicing self-censorship in the Ethiopian state-owned media are of political, cultural, economic, religious and editorial nature. They seem to mostly practice it because of the pressures

from their editors, editorial policy, the government laws and ethical considerations. They also exercise it just to be on the safe side, to please their boss, to deliver standardized and accurate information to the public, to be free from being accountable for the wrongly produced articles, to save oneself from making any possible mistakes, to take the necessary precautions, to soften the tone of the news story, not to bring harm to the reader or the public, and not to lose credibility.

Research from the US confirms that softening the news story is common among journalists. According to Kohut (2000) “nearly one-third (32 percent) [in the local media] acknowledge they have softened the tone of a news story on behalf of the interests of their news organizations: only 15 percent of those in the national media say they have done so.” The following chart illustrates to what extent the respondents from the Ethiopian media affirm that they adjust the tone when writing news articles:

**Figure 4.1 Shaping of the tone of news articles by journalists**



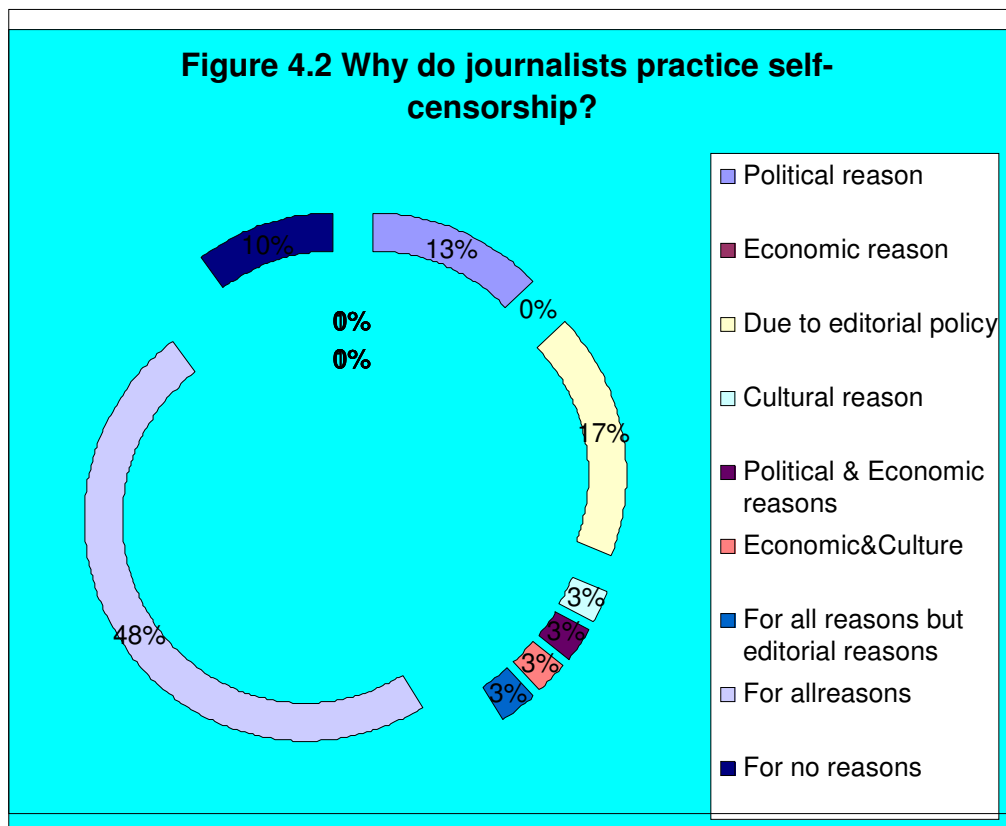
The research shows that there is a correspondence between each journalist’s definition of self-censorship and the reasons he/she gives for justifying the practice. Here are some of the reasons for the practice in their own words:

- “There are sometimes very sensitive issues that we ignore just to be on the safe side. Frankly speaking, when I write an article, I always censor myself because I want to be on the safe side. We live in Ethiopia. It is a question of survival.”
- I practice it to please my boss.
- If the journalist writes everything as it is without censoring it, there might be certain sections of the society that are unhappy about it. These may include the reader or even the editors themselves. Sometimes, what you believe is correct may be considered as incorrect and the editor may not like your article. For instance, once I happened to write an article on [a] women’s issue [women’s harassment in the country]. I stated that the issue is becoming serious but the government seemed to ignore the subject. I included this in my article but the editor avoided it automatically. So, it is really very difficult. I cannot tell you why he/she did that.”
- If the disadvantage of the truth is worthier than its advantages in my news article, I do practice self-censorship by way of softening the tone of the news.”
- Most journalists practice self-censorship because of the fear they sense and this fear stems from respecting the editorial policy, the ruling party and from not losing their jobs. For instance, if any political news arrives and if this particular news goes against the ruling party, no journalists dare to work on that. This is because it needs to pass through different stages: The senior authorities check it. Besides, those who hold higher positions, they are political appointees and are responsible for [the self-censorship].
- Honestly, the government does not prohibit you from writing your article professionally and ethically. But it is the trend that forces the journalist to practice self-censorship. We passed through a trend in which we experienced to transfer very limited information to the society. You usually witness when your senior

colleagues practice it and you would also join them believing that should be the proper way because of the trend they experienced.

