



CENSORED

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CENSORSHIP MONITOR

Issue#1 October 2013

WHAT IS THE CENSORSHIP MONITOR ?

The “Censorship Monitor” is a semi-annual concise report on the state of censorship and freedom of expression in Lebanon that provides readers with a comprehensive view of the latest censorship practices. The report mainly focuses on cultural and artistic works. The current first issue of the monitor will provide readers with a summary of censorship practices through time (1943-date). Upcoming issues will tackle the latest practices and news related to the topic of censorship.



MUSEUM OF CENSORSHIP

WHAT IS THE MUSEUM OF CENSORSHIP?

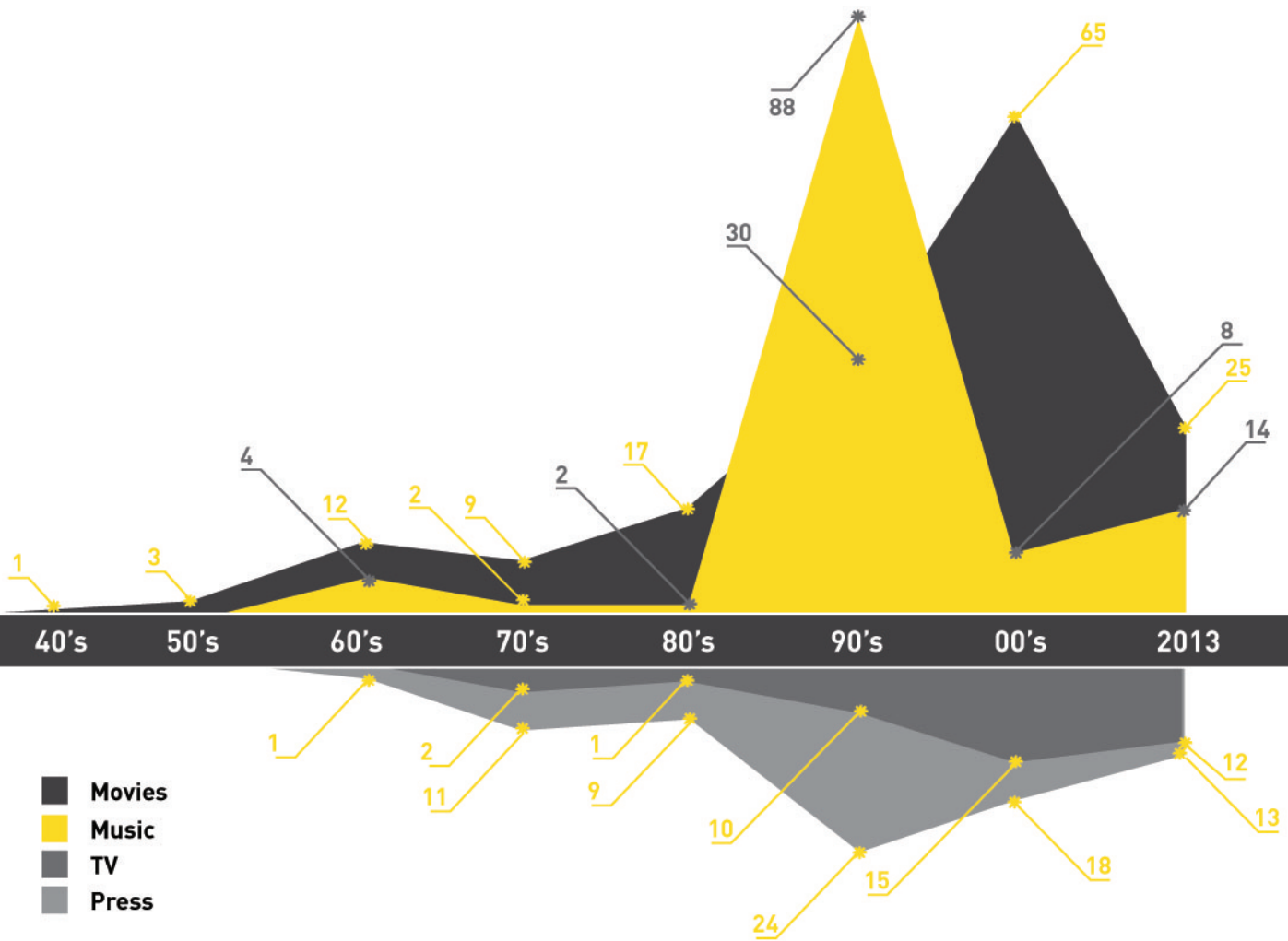


The Virtual Museum of Censorship, launched on September 2nd 2012, is a website gathering all censored material in one place to keep people aware of what is happening and to hold authorities accountable in order to protect freedom of expression. The aim is to gradually build the database of censored material through crowd sourcing (a report button on the site allows anyone to report a censorship). The online platform allows people to browse, search for or just learn about what literary and artistic works have been censored in Lebanon

since the 1940s. Viewers can search and browse for data by category (art, books, music, movies, plays, radio, press) or by period (decades from the 1940s). This initiative is accompanied by a series of events that support freedom of expression.



