Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey:

JANUARY 2024 — DECEMBER 2024

BAĞIMSIZ GAZETECİLİK PLATFORMU

SUSMA SANSÜRE VE OTOSANSÜRE KARŞI PLATFORM

Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey:
January 2024
December 2024

Censorship and Self-Censorship In Turkey:
January 2024 — December 2024

Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey

Prepared by
Nur Tüysüz
Özlem Altunok

Contributors
Fırat Yücel
Aslı Tohumcu
Özge Ç. Denizci
Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş
Derviş Aydın Akkoç
Aylime Aslı Demir

Book design
Bülent Erkmen

Prepared for publication by
Mehtap Gürbüz

P24 contact details:
Punto24 Bağımsız Gazetecilik Platformu
Meşrutiyet Cad. Yemenici Abdüllatif Sk.
No:1-3 Asmalı Mescit Mah. 34430
BEYOĞLU/İSTANBUL TURKEY

P24 contact details:
susma@platform24.org
www.susma24.com
twitter.com/susma_24
facebook.com/susma24
instagram.com/susma_platformu

Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey

January 2024

December 2024

SUSMA SANSÜRE VE OTOSANSÜRE KARŞI PLATFORM

Content

Foreword

The Susma Platform was established in 2016 to address the censorship and self-censorship faced by individuals, groups, or organizations involved in culture and the arts. Its mission is to champion freedom of expression among cultural and artistic actors by working collaboratively to dismantle imposed limitations. The platform seeks to eradicate both general violations of freedom of expression and specific infringements on artistic expression through meticulous documentation of censorship and self-censorship cases, strategic litigation, and advocacy. This year's eighth annual report serves as a comprehensive memory study, documenting instances of censorship and self-censorship.

The government actively stimulates self-censorship and legitimizes censorship by manipulating the judiciary and regulatory mechanisms. It uses strategies like defamation campaigns, criminal charges, and punitive actions to shape cultural and artistic expression according to its own imposed boundaries.

Our annual documentation of censorship cases in arts and culture reveals an alarming rise in self-censorship, a dark and often invisible undercurrent. Although it often remains unprovable, the Susma Platform is aware of numerous artistic projects and events that are quietly shelved behind closed doors without being completed, staged, written, or exhibited. This form of suppression, though difficult to quantify, is largely driven by fatigue, fear, and a growing sense of resignation in the face of increasingly varied and intensified censorship tactics over the past decade. The urge to "withdraw" from creative expression is intensified by punitive measures, detentions, investigations, targeting, marginalization, and the threat of economic censorship directed at organizations, communities, and initiatives. Yet this act of withdrawal often becomes a necessary condition for continuing artistic and cultural work within the harsh climate shaped by government pressure.

Looking back at 2024, we observed that a number of activities were held without public announcements, while art institutions exercised caution to avoid crossing established "red lines." The main opposition party, despite gaining control of local administrations in many provinces and districts, often aligned with the government's stance by refusing to provide public venues for certain events, particularly those related to LGBTI+ rights and

Kurdish cultural initiatives. Many artists, in turn, refrained from exhibiting their work. Major festivals supported by the central government introduced self-censorship mechanisms during pre-selection processes to eliminate "risky" films. Likewise, sponsors and large private investors increasingly adopted content restrictions that mirrored the state's position.

To offer some concrete examples, LGBTI+ events were rarely subject to official bans this year, largely because they were organized within closed circles and without public announcements. For instance, the Istanbul Pride Parade was held on Bağdat Avenue (a socioeconomically privileged and more homogenous area perceived as safer than Beyoğlu) and coordinated through the Telegram app. While this strategy enabled the event to take place despite the risk of prohibition, it significantly limited public participation.

In another instance, a viewer complained of "obscenity" in a piece by artist Fahrettin Örenli, exhibited in the "Tek Yön" ("One Way") show at the İstiklal Art Gallery, run by the Municipality of Beyoğlu, which the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) governs. Citing "sensitivities," the gallery management responded by removing the artwork.

Additionally, Turkey's leading film venue, the Antalya Film Festival, censored Nejla Demirci's documentary "Kanun Hükmü" ("The Decree"), which tells the story of a doctor and a teacher dismissed from their jobs by presidential decree.

Self-censorship, in contrast, is difficult to illustrate with tangible examples. Unlike direct censorship, it cannot be easily documented or grounded in specific instances. This inherent invisibility allows self-censorship to become normalized and widely accepted.

In this context, self-censorship becomes a strategy for organizations, communities, and individual artists to continue their work and share it without risking repercussions. However, as self-censorship becomes normalized, it ultimately fosters a stagnant creative environment.

In light of these indicators, our 2024 report will not only feature cases of censorship but also explore how self-censorship manifests in today's context. Through articles from contributors across various disciplines, we will examine whether self-censorship acts as a coping mechanism for dealing with censorship or if it ultimately reinforces it.

Under what circumstances and in what forms has self-censorship emerged in recent years? What factors have contributed to its rise? What does the increase of self-censorship signify, and what impact does it have on society? What long-term losses and forms of erosion does it cause? How can self-censorship be addressed? Moreover, could self-censorship serve as a means to continue creating or as a strategy to counter censorship? Does it drive the emergence of new artistic trends and narratives, or lead to a preference for certain forms? This report seeks to answer these questions.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our contributors Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş (visual arts), Fırat Yücel (cinema), Aslı Tohumcu (literature), Özge Ç. Denizci (music), and Derviş Aydın Akkoç (theatre), who have discussed the concept of self-censorship across various disciplines. In 2024, one of the groups most affected by censorship was the LGBTI+ community, and we felt it was important to dedicate a special section to this issue. Aylime Aslı Demir has shared valuable insights on what self-censorship means for the LGBTI+ community, how it underpins their struggle, and how it nurtures "stray weeds." We extend our heartfelt thanks to Demir for her contribution.