- Perhaps, in the developed countries, any news may not be considered as a problem as long as it is new and it satisfies or pleases the public. However, in Ethiopia, as we are still backward democratically and economically; besides, in a country, where over eighty nations and nationalities exist, we, the journalists, are supposed to take the necessary precautions as the media [are] expected to play a leading role. That is why we practice self-censorship.

The following chart shows why journalists who filled out the questionnaire practice self-censorship.



## **4.5 Most common areas where self-censorship is practiced**

The research revealed that in Ethiopia, self-censorship is practiced in political, economical, societal, cultural, religious and nation and nationalities related issues. However, at the same time it was found that it is predominantly practiced in political issues. Besides, it also depends on the particular issues to be covered. For example, if journalists work on societal issues, they make the necessary precautions, especially if the issues are related to politics or they are against any official policies (policies on health, education, etc.) or government laws. Asked about what sort of issues self-censorship is practiced, one respondent from ENA said it as follows:

I practice self-censorship in all issues. For instance, I practice it on religious issues. When celebrating a religious ceremony, I usually write the article addressing all Ethiopians. I think that if there exist some elements in the news article that separate the unity of Ethiopians, I would avoid or omit that particular part of the story. For instance, there is this situation that people relate the Ethiopian Millennium Calendar with the view of the Orthodox Church. This will definitely alienate other sections of religious groups, which in turn, disappoints them. Therefore, in this case, I leave out the fact that the calendar is attached to the Orthodox Church but maintaining the contribution of the church.

## **4.6 Advantages and disadvantages of self-censorship**

Journalists practice self-censorship both knowingly and unknowingly. The informants mentioned possible advantages and disadvantages of practicing it. In fact, there were also some respondents who argued that it is conditional; i.e. it can be both advantageous and disadvantageous depending on the issue or news item.

### **4.6.1 Is self-censorship always bad?**

The study showed indeed that practicing self-censorship is also seen by many journalists as good and useful. In fact, this notion seems different from what was stated in the literature review (chapter two). The literature by and large assumes that self-censorship has only disadvantages and negative impact. For instance, self-censorship is considered

as a threat to freedom of expression, as a pretext for defamation and other laws, or even as a means or cause to sense fear among journalists. Among the respondents, some journalists believe that self-censorship is essential as it secures the well-being of a nation or a country; it avoids religious, societal, political and sensitive issues that could bring conflict or harm among people; it enables journalists to work ethically and not to disseminate wrong information to the public; and it guards journalists to be on the safe side. This is how journalists who were interviewed expressed its importance:

- “It certainly is good to censor oneself because it enables you to check the quality, content and standard of your article before it reaches the readers.”
- “For me, it is important to practice it because it enables me not to disseminate wrong information to the public and to work within the discipline of the profession.”
- “It is good to practice self-censorship because in the first place, you need to save yourself. In a situation where there are no free and independent professional associations that could defend you, you normally do not dare to take risks. So, it is even essential as you may have lots of things in mind. For instance, you may have lots of commitments and social responsibilities.”
- “Yes, it is good. When you write reader-centered articles, you should always consider whether most of the readers think that your article is useful or not. If it is not useful to most readers, I will avoid the story. For instance, there are certain things that the society holds as a norm. Let us say, for example, if you write openly about sexual issues, the society does not accept it, so, thinking [about] your reader, you avoid the story.”
- “I censor myself most of the time. It is good to practice self-censorship. Actually, it is based on media ethics that the journalist practices self-censorship.”

- Yes, it is very good but you mostly censor yourself in relation to ethical issues. It is not views or opinions that you censor. It is good to practice self-censorship as long as it enables to express one's thought freely without damaging somebody's rights, privacy, and so forth.

#### **4.6.2. Disadvantages of self-censorship**

Despite the beneficial sides of self-censorship that were mentioned by some journalists, for the most part they regard the harmful sides to be more important. In this regard, some of the interviewees hold the opinion that it is bad because of the following reasons:

- Important fact or truths may be held back.
- Practicing self-censorship forbids the journalist not to apply journalistic principles and ethics properly.
- It bans journalists to report on sensitive issues that are not even prohibited.
- It discourages journalists from reporting the wrongdoings of the government.

The following are sample responses by the respondents concerning the disadvantages of self-censorship:

- “No, how can it be good? Why cannot a journalist report anything other than those issues that are banned by laws? There are certain laws that exist in the Ethiopian Constitution that ban journalists from reporting. These include: issues on national security, issues that arise conflicts among people, religious groups and so forth. But why are we not allowed to report on political issues freely? Why is it that other political parties are not given fair coverage like the ruling party?”
- “I don't think it is good to practice self-censorship because sometimes you may hide the wrongdoings of the government and it encourages journalists to practice one-sided reporting.”

- “I don’t think it is good but it is unavoidable. If a journalist works freely without practicing pre-censoring, I think it is good because journalism is about letting the public know the truth. Unfortunately, journalists sometimes hide or hold back some dangerous information to some extent but it would be good if there were no limitations on news articles that could not bring any negative effect or harm on the public. Thus, if there are limitations, I personally do not believe that we can serve the public properly.”