A HISTORY OF CENSORSHIP



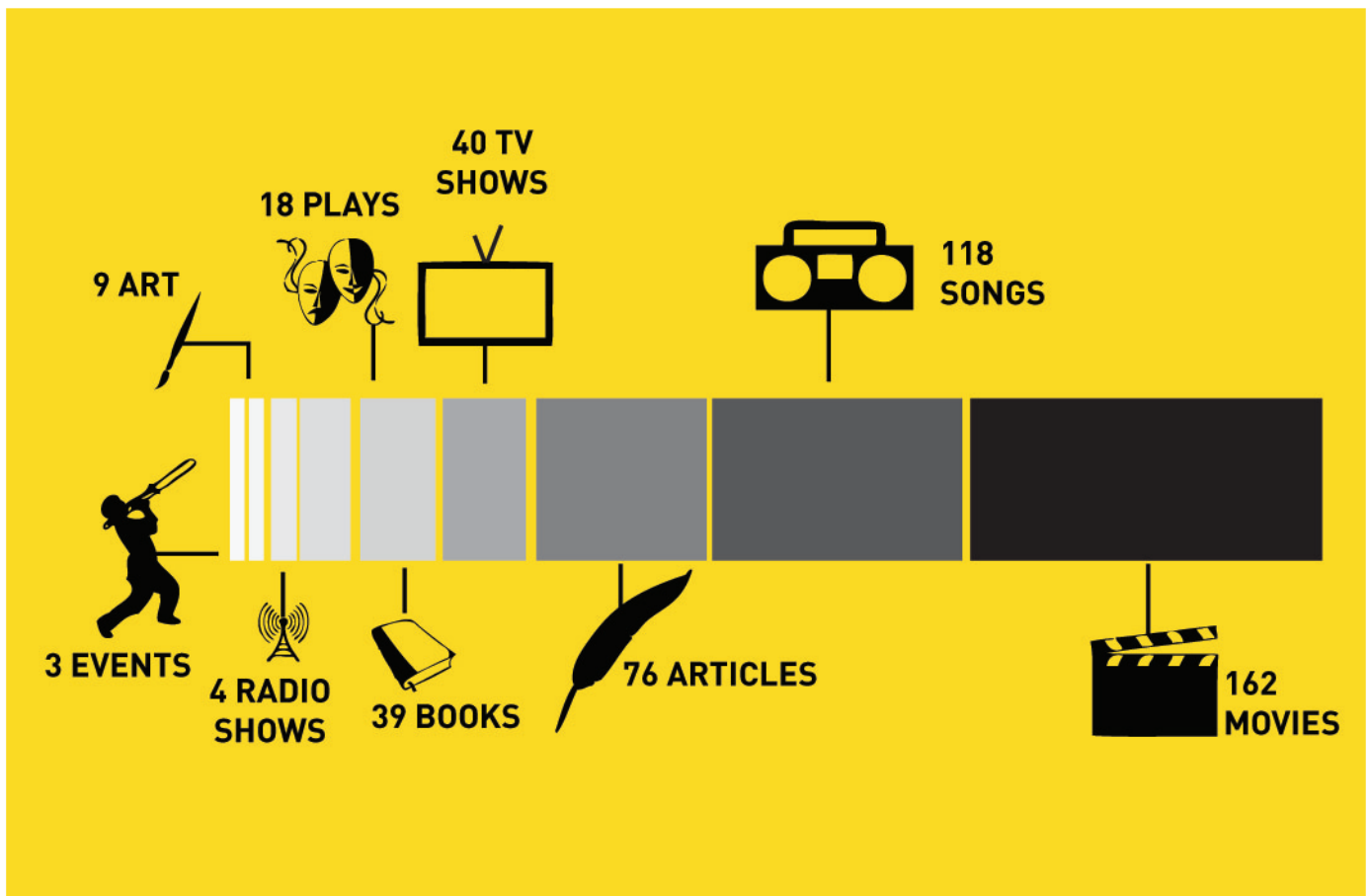
CENSORED MATERIAL PER DECADE SINCE THE 1940'S

The graph above illustrates the evolution of censored movies, music, TV and press-related material from the 1940s until our present decade.