Cinema

The self in self-censorship

Fırat Yücel

We often believe ourselves to be free and independent creators, taking pride in that notion. Yet, there is no denying how deeply our decisions, ideas, projects, and dreams are shaped by the political climate surrounding us. The direction of the wind –or more tellingly, where it doesn't blow– defines the limits of what we can do, especially for those who identify with the societal opposition. When we break down Turkey's recent history into distinct periods, the constraints on creativity become even clearer: before and after the 1980 coup; before and after the Gezi Protests in 2013; before and –arguably– after the presidential decrees that led to the dismissal of thousands of public servants, including academics at universities; and before, during, and after the pandemic... All the issues that left their mark on a given period have seemingly been set aside, only to resurface –inevitably– later. Multilingual films have given way to unilingual ones, radical political imagination has been replaced by an emphasis on cultural embellishments, the idea of equality has been replaced by fraternity, and protagonists have been relegated to the role of side characters. The period has changed, some people were imprisoned, others remained free, and many projects were shelved... The subjects of these sentences are deliberately concealed.

This is how self-censorship works. Its very name contains a subject – "auto," meaning "self" in Greek. As in "autobiography," the story of one's own life. As in "autonomy," the act of self-governance. Yet, when we speak of self-censorship, the subject is almost always absent. We refer to the climate, the era, the prevailing mood – but the person we are speaking of remains hidden. Rarely will anyone say, "I have practiced self-censorship."

The Susma (Speak Up) Platform, which requested me to write this article, was established in 2016 to confront silence and censorship. It publishes an annual report titled "Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey." Yet, despite the emphasis on self-censorship in both the platform's name and the report's title, actual instances of self-censorship are rarely documented. Self-censorship has a name but lacks a clear object; it compels a verb while evading a defined subject. Every sentence about self-censorship carries an unarticulated subject, one that remains implied.

But here's one point of consensus: self-censorship dominates the landscape of political, audiovisual, and cultural production in Turkey today. In one of her first interviews following her release from eight years in prison, Gültan Kışanak[1] said that the "climate of self-censorship" was among the first things she noticed, comparing it to the atmosphere that followed the 12 September 1980 coup. In fact, she had already begun reflecting on this while still behind bars. In her book "Firari Yazılar" [2] ("Fugitive Essays"), she writes: "The issue of censorship and self-censorship takes on entirely new dimensions in prison. You are constantly thinking about how to get your writing out. (...) You can defend your beliefs in court by taking a risk, but when you write them down, you can't get them out." Kışanak describes a striking paradox: a moment when freedom of thought can feel more attainable inside prison than outside. Her words point to a kind of social retreat, one that keeps ideas formed in confinement from ever making it "past the prison walls."

Self-censorship refers to an individual censoring, limiting, or categorizing themselves "in the absence of any direct or overt pressure." It is the subject themself who voluntarily choses to impose censorship without any official ban, decree, notice from the governor's office, email, or other external forms of pressure. They blame "the times we are living in," they blame "the government," they blame "all the trouble that has happened to many others." [3] However, in today's Turkey, it is challenging to find cases that do not involve "overt pressure." At most, we can speak of the ambiguity surrounding who enacts the censorship, and when. For example, who exactly was responsible for censoring the documentary "Kanun Hükmü" at the 60th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival? Was it the organizers, the ministry, the judiciary, the governor's office, the sponsors, pro-government trolls, or law enforcement? When exactly did the censorship occur, and does it have an expiration date? What is necessary for screening "Kanun Hükmü"?

1 "8 yılda ne değişti? Gültan Kışanak anlatıyor...", İrfan Aktan ile DİPNOT https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhLahL3lA34

2 Görülmüştür Kolektifi, "Hapishanede sansür ve oto sansür... Tutsak yazarlar anlatıyor...", Firari Yazılar, Klaros Yayınları, 2021 https://gorulmustur.org/icerik/hapishanede-sansur-ve-oto-sansur-tutsak-yazarlar-anlatiyor

3 Wikipedia defines self-censorship as follows: "[The] act of censoring or classifying one's own discourse, typically out of fear or deference to the perceived preferences, sensibilities, or infallibility of others, and often without overt external pressure."

Does it require a Constitutional Court ruling on a violation of freedom of expression? Or for the film to be officially registered? Or, simply, to be screened without police interference at any event? None of this is settled. Furthermore, censorship in Turkey often takes place during production, or even earlier, in the financing stage, through subtle, unprovable means. This might involve a phone call that disguises a threat as a "polite request," a piece of advice, or even a suggestion.

Given this ambiguity, it becomes nearly impossible to determine whether any given case constitutes censorship or self-censorship. Additionally, when the source of censorship is ambiguous and may potentially be enforced by any government, corporation, or paramilitary group, self-censorship becomes a more intricate phenomenon. It moves beyond the question of whether the act is blatant, visible, or invisible; instead, it takes the form of a pervasive mood imposed on the individual. For this reason, self-censorship in Turkey today amounts, at most, to this: the fear felt by those who have not personally faced censorship (or who have neither paid a price for it, nor dared to). One example is treating the documentary "Yeryüzü Aşkın Yüzü Oluncaya Dek" ("Love Will Change the Earth"), which was censored by the Golden Orange festival committee in 2014, as though it were officially banned –even though it wasn't– and overlooking the fact that it has since been screened multiple times at various venues without incident. In other words, self-censorship can equate to an inability to recognize the relatively free spaces that still exist while accusing those who make use of these spaces of "playing the hero" or "failing to grasp the circumstances." It involves internalizing the state apparatus's "pre-censorship" practices – which the Constitutional Court has ruled a violation of rights– and tailoring one's work accordingly. In Turkey, self-censorship as a concept permeates the financing, production, and distribution of cinema. As a result, it is often framed as a moral issue, positioned somewhere between bravery and heroism. The issue is, on the one hand, overly personalized, and on the other, insufficiently examined through the lens of political subjectivity. Both its practice and the resistance to it lack a coherent political or strategic framework. This is the main reason why self-censorship continues to lack a clear subject, or a defined "self."