#### **4.6.3 Conditional self-censorship**

Some informants argued that practicing self-censorship is conditional. That is to say, it can be both advantageous and disadvantageous depending on the issues at hand or the situation in general. Here is how the respondents supported this idea:

- “It depends on the issues. It can be good or bad. It could be bad when you always abide by government and editorial policies, you may hide sometimes the truth from the public. However, it may be sometimes good as long as you [do] not violate some policies or laws that ban any issues that provoke conflict among people.”
- “It can be good or bad. If my article stirs up some sort of conflict among nations, religious groups or even among ethnic groups; you can imagine what is going to happen to me. In this particular case, it is really bad. To the contrary, it is good to practice it believing that the public should know the truth irrespective of some serious issues that are banned by laws and policies.”
- “Self-censorship can also be interpreted negatively. Firstly, if you (the journalist) are over-suspicious or more careful and if you write dull news that are not interesting, secondly, if you worry too much unnecessarily, you may withhold back some important issues. I cannot say that self-censorship is totally bad but it has some negative connotation to some extent.”

- “It can have both advantages and disadvantages. It is good because it [makes me] accountable. Sometimes, there are certain news items, which can put you in jail for reporting them. For instance, if the judge doesn’t allow you to report court cases even if the public has to know it, you cannot report that news. Thus, the news could be avoided. Sometimes, we cannot report a case if it is being handled by a police. For instance, there was a girl who was injected with some improper medicine and her skin was badly injured. I wanted to report the case as news. I had every single evidence at hand. I knew what had happened to this girl. I had recorded everything. I could have reported that but the next day, I would have big problems with the police. The police often avoid the issue claiming that things should be filtered out before they are reported.”

#### **4.7 Self-censorship in news articles**

An attempt was made to see how practicing self-censorship impacted news articles or stories that journalists working in the state-owned media write. The research discloses that self-censorship could have positive or negative impact depending on the perceptions and experiences of the journalists under study. Some of the respondents believe that it has a positive impact on the news articles because it encourages journalists to consider ethical issues and follow the editorial policy and not to write anything that creates conflict among nations, religious groups, and the like. It also determines which direction to follow when producing an article, and how deep journalists go about their story or event.

Even so, most respondents believe that it has mostly negative impact on news articles or stories. They give three main reasons for this:

1. Self-censorship limits the right and authority of the public to know the truth.
2. Journalists feel incomplete for what they report.
3. Facts could be distorted in some way.

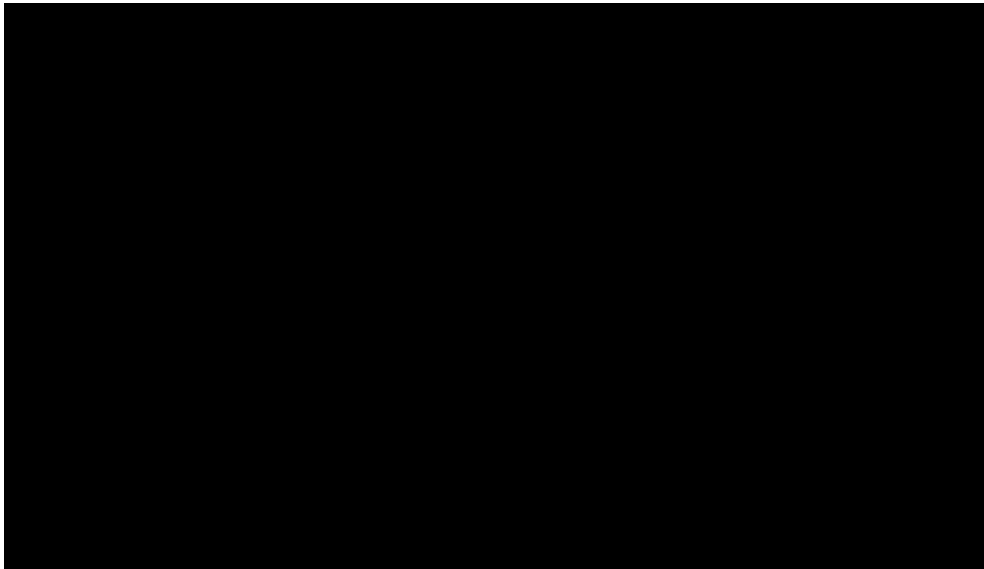
Asked what types of direct impact self-censorship could have on news articles, the informants gave such responses:

- “I often write articles for youth because my target audiences are youngsters. If, for instance, I withhold some facts by practicing self-censorship, I feel that I forbid those youths from getting the proper information. So, this can have a negative impact and the reverse is true as well.”
  
- “When you practice self-censorship very much, you may leave out some important facts out of fear. The question is to what extent do I practice self-censorship. Firstly, if I write any article just by simply following the editorial policy, it means there is some fear I sense. Secondly, if I produce any article believing that my bosses [senior editors] would comment negatively on it, I may distort information.”
  
- “Well, it may affect the stories because you do not give the other side of the story to your readers. You deliberately skip some important elements.”
  
- “It can have impact because it determines which direction to follow to produce your article, how deep you go about your story or event. Even your sources are individuals. They can limit or wide the information that journalists receive. So, it can affect the news article.”
  
- “Self-censorship can sometimes have impact on news stories. It limits the right and authority of the public to know the truth. Sometimes, you go out of the reality. For instance, recently, about the gold embezzlement that took place in the Ethiopian National Bank, every private media reported it but no single state-owned media reported it because the government did not want that to be reported claiming that things are under investigation and they should be filtered out and let the public know when the time comes.”
  