Movies were the most censored material of the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1980s and the 00s with respectively 3, 12, 17 and 65 reported movies censored; Music was the most censored material of the 90s with a total of 88 reported music-related materials censored; Press was the most censored material of the 70s where 11 incidents related to censorship were reported.

The highest amount of reported censored movies was 65 incidents (reached in the 00s), of censored music was 88 (reached in the 90s), of censored material related to TV was 15 (reached in the 00s) and of censored press was 24 (reached in the 90s).

CENSORSHIP LIST 1955- PRESENT



The censorship list represents various materials that were affected by censorship from 1943 until 2013 ranked in ascending order.

3 events, 4 radio shows and 9 works of art that we currently know of were affected by censorship since 1943.

Moreover, 18 plays, 39 books and 40 TV shows have been victims of censorship bodies whereas 76 press articles, 118 songs and 162 movies were struck by a form of censorship.

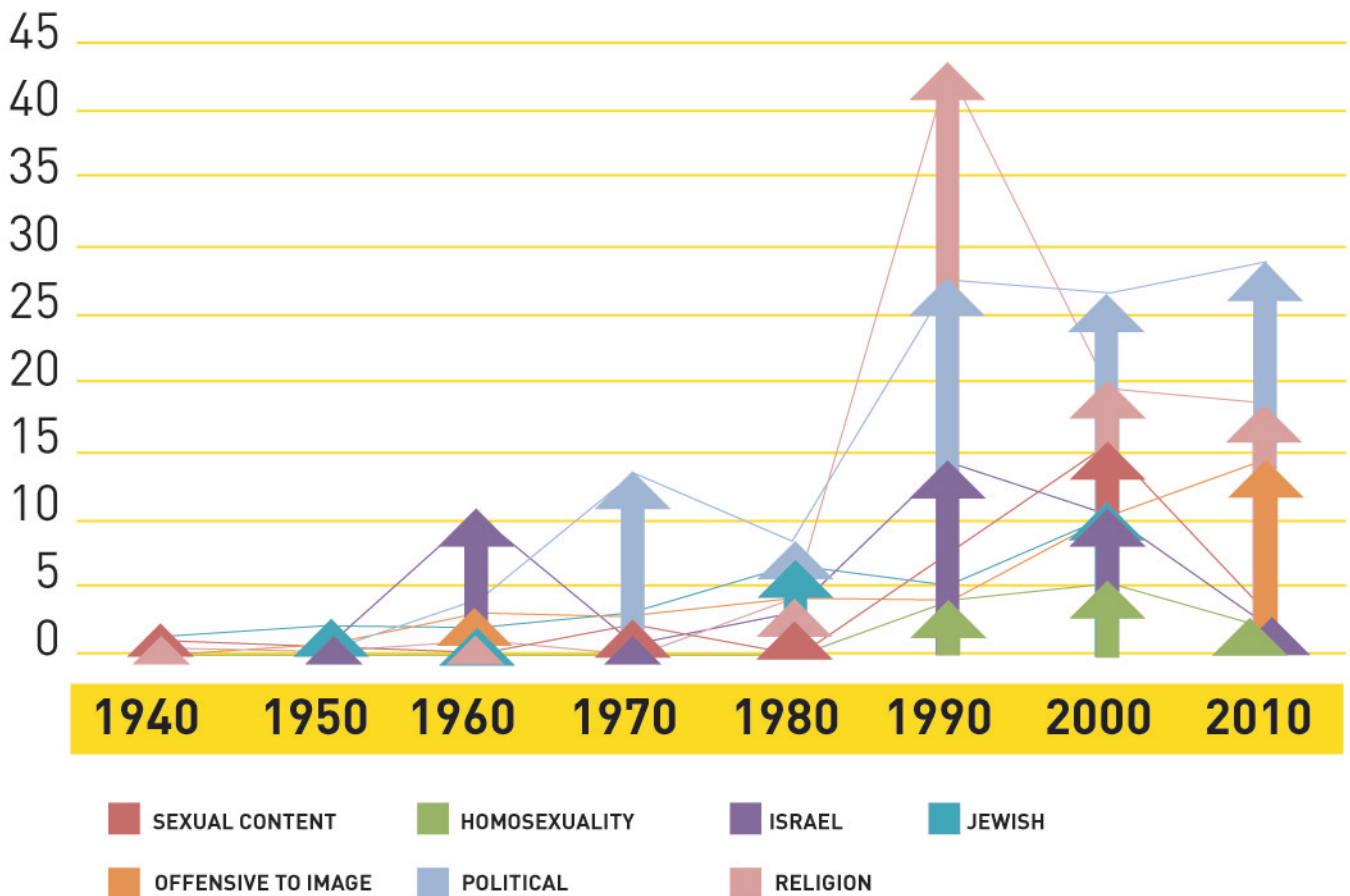
NUMEROUS UNREPORTED CASES OF CENSORSHIP

It must be noted that both charts are based on data gathered from available information regarding censorship incidents. For instance, one may argue that the first three decades shown in the graph “Censored material per decade since the 1950s (ou 40s)” were not exposed to a significant amount of censorship incidents. This is due to undisclosed censorship incidents and lack of access to information back then; the latter can be applied to the rest of the decades, including our present time, where many censorship incidents remain unreported and reasons for censoring material unjustified. Censorship bodies find no obligation in exposing any censorship incident, let alone explaining the reasons behind censoring certain materials.

Nevertheless, both charts remain a sufficient tool to better understand the evolution of censorship in Lebanon and how it can keep society in the dark.

REASONS FOR CENSORING IN LEBANON PER DECADE

Following a thorough research led by the MARCH team, censorship reasons can be grouped into seven categories:



Censorship has evolved throughout the years in no specific manner: political reasons were behind censoring material in the 1940s and 1950s whereas “Israel” was the main reason for halting freedom of expression in the 1960s. The 1970s, 1980s, 2000s and 2010s saw “political reasons” restrict freedom of expression while the 1990s was an era where “religion” was the main reason behind the fate of works of art and literature. Censorship for sexual content is on the low nowadays, whereas censorship for political or image offensive reasons know a record high.

There is no particular tendency in which material is being censored throughout the years, mostly due to the fact that even though most works are banned for the mentioned above reasons, their censorship is completely arbitrary and random whereby a work that was banned one month can be authorized the following month, depending on the employee viewing it, most of the time without leaving a written trace of the ban.

[THE LAW]

CENSORSHIP BODIES

LEGAL CENSORSHIP AUTHORITIES

Movie Censorship Commission

Council of Ministers 

Ministry of Information

Minister of Interior

General Security

NON-LEGAL CENSORSHIP AUTHORITIES

Political Parties

The National Audiovisual Media Council

Foreign Embassies

The Catholic Information Center

Dar El Fatwa

THE LAW STATES:

Disrespecting public order, morals, and good ethics

Showing contempt to any religion recognized by the state

Insulting the dignity of the Head of State

Exposing the state to Danger

Disturbing public peace

Inciting Sectarianism

Offending the sensitives of the public

Spreading propaganda against Lebanon's interest



ON THE GROUND

"No record" policy

Raids and Pressure

Certain materials are both censored and authorized

Interference from any authority in the country

THE REASONS BEHIND CENSORSHIP IN LEBANON:

THE LAW

Censorship controls over literary and artistic works and publications in Lebanon today fall under the jurisdiction of the General Directorate of General Security. In fact, General Security has been entrusted with the task of licensing, monitoring and censoring creative works.



Most works are censored or threatened to be banned for the following reasons:

POLITICAL REASONS:

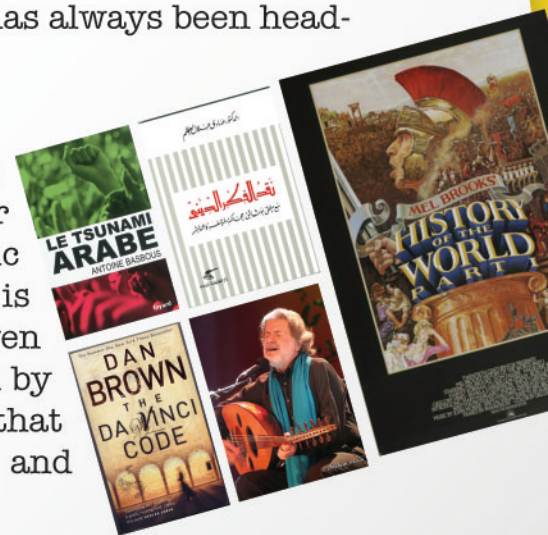


Regarding foreign relations with friendly countries, the censor pays considerable attention to the political sensitivities of Arab regimes and endeavors to safeguard diplomatic relations with these countries as well as banning attacks on the Palestinian cause and Arabs in general. Films on the civil war have been routinely censored since the nineties on the basis that referring to the conflict “threatens civil peace”.