Self-censorship, by definition, is not a tangible process; it is a practice often confined to the minds of creators, one they may be unwilling or unable

to admit even to themselves. In his novel "Gece" ("Night"), Bilge Karasu captures the pervasive mood following the 1980 military coup. This atmosphere seeps into every household and mind. Thoughts like "They are taking people to prison, maybe I am next," "What happened to others could happen to me," and "I could draw the short straw, too," echo throughout. But then comes the question emerging from some unexpected place, the central question that casts the color of night over Karasu's novel: What if they don't take me in? What if nothing ever happens to me? What if I spend all these years not doing what I want, not saying what I need to say, and nothing happens? How will I account for all that was left undone and unsaid, not to others, but to myself?

Oppression leads to isolation. It involves the state or corporate entities shutting down or restricting the activities of labor unions, collectives, associations, centers, and student clubs. It means budget cuts, strike bans, and a complete silence of once-active WhatsApp groups where we debated politics day and night. being left alone in the cutting room with that decision which could make a lot of trouble for you. It means being left alone in the editing room, facing a decision that could land you in serious trouble.

If oppression is isolation, then the only way to address self-censorship — oppression turned inward— is by invoking its antidote: collective will. No one openly admits to practicing self-censorship. The subjects remain concealed. Self-censorship cannot be identified or documented. If there is to be reporting or compilation of statistics on this subject, many of us would likely seek answers to the questions raised in Bilge Karasu's previously mentioned novel: Will more people suffer if we choose to speak out, or if we decide to stay silent? If we stay silent, will it eventually be our turn as well? Then, the same question arises again, lifting its head from the sand: What if it isn't? What if I continue living this way, enveloped in a comforting silence? What if I forget even the things I never said?

Perhaps one of our central questions is this: In a climate so dominated by fear, is there room for the fear of "what if nothing happens to me"? Can we speak of such a fear? Can it ever take on a collective form?

To answer this, we might need to move beyond the assumption that admitting fear equals a total absence of courage. Exposing our vulnerability may require a greater level of bravery. To reframe the question: Can an artist carve out a greater space for freedom by first acknowledging their lack of

it? In classical dystopias, the paramount deadlock individuals face stems from forgetting the very fears that once defined their reality. The protagonist must rediscover these forgotten fears to realize that what seems normal or natural is, in fact, a construct of a broader system governed by fear.

To expand on this idea, if escaping from a dystopia requires rediscovering fear, then during times of increased oppression and violence, shouldn't artists consider "what they can't do and how they can approach it differently," instead of merely saying, "I'll just keep doing what I do"? Shouldn't they ask themselves: Why did I shelf that project? Why couldn't I finish it? Why did I stop midway? What motivated my actions instead of pursuing other options? And why didn't I include that image in this book? Shouldn't we be discussing what we did not –or could not– do, and why, at a time when home raids have become routine; documentary filmmakers are imprisoned for their work; screenwriters, cinematographers, and agents are arrested; public administrators instantly seize institutions built over years; audiences are detained at LGBTI+ film screenings; and the film industry fails to take a stronger stance to defend its participation in the Gezi Protests?,

The "Görünür Görünmez" ("Visible Invisible") video series by Altyazı Fasikül emerged from questions like these: What if, when creating art, we laid bare our hesitations, fears, and anxieties, not to mention the over-the-top bravery we later find embarrassing? What if we revealed the questions we posed in moments of enthusiasm or anger –only to delete them for being untimely– along with the letters, messages, and diary entries written in desperation or frustration, their recipients unknown; the endings we shelved for being too hopeful or too bleak; and the files we closed without hitting the save button? In short, can we restore the subject to self-censorship? And what would happen if we did?

Interestingly, a video named "Duvarlar" ("Walls") serves as the unifying thread in the "Görünür Görünmez: Bir (Oto)Sansür Antolojisi" ("Visible Invisible: A (Self-)Censorship Anthology") exhibition series, forging a powerful link between those behind bars and those on the outside. The video documents a form of protest in which prisoners assert their right to write and publish books by inscribing messages on their courtyard walls. I'm not sure how we arrived there, but at some point the glue holding the Visible Invisible collective together became –in Kışanak's words– the act of "getting out" political prisoners' own words to the outside world. The courtyard images

in "Duvarlar" ("Walls") link the six videos in the exhibition –"Tereddütler" ("Hesitations"), "Duvarlar" ("Walls"), "Eksik Belgeseller" ("Missing Documentaries"), "Sevgili F" ("Dear F"), "Çark" ("The Wheel"), and "Sevil"– into a cohesive whole. At the film's end, an unfinished inscription reads: "Our right to publish books cannot be prev..."

Prisoners who write on courtyard walls are prosecuted by the state for "damage to public property," which effectively recasts prisons as public spaces. Ideas forged behind bars must be "taken out" to the public. But the atmosphere beyond the walls is thick with self-censorship. This leads us to facing a new question: If the true barrier lies outside -rooted in the inertia of societal opposition or a communal presence that blocks change- then questions of what we cannot do, and how, become not just individual dilemmas but collective ones. Accordingly self-censorship is no longer simply about an artist's personal freedom, courage, or fears. It defines the contours of political imagination, where it begins and where it ends.[4]

It is difficult for artists to let go of the myth of individual freedom. Doing so means accepting that we are not –and cannot be– truly free, and that our ideas may be even more imprisoned than those behind bars. Reinstating the subject (the "self") into self-censorship is only possible through a collective process of empowerment. Only then can we begin to confront the true political fear –the fear of "what if nothing happens to me?"– and find a form of courage guided by that very fear.