- “One has to check questions like: Does the news article bring advantage to the country or not? Does it go with the policy? For instance, in South Africa, law

allows gay marriage. And if you report this as news for the Ethiopian public, what is its importance? It would be considered as giving some kind of recognition for a taboo. It may interest very few or limited individuals. So, generally, this could bring some danger and it is disadvantageous.”

In the designed questionnaire, 39 journalists were asked if practicing self-censorship could have a negative impact on their news stories. The following chart illustrates their responses:

**Figure 4.3 Perceived negative impact of self-censorship**



#### **4.8 Self-censorship vs. freedom of expression**

As discussed in the literature review, practicing self-censorship can be related directly or indirectly to freedom of expression and press freedom. The present study concludes that self-censorship puts limitations on both freedom of expression and press freedom.

Although freedom of expression is a human right and everybody has a right to express his or her thoughts and impart or receive information, it does not necessarily mean that he/she can exercise it freely. There are some limitations. For instance, the issue of defamation, invasion of one’s privacy and any related issues that stir up war or

conflict among nations, ethnic groups or among small communities are not entertained freely. Therefore, journalists should do ethical considerations.

As to the impact of self-censorship in news reporting, journalists in the research believe it could influence freedom of expression positively, negatively or both. This implies journalists may sometimes report what they do not want, and to the contrary, they do not report what they are expected to do professionally and ethically due to the practice of self-censorship. Consequently, this would affect their freedom of expression one way or the other as long as they remain incapable of expressing their thoughts or ideas freely; especially on political issues. However, the whole issue of self-censorship in relation to freedom of expression revolves around to what extent journalists should exercise their right of freedom of expression.

The following are some informants' responses on the impact of self-censorship on freedom of expression:

- “Self-censorship can have both a positive and a negative impact on freedom of expression. For example, you can exercise your freedom of speech as long as you do not violate somebody’s right. In this case, you respect other’s rights. However, when self-censorship is practiced without taking into considerations other’s rights, it can affect those individuals or people.”
- “Practicing self-censorship has a great impact on freedom of speech. In a country where freedom of expression is certified in the Constitution, it is often said that any person can exercise his/her right of freedom of expression. But practically, it is impossible and what we witness is completely different.”
- “When you practice self-censorship, you limit your right to express your thoughts to some extent. And again, freedom of expression has also limitations. It does not mean that it is completely free. Both have limitations. Self-censorship can have little impact on freedom of expression. Your right to express your thoughts, to oppose ideas or give opinions is secured as long as you do not violate anybody’s right. But practicing self-censorship does not necessarily mean

suppressing individual's or people's ideas or prohibiting the public from knowing the truth. In our media outlet [*Addis Zemen*], we welcome any constructive criticism on our opinion page as long as the criticism is not basically based on defamation. We normally do not do any thing based on hearsay. We always acknowledge our sources.”

- “I don't think practicing self-censorship impacts freedom of speech as long as you report unbiased news or stories. The journalist also needs to remain neutral; for instance when dealing with various political parties' report, he or she is expected to report fair, balanced and accurate information to the public”

#### **4.9 Self-censorship vs. press freedom**

Like freedom of expression, self-censorship also impacts on press freedom. To what extent state-owned media organization allow press freedom is a controversial issue at this level. According to Faringer, “the very definition of a free press implies the principle that the mass media have a crucial task as a watchdog, as the fourth estate, as the market place of ideas, and as a means for the public's right to know – being an impartial and objective link between the authorities and the public (Faringer, 1991: 99). However, with the presence of some restrictions in policies, press laws and government laws, the media cannot play its role as a watchdog for the public. Therefore, this would definitely hinder government media outlets to exercise press freedom fully.

Some respondents argue that there is no absolute press freedom and there might exist relative freedom, which again is surrounded by possible limitations. They believe that with the presence of these limitations such as government restrictions, the media cannot play its leading role in the community or in the public general. This notion is directly related to Weaver's discussion on press freedom. According to Weaver (1977:6), “the relative absence of government restraints on the media, the relative absence of nongovernmental restraints and the existence of conditions to insure the dissemination of diverse ideas and opinions to large audiences” are the possible components of press freedom. This is what is lacking in Ethiopia as far as press freedom is concerned.

Here are a few of the respondents' reactions towards press freedom and self-censorship:

- “As I work in a state-owned media, I am not allowed to report anything that contradicts the government policies and that shows the negative image of the government as far as working freely is concerned. This shows that there are limitations. You may criticize, for instance, the weaknesses of a certain government organization. In this regard, you have the freedom to express your thoughts, at least to some extent.”
- “To start with, everything has a limit. Every society is bound by codes, norms and the like. Absolute or full freedom never exists but there could be relative freedom which itself can be feared to exercise it and sometimes, it can even be disappointing.”

#### **4.10 Journalists' emotions when practicing self-censorship**

In conducting the research, journalists were asked what their emotions were when exercising self-censorship. It was found that some respondents felt comfort since they believed they did the right thing by letting the public know what they should deserve to know. Others felt discomfort because they think that they avoided or withheld some important part of the story, which the public was supposed to know. Still others had mixed feelings, i.e. they felt both comfort and discomfort depending on the news stories or any stories. At times, they are happy with what they produced and some other times, they regret for what they wrote or reported.