Israel: regarding relations with enemy states, censorship is firstly based on a national law that calls for the boycott of all Israeli products. Secondly, there is censorship of all forms of publicity or compassion for Israel : this boycott was initially observed by the entire Arab League. Today, only Lebanon and Syria adhere to it stringently. The boycott list was maintained by a special office within the Arab League called the "Central Boycott Office." Each participating Arab League state had its own national office. The Lebanese Boycott office is at the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The Central Boycott Office has always been headquartered in Damascus.

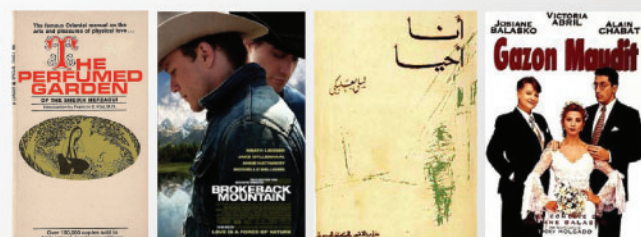
RELIGION:

General Security will send creative works it thinks might upset religious sensitivities to their respective governing bodies (usually the Catholic Information Center or the Dar-al-Fatwa, which is Lebanon’s highest Sunni Muslim authority), even though these religious bodies are not authorized by law to exercise censorship. Scenes or topics that question the ability of religion to counter evil and offensive scenes are removed.



Obscene and Immoral content:

Regarding censorship material which offends public morals, contains scenes of nudity, sex and foul language are strictly censored and the censor generally determines the extent to which the film or work does not offend public morals. Also, works that promote homosexuality are prohibited but violent scenes or scenes depicting drug use are allowed.





بتقطع؟.. أو ما بتقطع؟



BTO2TA3 AW MA BTO2TA3?

Bto2ta3 aw ma Bto2ta3?, an interactive play exploring the theme of "Freedom of Speech and Censorship in Lebanon", was presented across universities in the country during the month of April 2013.

On August 28 2013, MARCH were formally informed by General Security (Censorship Bureau) that the play, written and directed by Lucien Bourjeily and produced by MARCH, has been banned from public performance, scheduled to be presented early September 2013.

After a month and half of stalling, MARCH was finally summoned to the head of the censorship bureau’s office where they were welcomed by being shouted at.

The censor board’s general claimed that the play is not acceptable because it mocks the censorship bureau, therefore portraying them in an incorrect manner, which he will not allow.

“A play is merely a work of art”, explained MARCH. It does not necessarily portray reality as it is; therefore being accurate when writing the script is not a prerequisite.

When asked about the section of the law permitting him to forbid the play, the general asserted that the law allowed him to ban whatever he wanted, thus a particular reason needn’t be given.

Deeming himself an expert of the arts, he added that the play had no creative worth and should not be considered a play but a masquerade.

When MARCH asked to obtain an official written refusal paper, the censor board's general wanted to know why the document was needed as he assumed it was going to be shared with the media. MARCH persisted and insisted that the refusal paper be given to them; once agreed, they were asked to fill in a bunch of paperwork before being informed that the official rejection paper would be ready in ten days.

The strange encounter with MARCH and the censor board's general reinforces the subjective state of censorship in Lebanon: the play was banned by General Security as the latter personally took offence to the work and not because it "disturbs the public peace" or "disrespects public order, morals and good ethics" (Law on Censorship, 1994).

The law on censoring material needs to be reviewed and amended since its current state gives those in charge the power to decide what can and can't reach the Lebanese society no criteria to follow, limiting the public's right to access information and right to choose. It can be stated that *Bto2ta3 aw ma Bto2ta3*, a play aiming to raise awareness on the censorship's status in Lebanon all the while being entertaining, was banned because it personally offended the head of the censorship bureau: the fate of the play was decided based on one person's interpretation and judgment.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF HALTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Lebanon is a country where violence is practiced on an almost daily basis with no one being held accountable while art and culture are being punished.

In fact, cultural works tackle issues in a way that allows an infinite number of interpretations to be made, which is why a given piece of art can come across as offensive or immoral depending on how it is evaluated.

A piece of art, a movie or even a book's purpose is to give the viewers the freedom to interpret it in their own way, any of which may be considered valid.

Punishing the creators of such works of art is irrational as anyone should be able to express their views freely without fear of being shut down by force.

**CONTACT
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