4 Zana Kibar, one of the directors of the documentary "Sûr: Ax û Welat", whose screening was blocked in Turkey, draws on a bird-hunting method used in France to describe the climate of self-censorship in the country: "During the hunting ban, hunters stretch wire nets over the forests. Birds, repeatedly hitting these nets, learn not to fly too high or too far. The boundary set by the net becomes their sky. When the ban ends and the nets are removed, the birds still don't cross those invisible lines, because they can no longer imagine doing so. We seem to be in a similar situation." Sibil Çekmen, "Gökyüzünün Sınırı", Zana Kibar ve Erhan Örs'le söyleşi, Altyazı Fasikül: Özgür Sinema https://fasikul.altyazi.net/seyir-defteri/gokyuzunun-siniri/

Cases

The Directorate-General of Cinema at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism did not approve the commercial release and public screening of the documentary *The Decree* (*Kanun Hükmünde*), which tells the story of doctor Yasemin Demirci and teacher Engin Karataş, both dismissed from their posts by statutory decree during the state of emergency. (February)

The late Turkish rock icon Cem Karaca's former spouse, İlkim Karaca, deposited the court-mandated security fee of TL 3,500,000 to have the film *Cem Karaca'nın Gözyaşları* ("Cem Karaca's Tears"), a biopic about the musician's life, withdrawn from circulation. (February)

Gülten Kaya Hayaloğlu, wife of the late artist Ahmet Kaya, one of the most beloved Turkish-Kurdish folk singers, filed a lawsuit to halt the screening of *Ahmet'in Türküsü* ("Ahmet's Song"), a biographical film directed by Kudret Sabancı. (February)

The 25-month prison sentence for Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu, directors of the documentary *Bakur*, was upheld. (April)

Screenings of Nejla Demirci's documentary *The Decree* as part of the Labour Film Festival were banned by the district governorates of Çankaya in Ankara, and Kadıköy and Beyoğlu in Istanbul, despite no court ruling having been issued against the film. (May)

Bakur cinematographer Koray Kesik was taken into custody. (May)

Director Nejla Demirci announced that Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which had provided venues to the Labour Film Festival, prevented the screening of *The Decree* at Beyoğlu Cinema, a venue owned by the municipality. (May)

Director Ömer Leventoğlu and cameraman Hüseyin Altürk, who were detained after their vehicle was stopped, were released. They had been arrested for possessing t-shirts bearing the image of Selahattin Demirtaş, the former co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party, imprisoned since 2016. (July)

When approached with a request to screen the documentary *Bir Düş* ("A Dream"), which chronicles 20 years of independent journalism at BirGün newspaper, Denizli Metropolitan Municipality responded that it would only consider the request after previewing the film. (October)

An investigation was launched into director Kazım Öz on charges of "terrorist organization propaganda" following the online screening of his film *Zer* on YouTube. (October)

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism ruled that the film *Rojbash*, directed and produced by Özkan Küçük, was unfit for commercial release. (October)

A screening of *The Decree* by the Free Orange Film Festival was banned by the Antalya Governor's Office. Controversy over the same documentary had led to the cancellation of the prestigious Golden Orange Film Festival on its 60th anniversary the previous year. The group organizing the screening aimed to highlight censorship. (October)

The film *QUEER*, scheduled to premiere at MUBI Fest, was banned by the Kadıköy District Governorate for "provocative content that may pose a threat to societal peace." In response, festival organizers cancelled the entire event. (November)

Director Kerem Tekoğlu was arrested on charges of "membership in a terrorist organization" as part of an investigation into Ahmet Özer, the mayor of Istanbul's most populous district, Esenyurt. (December)

Publishing Industry

Imagination versus delicate sensibilities

Aslı Tohumcu

A Pleasure to Burn: Fahrenheit 451 Stories by Ray Bradbury always sits within arm's reach on my bedside table. Sadly, it's a masterpiece all too often overlooked, in which Bradbury reflects on the experiences and narratives that culminated in his famous novel *Fahrenheit 451*. These tales unfold in a world where autocracy no longer needs to impose censorship, having instead resolved the issue by fostering a society that has come to loathe the arts. In one story, we meet individuals who have committed to memory books that have become "extinct." In another, a group of writers escapes to another planet to escape the state's fury at imagination. At the story's conclusion, the "enemies of the arts" track them down on the planet where they sought refuge; once they are killed, no one will remain on Earth to imagine. In this struggle, led by Edgar Allan Poe, the writers' sole weapon is, naturally, their imagination.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, reading *A Pleasure to Burn* about 15 or 20 years ago, and being amazed at how Bradbury could craft such stories, how he could conjure such profound darkness. Yet now, it feels as though it all unfolded just yesterday... There's a reason for this feeling, though I'm not sure I can neatly articulate it. But I will try.

For over 20 years, I have been writing children's book too. Yet it took me some time to realize that children's literature is often viewed as a tool or educational material for raising "acceptable children." Some parents, despite limited literary discernment, would lodge surprising, unsettling objections founded solely on their parental authority. Naturally, parents have the right to determine what their children should not read, and we would navigate any individual protest by respecting that prerogative.

At our events, we took the time to gently explain why a story's antagonist might speak harshly. When a parent who hoped her daughter would become a veterinary surgeon objected that the book's vet, sleeping outside the clinic all day, set a poor example, we patiently explained that this was a fictional character, and the portrayal served the story. At most, these occasional incidents amounted to little more than anecdotes and little jokes shared among publishers and writers.

But then came the day when we were informed that parents at a school in provincial Anatolia objected to pigs, New Year's celebrations, and depictions of battles in the books assigned for Turkish language classes, and that they preferred child characters who behaved properly toward adults and avoided certain undesirable thoughts. New "sensitivities" were raised almost daily, and the list kept growing. Before long, I, too, began to draw my share of complaints.