#### **4.11 Application of theories**

Both the gatekeeping and the social control in the newsroom theories seem applicable to the research.

#### **4.11.1 The gatekeeping theory**

As mentioned in chapter two, this theory deals with “the process through which certain information passes a series of checkpoints (gates) before being finally accepted as news material” (Fourie, 2004: 54). In this regard, the theory asserts that any information or news elements will undergo different checkpoints, such as whether the information goes against the editorial policies, press laws or government laws. The news item should be checked and verified by editors, who in this case are considered to be gatekeepers, before it is published. It follows that this theory is all about the selection of news items or any other stories in light with the existing editorial policies and any laws pertinent to media issues.

#### **4.11.2 The social control theory**

According to McQuail, “Social control refers to systematic tendencies to propagate conformity to the established order and reaffirm the legitimacy of existing authority by way of ideology and the ‘consciousness industry’” (McQuail, 1984). In here, ‘conformity’ refers to some sort of compliance, which seems to be the central idea of this particular theory. The theory appears to focus on journalists’ compliances to the recognized order-policy that journalists need to follow and respect. Furthermore, this theory involves also what happens in the newsroom.

Breed discusses social control in the newsroom as follows:

The publisher does set news policy and this policy is usually followed by members of his staff. Conformity is not automatic, however, for three reasons: (1) the existence of ethical journalistic norms; (2) the fact that staff subordinates (reporters, etc.) tend to have more “liberal” attitudes (and therefore perceptions) than the publisher and could invoke the norms to justify anti-policy writing; and (3) the ethical taboo preventing the publisher from commanding subordinates to follow policy. (Breed, 1955:326)

From Breed’s perspectives, conformity is a behavior that obeys the established rules or customs and it is not mechanical and does not happen naturally for the three reasons he mentioned above. This has something to do with the presence of ethical journalistic norms, journalists’ liberal attitudes or perceptions concerning reporting certain sensitive issues and the possible ethical taboo that hinders the publisher from forcing journalists to abide by policies.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **5.1 Summary**

The main objectives of the study were to explore what self-censorship meant to journalists working in the state-owned media and why they practice it. The study also investigates how self-censorship affects news production. As the study focused only on a limited number of journalists working in the state-owned media, the results cannot be expected to generalize instantaneously to the practice of self-censorship by all government journalists, and certainly not for the private media.

The research utilized a triangulation approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. As for the qualitative research method, individual in-depth interviews and official document analyses were employed. The focus was mostly on qualitative methods because this approach serves best to scrutinize the emic perspective or the internal perceptions of journalists concerning the issue. However, to fill the noticed gap that could likely to exist in the in-depth interviews, questionnaires were also employed as a quantitative research method.

The findings reveal that self-censorship is practiced in the Ethiopian state media for political, economic, social, cultural and religious reasons. Besides, journalists also practice it in response to editorial polices, government laws, and fear of editors or their bosses. Journalists also try to define self-censorship based on their own understanding and experience. It was noticed that a few journalists have a very unclear idea about what self-censorship is. They instead try to define it as a form of editing. It was also found that practicing self-censorship was seen by the journalists as both useful and harmful depending on the issues at hand and the situations in general.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The main findings of the research include:

- Journalists have different understandings about the notion of self-censorship.
- Journalists mostly practice self-censorship due to political, religious, nation and nationalities related issues; economic and cultural issues; editorial policy; fear of their boss; internal fear; to be on the safe-side or to be free from being accountable.
- Self-censorship is usually practiced in political, economical, societal, cultural, religious and nation and nationalities related issues. However, it was found that respondents mostly practice it in political issues.
- Journalists practice self-censorship both knowingly and unknowingly.
- Journalists soften or change the tone of news articles in the process of practicing self-censorship.
- News articles or stories could be distorted due to the practice of self-censorship.
- Practicing self-censorship is seen as both useful and harmful.
- The public may or may not receive accurate, fair and balanced information due to the practice of self-censorship.

In light of the discussions of the findings, the following points serve as concluding remarks for the study:

If more pressures from the editors or government officials are imposed on journalists working in the state-owned media, journalists cannot perform their job ethically and professionally. As a result, the public may not receive accurate information

and the government media houses lose their credibility. There has to be press freedom that can allow journalists to exercise their right to report the weaknesses of the ruling party; to give equal coverage to opposition parties, especially during election times; and to identify the wrongdoings or mal-practices of the government.

To what extent should journalists practice self-censorship is also a case in point to discuss. The danger is that journalists may not report what they are expected to report due to the internal fear. On the contrary, they may sometimes practice it for good reasons; such as not to stir up conflict among nations or religious groups. In such cases, it may be justified to practice self-censorship as long as it does not overrule other important ethical considerations in journalism, such as uncovering misconduct. All in all, journalists need to take the necessary precautions as to when and how to practice self-censorship.

### **5.3 Scope for further studies**

This thesis could serve as instigation for further studies. As the thesis tried only to examine the possible practice of self-censorship by journalists who work in the state-owned media, specifically in *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zemen* and Ethiopian News Agency, any interested researcher can investigate if self-censorship is practiced in private owned media outlets or can still do a comparison study between the state-owned and private media houses. It is also possible to explore the same issue whether journalists working in broadcast stream (TV and radio) practice it and for what reasons.

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# APPENDIX A

## Questionnaires

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

**Dear Journalist,**

I am conducting a survey on the possible practice of self-censorship in the state-owned print media in Ethiopia focusing on the Ethiopian Herald, the Addis Zemen media outlet and Ethiopian News Agency. You have been randomly selected as one of the participants in this survey. The data you provide will be used exclusively for a master's thesis, which you may later use as a point of departure for your own future studies.

Your responses to items will be strictly anonymously kept and managed with utmost confidentiality and ethical care. I alone will have access to the data, which will later be presented, to my thesis advisors as group scores. There is no special interest in individual persons. Should you have special needs, you can ask that I scrap the questionnaire that you fill in. Only your confidence in the researcher and your genuine responses can make the survey a meaningful exercise. Please take a few moments **to complete** the survey and return the forms the next day. Please, **DO NOT** write your name.

I thank you individually for completing the questionnaire.

Note: Question 1-11 can be answered both by reporters and editors but **only editors** should answer question 12-17.

1. Your age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your academic background (qualification) and in what field \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your position in the *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Zemen* or *ENA*?

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4. Your experience in the media

- A. Less than a year      C. Two years      E. Four years  
B. A year                  D. Three years      F. Five years and above

G. If other than these, specify it \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you think you work freely from any pressure?

- A. Yes, I do.      B. No, I don't      C. I don't know

6. What kind of pressure do you usually face while reporting or writing news?

(If the space provided is not sufficient, please, use a separate sheet of paper or the back side of this paper.)

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7. Have you ever regretted for not reporting a certain story or news item as you wished?

- A. Yes, I have      B. No, I haven't      C. I don't remember

8. If your answer is A for question number 7, please, state what was the regret about?

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9. Do you think practicing self-censorship can have a negative impact on your news stories?

- A. Yes      B. No      C. I have no idea

10. If your answer is yes for question number 9, what could this negative impact be?

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11. For what reason do you practice self-censorship?

- A. Political reason B. Economic reason C. Because of editorial policy  
D. Cultural reason E. For all reasons mentioned above. F. For no reason at all

12. (For editors) Have you ever received a pressure from advertisers to publish their story?

- A. Yes B. No

13. (For editors) Do you often censor yourself in deciding what stories should get published or not regardless of their news worthiness?

- A. Yes B. No

14. (For editors) Are there stories which are ignored or not published in fear of the government official?

- A. Yes, there are some B. No, there aren't any C. I don't really remember

15. (For editors) Do you often shape the tone of stories which you think are straight forward or could likely to bring some negative impact or consequences on the reader?

- A. Yes, I often do. B. Yes, I sometimes do C. I never do

16. (For editors) Do you allow stories that show the weak side of the government to be published?

- A. Yes B. No

17. (For editors) Do you believe journalists working the *Ethiopian Herald* ,  
*Addis Zemen* or ENA perform their task with professional integrity?

A. Yes   B. No   C. I have no idea.

# **APPENDIX B**

## **Editorial Policy of Ethiopian Press Agency**

[Relevant sections]

*Translated from Amharic by the researcher*

### **Chapter one**

#### **1 Objective and Introduction**

##### **1.1 Introduction**

As it is explained in communication science, any principles that set regulations for news coverage, columns, photographing and footage and make decisions about the covering of any events is termed as editorial policy.

The Editorial Policy of Ethiopian Press Agency is mainly composed of nine chapters that include basic principles and regulations. Chapter one describes the introduction and objectives of the policy; chapter two outlines the beginning of the Editorial Policy of Ethiopian Press Agency and explains its corner stone; chapter three discusses principles and objectives of the institutionalized Editorial Policy services of the Press Agency; chapter four explains missions and objectives of the editorial policy, chapter five expresses in detail the principles of distribution and coverage of news and column; chapter six states principles of assigning reporters and organization, duties and responsibilities of editorial conference; chapter seven focuses on the principles of editors within which included principles of photographing and layouts; chapter eight discusses journalistic ethics (focusing on journalistic moral offence) and chapter nine deals with general executive principles.

##### **1.2 Objective**

The Editorial Policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency has the following objectives:

- 1.2.1 to serve the public effectively based on the editorial policy, to which the Ethiopian Press Agency was authorized by proclamation.

1.2.2 to create good-quality and proficient editorial undertakings and directives that involve openness and accountability.

1.2.3 to enable the existence of professional evaluation and levels of duties, which are free from individuals' feelings and wishes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **2. The beginning and corner stone of the Editorial Policy of Ethiopian Press Agency**

Selections of contents of Newspapers and magazines of The Ethiopian Press Agency and their decision making of the process stem from the following four corner stones:

2.1 National Ideals

2.2 Proclamation of the Establishment of the Ethiopian Press Agency

2.3 Press Laws and

2.4 National Consensus

#### **2.1 National Ideals**

National Ideals are the basic sources for the duties and principles of the editorial policy of the Ethiopian Press Agency. These national ideals are included in the Ethiopian Constitution and are copied from the following four points:

2.1.1 Building democratically regulations that respect the people's active participation

2.1.2 Bringing universal development for the people by avoiding backwardness and poverty.

2.1.3 Constructing democratic unity of the people of Ethiopia on absolute basis.

2.1.4 Defending National Sovereignty and Loyalty (Freedom)

#### **2.2 Proclamation of the Establishment of the Ethiopian Press Agency**

The second source for the duties of editorials is the proclamation set for the establishment of the Ethiopian Press Agency.