During a school visit, some parents who had prevented their children from reading my book, selected by the head of department, and from attending the event nevertheless showed up in person to confront me afterward. The problem had to do with "poo." The child character, who constantly overheard conversations about their infant sibling's poo (how the baby pooed or didn't, what color it was, what consistency it had, and so on) was scolded when she spoke of it herself and, quite naturally, felt upset by the hypocrisy. Despite offering an explanation for the mention of poo in the book, I couldn't defuse the anger directed at me. As far as I know, there isn't a single person who doesn't poo. Yet it seemed we were free to do it, just not to write about it. If you dared, a crowd demanding answers was ready to trample you. That's what I learned that day.

Shortly after, I learned that a children's book I deeply admired had been banned and would no longer be printed. Another book became the subject of a court case, while yet another was withheld from reprint as the publisher sought to avoid controversy. In a book series that has been in print for nearly 20 years and has brought joy to tens of thousands of children, the characters' nicknames were changed in a new edition because they were deemed "foul language." In one book, a child's underpants are visible as she rolls over; in another, characters discuss freedom and justice; in yet another, a boy wears a dress... Because these elements ruffled the feathers of some, others were denied the right to read.

Don't let the past tense mislead you, today, the Board for Protecting Minors from Obscene Publications, affiliated with the Ministry of Family and Social Services, continues to work with commendable diligence, enforcing bans on the distribution and sale of numerous books while pursuing legal action against writers, translators, and publishers. They leave no stone unturned in their effort to expand the list of banned books at full speed. The nation's hardest-working, most efficient institution even operates a

hotline, allowing ordinary citizens to file complaints and report content they consider obscene whether by phone, email, or WhatsApp. Once they decide a publication is obscene, it is labeled "Harmful to minors" and banned from public display. Those over 18 can buy these books only in opaque envelopes, marked only with nothing but the book's title and the warning "Harmful to minors." If they can find them, that is.

We have reached a point where decisions are made on behalf of everyone about what children can and cannot read. This is done both by the state and by individuals. The latter can include ordinary parents or internet personalities, whose sole qualification often being that they have children. We can now say that state censorship has become almost redundant, as responsible citizens effectively manage the mechanisms of censorship by filing complaints and targeting books themselves.

Writers sit at their desks with the ultimate goal of being read, yet the possibility of not being read remains a disturbing risk. How can they mitigate this? By choosing acceptable titles, addressing acceptable themes, and using acceptable language. I can use one of my own books as an example of how book titles are changed. In my book *Benim Babam Kötü Örnek* ("My Father is a Bad Example"), the men of the family, who are afraid of doing any work at home, complain to the young girl about her father. They tell her that her father is a "bad example" for helping her mother with various tasks. This stems from their fear that they might be expected to do some work themselves. The mother, however, explains to her daughter that life is a shared responsibility, and what her father is doing is actually commendable. The little girl, undeterred by the opinions of others, chooses to continue living her life happily.

The book was certainly well received by many readers, but more judged it by its cover, without even turning the page, saying, "How dare you call fathers a bad example?" Teachers who had recommended it found themselves in trouble, and as a result, the title was changed to *Benim Babam İyi Örnek* ("My Father is a Good Example") in a new edition. Never mind that the children who read it understood the joke. Thankfully, fathers and their prestige were spared.

Another of my children's novels, the first in a trilogy, has now made its way back to my desk. A passage from this book, which has been in print for almost 15 years and read by tens of thousands, has recently provoked objections that I

find too deplorable to elaborate on here. These objections have gone beyond parents merely barring their children from reading the book to complaining about me to the authorities… Although the book isn't in danger of being consigned to literature's graveyard, the prospect of it reaching far fewer children than before is disheartening enough. I find myself torn between excising the problematic section while keeping the plot intact, and rewriting it entirely.

Such events deny readers their right to read and writers their creative freedom. Moreover, they risk ceding the field to authors whose lackluster, especially compliant works sail through censorship as "harmless." Children's literature risks becoming a barren landscape of formulaic works devoid of engaging plots, marred by tepid language, and incapable of nurturing any love of reading. We will see fewer representations of diverse families and children, and fewer books that let young readers discover worlds where they feel at home, foster empathy, and feed their imaginations. Literature itself will vanish, replaced by books scarcely distinguishable from educational materials, and that's because we currently lack organized coalitions of publishers and authors, with no unified, collective stance.

Whether these personal anecdotes show that self-censorship is simply a survival tactic or that I have begun to backpedal, I frankly don't know. All I know is that they leave me feeling unsettled. My job is to craft stories that I love, not to pander to readers lacking the competence to read and comprehend or to appease prohibitionist sensibilities.

Given that children's book sales are largely concentrated in schools, one possible solution might be to write for children who know what they are looking for on bookstore shelves and at fairs, rather than within the confines of schools. I'm currently exploring this approach by writing a horror novel for children. It's ironic that the censorship and reactions I have encountered have led me to genres like horror and fantasy, which were once deemed risky. I will continue to exercise my imagination until the day comes when we become like one of Bradbury's heroes, memorizing books in a world bent on destroying them, though I hope I never have to become one of them.

Cases

Nergiz Publishing House announced that, upon the directive of the governor of Adana, disturbed by the publisher's book *Milli Eğitim'e Darbe* ("A Blow to National Education"), advertising banners for the book were removed from the Çukurova Book Fair. (January)

An investigation was launched into around 50 inmates at Patnos Prison in Ağrı province over books confiscated during ward searches. (January)

Three books, bearing Ministry of Culture approval stamps, were confiscated from the Pirtukakurdi stall at the İzmir Book Fair. Sebih Yoldaş, who was in charge of the stall for the Kurdish book website, was detained. (April)

The Municipality of Erzurum banned books published by Kırmızı Kedi Publishing House from being displayed at its stall during the Erzurum Book Fair, citing "political content" as the reason. (May)

The Ministry of Family and Social Services declared the books *Disney Esrarengiz Kasaba Günlük 3* (*Disney Mysterious Town Journal 3*), *Farklı Olmaya Cesaret Eden Erkek Çocuklarına Hikâyeler* (*Stories for Boys Who Dare to Be Different*), and *Yaramaz Evin Yeni Misafirleri* (*New Guests of the Naughty House*) as harmful publications, claiming that "some expressions, images, and depictions could negatively affect the morals and development of individuals under the age of 18." (May)

Police confiscated copies of the book *Jineolojiye Giriş* ("Introduction to Jineology") from Aram Publishing House's stall at the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival, citing an existing confiscation order. (July)

A court case was filed against writer Yılmaz Odabaşı on charges of "terrorist organization propaganda" and "membership in a terrorist organization," after he shared a social media post originally published by lawmaker and social activist Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu using the hashtag "No to strip searching in prisons," and commented on the issue. (August)

The İzmir 4th Criminal Court of Peace ordered the ban and seizure of the books *The Daughters of Kobani* (*Kobani'nin Kızları*) by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon and *Kürt Siyasetinin Mor Rengi* ("The Purple Color of Kurdish Politics") by Gültan Kışanak, on the grounds that they amounted to "terrorist organization propaganda." (September)

A court case on the charge of "terror organization propaganda" was also filed against author Yavuz Ekinci over certain expressions used in his 2014 novel *Rüyası Bölünenler* ("Those Whose Dreams Were Interrupted"). (September)

On 24 September, police raided the premises of the Mezopotamya Language and Culture Research Association (MED-DER), the Anka Language and Arts Education Cooperative, and the Payîz Pîrtuk bookshop as part of an investigation by the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office, confiscating hundreds of books and magazines. (September)

It was revealed that, in 2022, a ban and confiscation order had been issued for the novels *Umut ve Mavi* ("Hope and Blue") by Fırat Can and *Gün Işırken* ("As the Day Lightened") by Nilüfer Şahin, both published by Aryen Publishing House. The publisher was not notified of the ruling. (November)

The administration of Erzincan Type T Closed Prison confiscated the book *Basit Bir Demokrasi Örneği* ("A Simple Example of Democracy"), authored by Semih Altun, an inmate at the same prison, on the grounds that it would be harmful for the author to receive his own book. (November)

At the 8th Diyarbakır Book Fair organized by TÜYAP between 30 November and 8 December, copies of *Dildarê Serkeftinê* ("Driven by Success") by Mahmut Aba, Nelson Mandela's autobiography *The Long Road to Freedom*, and *Mektupları ve Yazıları* ("Letters and Writings") by Hayri Durmuş, all published by Aram Publishing House, were confiscated. (December)

Copies of the books *Efrin Direniş Günlüğü* ("Afrin Resistance Journal") and *Kadın Olmak* ("Being a Woman") were also confiscated from Aram Publishing House's stall at the Diyarbakır Book Fair. (December)

The Diyarbakır 3rd and 4th Criminal Courts of Peace issued confiscation orders for 42 books, 12 magazines, and six newspapers seized in police raids under an ongoing investigation by the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office since 2022. (December)

Music

Very rabid counterattacks, we must resist![5]

Özge Ç. Denizci

Last year, at a festival, Bajar's Kurdish song *Serhıldan* was played, and people began dancing the *halay*. A middle-aged woman entered the crowd, split the dancers, and started shouting: "You're playing separatist songs, you separatists!" Still, the song played through to the end. We later learned that a complaint had been filed with the Presidential Communications Center (CİMER)—a platform for requesting information from public institutions and submitting non-judicial complaints specifically about the festival, because of that very song. If the organizers had had the means, they would have invited Bajar in person and danced the *halay* to *Serhıldan* together. Just imagine: this is still happening in 2024. This is a song that is played and sung everywhere, and a band that performs across the country. But censorship won't be held back. It, too, is everywhere. In fact, it is now inside us. Whatever we can't tolerate, we complain about, whether to ourselves or to some third party. Speaking directly with those we disagree with feels almost old-fashioned now. When did we forget how to focus on solutions, to fight for what we care about? Or did someone make us forget?

It is as if we stopped being ourselves. "If I write this, I will get in trouble." "If I play it this way, people will react." "If I draw it like that, people will think something else..." When did we stop playing, singing, writing, drawing –in short, creating– for ourselves? As the lyrics of the song in question ask: "When did we grow up, when was the last time? When did we forbid children?" Indeed, when did we forbid ourselves?

We carry so many basic fears – of exclusion, not being accepted, being labeled, isolated, rendered helpless, having our freedom, jobs, homes, or livelihoods taken from us, among others. Is it possible to engage in artistic production that expresses our individuality, our desires, passions, anger, and other human emotions, despite all these fears? In an environment filled with

5 Contraataques muy rabiosos, deberemos resistir!

I cherry-picked the title of this article from the song "Ay Carmela!". We have been subjected to so much censorship and have internalized it so deeply that our counterattacks now target ourselves. Each of us carries our very own lovely little self-censorship.

uncertainty about what might happen to us, where there is no trust or safety net, it is just as difficult to realize our goals and fulfill ourselves as it is to simply be ourselves.

Historical data show that in our region, bans targeting evolving musical cultures have occurred in nearly every era – long before the founding of the Republic, during its establishment, and in the years that followed. But especially over the past 20 years. We have become alienated from one another, forgetting how to live together, how to build together, how to shape life collectively. Naturally, we have also become alienated from ourselves, or so we are led to believe. Not that we resist believing it. As alienation deepened, censorship grew; and as censorship increased, so did alienation. And so it went. And so it goes.

Not to delve too far into ancient history, but it is worth noting that the history of bans on Turkish music is often said to date back even further, to the Europeanisation process that began in the 17th century.