The Proclamation mainly decides print publications and selection of contents of news elements or any other stories. Therefore, the proclamation gives the mandate for the

Ethiopian Press Agency for different articles which satisfy the public needs such as informing the public and satisfying its desire on entertainment issues, addressing free public opinion forum, criticisms or discussions, preparing issues concerning Ethiopia in foreign languages.

### Chapter Three

## **Principles and Objectives of Institutionalized Editorial Service of the Ethiopian Press Agency**

### **3.1 Principles of Institutionalized Editorial Service**

#### **3.1.1 Serving the public**

- 3.1.1.1 Introducing Democracy for the people, teaching the right and freedom of the people, encouraging common and shared assistance and cooperation among people and generally, making efforts to present issues that stand for the people's right and loyalty.
- 3.1.1.2 Focusing on issues that secure people's advantages and on issues that fight corruption and presenting them as soon as possible to the public.

#### **3.1.2 Integrity**

- 3.1.2.1 Verifying whether editorial tasks are based on concrete evidences so that the public receives balanced and accurate information
- 3.1.2.2 Prohibiting any wrong or inaccurate information from being published or circulated or distributed.
- 3.1.2.3 Plagiarism is not allowed (copying other's work and presenting as if it belongs to oneself is not permitted)
- 3.1.2.4 Addressing journalists to present accurate information for the public and respecting the right of the public to know and holding responsibilities to cooperate with similar stakeholders to expand the media in Ethiopia.
- 3.1.2.5 Any messages that transmit through the media should be attractive and reliable, maintaining the respect and reputation of the media and journalists

should create favorable condition to update themselves with the current technology.

### **3.1.3 Fairness**

3.1.3.1 Every opinion should be treated equally.

3.1.3.2 Editorial tasks should be of its standard, free from emotions and neutral-giving equal chances to everybody.

3.1.3.3 Editors should check if the outcome of their tasks should be clear complete and not ambiguous.

### **3.1.4 Respect**

3.1.4.1 Any publications of newspapers or magazines should not harm or violate human right and people's psychology, should not stir up conflict or annoyance among the nation.

3.1.4.2 Any publications should not damage both individual and communal right, should not restrict women and children's right, generally, they should respect human right.

3.1.4.3 Any publications should not blemish or underestimate cultures of nations and nationalities, religion, language, ethnic, and should not provoke conflict.

3.1.4.4 Journalists of Ethiopian Press Agency should take great precautions not to get published taboo photographs, pictures, cartoons and articles and not to disseminate messages that harm children's feelings.

3.1.4.5 Journalists should check any articles that are prepared based on gender, age or family relationship, physical and mental problems that could likely to bring negative impact on the concerned individuals.

3.1.4.6 Journalists should scrutinize that the contents of their articles should not damage national sovereignty, spoil the reputations of both individuals and society and stir up violence or conflicts among the people.

### **3.1.5 Accountability**

3.1.5.1 Journalists should check whether whatever they produce respects the Constitution of the country, criminal laws, press laws and other laws.

3.1.5.2 Journalists should check from different angles the accuracy of sources

that are pertinent to institutions and organizations before they are presented to the public.

- 3.1.5.3 Journalists should ban any news articles or stories that arise criminal acts or lead to conflicts.
- 3.1.5.4 Journalists should verify if any advertisements are properly done, legalized and have credibility.
- 3.1.5.5 Unless and otherwise journalists are forced by court warrant, they should not reveal their sources or violate the agreement they made with their sources.
- 3.1.5.6 Journalists must know journalistic ethics and enable other users or clients know them as well.
- 3.1.5.7 Journalists should correct their mistakes immediately and apologize the public.

### **3.2 Objectives of the activities of the editorial policy of the Ethiopian Press**

#### **Agency**

- 3.2.1 Explaining proclamations and policies set by the government.
- 3.2.2 Strengthening the relationship between the government and the people; serving the public.
- 3.2.3 Enabling political forces to participate fairly.

### **4.3 Detailed activities of editorials**

The interest of the Ethiopian Press Agency should fit (go) with the advantage and interest of the country.

Objectives of news, articles and pictures should meet the needs of national objectives, policies strategies and means.

## **Chapter Eight**

### Journalistic Ethics of Ethiopian Press Agency

#### 1. General Principles

Journalists working in the Ethiopian Press Agency should abide by the following principles:

1. Seeking the truth
2. Serving the public
3. Serving the public is the top priority
4. Not reporting wrong and unbalanced information
5. Respect for national public benefit and interest
6. Respect the above journalistic ethics

# APPENDIX C

## Editorial policy of the Ethiopian News Agency

[Relevant sections]

*Translated from Amharic by the researcher*

### **Introduction**

This editorial policy consists of seven chapters. Chapter one explains the objectives of the editorial policy, chapter two presents the cornerstones of the policy, and chapter three explains in detail, missions, objectives, institutional values, principles and service of editorials of the Ethiopian News Agency, chapter four outlines detailed directives of news coverage and general directives of advertisements.

Chapter five discusses organization of editorial conferences and principles of assigning of journalists; chapter six includes journalistic ethics of ENA and chapter seven and chapter seven touches upon general directives of execution.