With the founding of the Republic, cultural pressure and hegemony merged with the policies introduced by each successive government, bringing us to where we are today. The climate of fear and the politics of oppression were present throughout these periods, so much so that it became almost absurd to speak of the arts without also speaking of censorship. Those in power have never hesitated to impose bans on artists and cultural workers whenever it suited them. Westernization policies sought to assert dominance over the people's music under the pretext of transitioning to polyphonic forms. What belonged to the people could no longer be of the people. The tradition of composing anonymous folk pieces had to change: it had to become polyphonic, prove itself, and be accepted by the West. The pains of change attempted to erase what came before, layering so-called "new" approaches over existing traditions. This wasn't limited to folk music, but extended to all traditional musical forms in the country. Instruments such as the *kanun*, *oud*, and *ney* became subjects of debate, with theses written, arguments raised, and discussions held on how to change or "modernize" their sound. At times, even bans were imposed. The state's cultural policy was built on censorship then – as it still is today.

The activities of the Oriental Music Branch of the Darülelhan Music School – established in 1917 and later renamed the Municipal Conservatory– were limited by an order issued on 9 December 1926. Even today, this dilemma remains one of the most conspicuous reasons behind the ongoing cold war

between proponents of Eastern and Western music, particularly within academic circles.

At this point, I would like to fast-forward the story and share a bit of my own experience. After finishing primary school in 1993, I began studying at the İstanbul Anatolian High School of Turkish Music, which had been established that same year. However, the school was shut down in its very first year. Our class of 21 students was transferred to the non-existent middle school of what is now known as the İstanbul Avni Akyol Fine Arts High School, which led to numerous issues. Some of my classmates who specialized in Turkish musical instruments, such as the *oud*, *kanun*, or *kemençe*, were forced to switch to Western instruments due to the school's sudden closure. These differences in musical training sometimes sparked small conflicts between my classmates and the students studying Western music at the Fine Arts High School, and even with some teachers. Looking back, it is not hard to see that all of this was a result of shifting state policies.

Whether this was a political ban or a couple of sentences pronounced in a speech and then signed by officials, much like in the vein of how the Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTÜK) imposes limitations today, I will never know.

Speaking of RTÜK, we need to go much further back than the establishment of that institution. In November 1934, a ban was imposed on Ankara Radio prohibiting the broadcast of Turkish-style music, a restriction that lasted for a year and a half. As a result, people began tuning in to broadcasts from the Turkish Radiotelephone Corporation (*Türk Telsiz Telefon Anonim Şirketi*) in Istanbul, and at times, even to Egyptian radio stations. Like all bans, this one didn't only punish musicians, it impacted society as a whole. We will never know for certain whether it was because the banned music resonated more deeply with listeners, but decades later, 'arabesque' music was widely embraced and became immensely popular.

In later years, there was greater flexibility; the gap between the audience and music narrowed, giving people the right to listen to what they wanted, and musicians the freedom to play and compose as they wished. It wouldn't be inaccurate to call these years a period of "music on probation."

In the 1960s, social upheavals, civil society movements, a volatile political atmosphere, and the encouragement of domestic migration called for music to be reexamined as a social phenomenon. Global changes also had

an impact on Turkey. The 1968 movement influenced music, and music, in turn, influenced social movements, though only to the extent allowed by those in power. It wasn't that regulation had ended. The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) was established in 1966 to both broadcast and regulate programming, until, on 12 September 1980, the country awoke to military marches. It wasn't just books that were confiscated and destroyed. Had it been possible, the military would have seized a melody from the air and locked it in a cell so no one could hear it. The 1980 junta destroyed everything: cassettes, vinyl records, instruments, musicians' ideas and dreams, and the tastes of listeners. Some musicians deemed "prejudicial" were denied not just their music, but also their freedom. Those who could, fled, taking with them their instruments and their lyrics.

In the period that followed, cultural policy became a game of giving a little while taking back a great deal. In the mid-80s, during a time when the regime's pressure had slightly eased, protest groups and singers began to reappear. But they were only briefly visible before disappearing again, once more silenced by mercilessly enforced bans. The songs they sang and the instruments they played were considered incriminating evidence. "Excessive playing of the saz" was among the leading reasons for being taken into custody – just as is the case today with Grup Yorum. It wasn't only lyrics that were suspect, but sounds, notes, and melodies themselves. Songs belonging to minorities –or those perceived to– were silenced in waves of censorship. In the 1990s, as pop music surged in popularity, protest music fluctuated between moments of vitality and stagnation. The powerful either ignored it or destroyed it, just as they did in the 2000s. Then came a new phrase: "democratic opening." It seemed to signal freedom, but turned out to be just another routine political performance ahead of an election. Still, people began talking about freedoms, and that was enticing. There was talk of recognizing Kurdish as a mother tongue, freedom for languages that had been ignored for decades, or banned for being heard too much. Was it truly freedom, or did we only hear what we wanted to hear? Before all this, we had witnessed musicians nearly lynched for singing in Kurdish. We heard of composers altering lines of poetry so that songs could pass inspection. We saw musicians forced into exile for what they played or sang, unable to return home.

As with every societal incident, music was the first to be silenced, initially by the state, and then gradually through mounting community pressure. We

came to understand that anti-establishment music often led to courtrooms, and that playing the music you wanted could cost you your life. As musicians, perhaps we never imagined our concerts would be cancelled simply for speaking out on social issues. Or that, as women musicians, what we wore on stage would not be up to us. We never thought we would have to compromise so much on our bodies, our voices, our lyrics, and our melodies.