### **Chapter one**

#### **1 Objective of the Editorial Policy of the Ethiopian News Agency**

- 1.1 Serving the public effectively based on the proclamation that ENA received.
- 1.2 Creating editorial activities and directives that involve openness and accountability.
- 1.3 Enabling to have professional job evaluation and standard that are free from individuals' feelings and interests.

### **Chapter two**

#### **2 The Beginning and cornerstones of the editorial policy**

Selections of contents of News, news developments of The Ethiopian Press Agency, writing style and its decision making of the process stem from the following four corner stones:

2.1 National Ideals

2.2 Proclamation of the Establishment of the Ethiopian News Agency

2.3 Press Laws and

2.4 National Consensus

### **Chapter three**

## **3 Missions, objectives, institutional values, principles and editorials service of the Ethiopian News Agency**

### **3.1 Missions, institutional values and objectives of ENA**

#### 3.1.1 Missions of ENA

- Initiating people of Ethiopia and encouraging them to participate towards the building of peace, development and democracy.
- Presenting current and seasonal information to the public and educating them to create better way of thinking.

#### 3.1.2 Institutional values of ENA

3.1.2.1 Minimizing expenses and increasing income

3.1.2.2 Serving the tax-payer public in different ways.

3.1.2.3 Giving coverage of events regularly within the country consequently and equally, and holding the responsibility of updating journalist's performance.

3.1.2.4 Holding the responsibility of disseminating news that are supportive to the country's law makers and translators.

3.1.2.5 Holding the responsibility of informing events of Ethiopia and introducing its good image and culture.

3.1.2.6 Checking if ENA's news articles are based on Ethiopian Press Laws and regulations.

3.1.2.7 Checking the presence of legal protections for journalists on their regular activities.

3.1.2.8 Holding the responsibility of implementing principles of ENA's Ethics.

## **3.2 Objectives of ENA**

ENA has the following objectives as government medium

3.2.1 Explaining proclamations, laws and policies set by the government

3.2.2 Strengthening the relationship between the government and the people; serving the public.

3.2.3 Enabling political forces to participate in the media fairly and genuinely.

## **3.3 Principles of editorial services**

### **3.3.1 Serving the public**

3.3.1.1 ENA makes the necessary efforts to present issues that introduce the discipline of democracy and educate people's right and freedom; it presents generally issues that stand for the right and loyalty of the people.

3.3.1.2 Focusing on issues that guarantee people's advantage and anti-corruption.

### **3.3.2 Integrity**

3.3.2.1 Verifying whether editorial tasks are based on concrete evidences so that the public receives balanced and accurate information.

3.3.2.2 Prohibiting any wrong or inaccurate information from being published or circulated or distributed.

3.3.2.3 Plagiarism is not allowed (copying other's work and presenting as if it belongs to oneself is not permitted)

3.3.2.4 Addressing journalists to present accurate information for the public and respecting the right of the public to know and holding responsibilities to cooperate with similar stakeholders to expand the media in Ethiopia.

3.3.2.5 Any messages that transmit through the media should be attractive and reliable, maintaining the respect and reputation of the media and journalists should create favorable condition to update themselves with the current technology.

### **3.3.3 Fairness**

3.3.3.1 Every opinion should be treated equally.

3.3.3.2 Editorial tasks should be of its standard, free from emotions and neutral-giving equal chances to everybody; Editors should check if the outcome of their tasks should be clear, complete and not ambiguous.

### **3.3.4 Respect**

3.3.4.1 Any publications of newspapers or magazines should not harm or violate human right and people's psychology, should not stir up conflict or annoyance among the nation.

3.3.4.2 Any publications should not damage both individual and communal right, should not restrict women and children's right, generally, they should respect human right.

3.3.4.3 Any publications should not blemish or underestimate cultures of nations and nationalities, religion, language, ethnic, and should not provoke conflict.

3.3.4.4 Journalists of Ethiopian News Agency should take great precautions not to get published taboo photographs, pictures, cartoons and articles and not to disseminate messages that harm children's feelings.

3.3.4.5 Journalists should check any articles that are prepared based on gender, age or family relationship, physical and mental problems that could likely to bring negative impact on the concerned individuals.

3.3.4.6 Journalists should scrutinize that the contents of their articles should not damage national sovereignty, spoil the reputations of both individuals and society and stir up violence or conflicts among the people.

### **3.3.5 Accountability**

3.3.5.1 Journalists should check whether whatever they produce respects the Constitution of the country, criminal laws, press laws and other laws.

3.3.5.2 Journalists should check from different angles the accuracy of sources that are pertinent to institutions and organizations before they are presented to the public.

3.3.5.3 Journalists should ban any news articles or stories that arise criminal acts or lead to conflicts.

3.3.5.4 Unless and otherwise journalists are forced by court warrant, they should not reveal their sources or violate the agreement they made with their sources.

3.3.5.5 Journalists must know journalistic ethics and enable other users or clients know them as well.

3.3.5.6 Journalists should correct their mistakes immediately and apologize the public.

## **Chapter six**

### **Journalistic Ethics of ENA**

#### **1. General Principles**

Journalists working in the Ethiopian News Agency should abide by the following principles:

1.1 Seeking the truth

1.2 Serving the public

1.3 Serving the public is the top priority

1.4 Not reporting wrong and unbalanced information

1.5 Respect for national public benefit and interest

1.6 Respect the above journalistic ethics

# Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Signature\_\_\_\_\_

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