Do you remember when universities used to hold spring festivals? These festivals began to be systematically banned starting in 2006. By 2024, they were still under restrictions or outright bans. As if banning university spring festivals weren't enough, the bans soon spread to festivals more broadly. Citing concerns over security, authorities began cancelling events. Over time, festivals became monopolized, featuring the same groups and musicians, over and over. Fearing the country might fall completely silent without even these, we told ourselves, "Let's not speak out, at least these can continue." We consoled our musician friends, saying there would be other festivals to play. Then many were banned all at once. It was a move to silence music altogether. For example, the Zeytinli Rock Festival, held annually since 2005, was cancelled in 2022. Scheduled for August 17–21 that year, it was banned by the district governor's office after the Society for Spreading Science (İlim Yayma Cemiyeti) declared it "incompatible with societal values." The music festival in Bursa's Nilüfer district was also banned in both 2022 and 2023 by orders from the governorate and district governorate. But the bans didn't stop at music. The 60th edition of the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, scheduled for October 7–14, 2023, was cancelled due to controversy surrounding the documentary *The Decree* (*Kanun Hükmü*). Similarly, the screening ban on the film *Queer*, which tells a love story between two gay men, led to the cancellation of MUBI FEST, planned for November 2024. Meanwhile, RTÜK issued an administrative fine and five broadcast suspensions to Açık Radyo, Istanbul's beloved community radio station, after a guest used the term "Armenian genocide" on the *Açık Gazete* morning show on April 24. RTÜK then suspended Açık Radyo's terrestrial broadcasts and revoked its license. As these bans show, censorship extends beyond music to all forms of artistic and intellectual expression. It restricts not only artists but also their audiences. The audience's right to choose is curtailed before the work is even completed, before it is ever played or sung.

Today, whenever we start planning an event, the first thing we think about isn't how to organize it, but how to do it in a way that avoids getting banned or restricted. And organizing something under that kind of worry is anything but easy. In the end, we start censoring ourselves. It reminds me of an experience from a festival years ago, where I was on the organizing committee. That time, the censorship came from an entirely different place: some sectarian leftist big shots. They wanted to request the setlists of a few of the musicians performing at the festival, especially the lesser-known ones, before the event. A few of us argued that such a request amounted to censorship and was simply wrong. Would they have made the same request if a famous band or musician had been on stage? Of course not. The groups pushing for setlists had two concerns: first, that some songs might not align with the "spirit" of the festival; second, fear of provoking a reaction from the state. If that was the case, perhaps we shouldn't have held the festival at all. As it happened, a very well-known and widely loved musician was the closing act. No one would have dared ask them for a setlist. And then, the worst fears of the pro-censorship camp came true: the famous musician ended their performance with one of the very songs said to be "against the spirit of the festival." Even though we didn't sing along, even if we didn't particularly like the song, those of us who had opposed censorship were pleased. Because it's necessary to stand up to all forms of control and censorship.

There is, of course, much more to say on this subject... Sometimes I imagine a day without music. That we stripped music from advertisements, public spaces, films, births, deaths, weddings—from life itself. I can't help but wonder what kind of world that would be. Perhaps what we need is to experience the absence of music. Such deprivation might better reveal its value, and we would come to see that music is intrinsic to life, and that it is sustained by an entire ecosystem and the people who labor within it. Unfortunately, no artist in any discipline can truly be said to be practicing their art if they have built their own walls of censorship, shaped by the constant pressures I described at the beginning. The more we fail to recognize this, the more we punish not only ourselves, but also our audiences. We are living through a time –a critical juncture– when state censorship is no longer even necessary. Community pressure is more than enough. We are surrounded, but we have not surrendered, and we must not surrender. Perhaps the answer is to keep our focus on creation itself, and

only look around after the work is complete. First and foremost, we should create for ourselves. Every day brings new proof that wondering "What will others think?" offers no real protection against censorship, or more accurately, against the urge to self-censor.

I am beginning the solution with myself, breaking the bones of my tongue and hands: I have long limited and censored myself as a music writer. In Turkey, we can't really speak of music criticism, because the community is so small. Any critique is often taken personally or seen as a low blow, even when that's not the intention. There is no real concept here of criticizing the work itself. In a sector that barely survives, the moment you start critiquing music, people make you regret it, and you are the one accused of jeopardizing someone's livelihood. There's also the issue of personal ties: if your income depends on managing artists, booking shows, or running a venue, you can't afford to fall out with musicians, managers, promoters, or venue owners. That's why you won't find any music writers in Turkey who don't self-censor, and why it is rare to come across a solid piece of music criticism. These are the main reasons I haven't written in this field for years. I have chosen not to write about it, I have chosen to look the other way, and in doing so, I have censored myself.

I would like to conclude with a quote from a manifesto by End Censorship in Arts, which I was involved with years ago. This manifesto was opened for signatures prior to the 3rd International Freemuse Conference in Istanbul: "We, the undersigned, who work across various fields of culture and the arts, believe that censorship, retribution, and self-censorship form a 'triangle of evil', each reinforcing the other, and we reject all of them."

References

– Melih Duygulu, "Cumhuriyet ve Müzik", İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2024.
– "Cumhuriyet'in Sesleri", Gönül Paçacı (ed.), Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1999.
– "Cumhuriyet'in Müzik Politikaları", Fırat Kutluk (ed.), h2o yayınları, 2018.
– Orhan Kahyaoğlu, "Grup Yorum 25 Yıl Hiç Durmadan", Can Sanat Yayınları, 2010.
– İrfan Yiğit, "Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Musiki ve Yasaklar", PhD dissertation, 2019.
– Anıl Yıldız, "Özge Ç. Denizci: 'Müzik hayatın aslında ta kendisidir.'" https://www.edebiyathaber.net/ozge-c-denizci-muzik-hayatin-aslinda-ta-kendisidir/
– Özge Ç. Denizci, "Son ses duyulana kadar...", https://www.izmir.art/tr/son-ses-duyulana-kadar

– “Önce Müzik mi Susar?” Tayfun Polat, Özge Ç. Denizci, www.youtube.com/watch?v=svdcWqx7h9s
– “Sansür Konuşmaları” Aslı Odman, Nazım Dikbaş, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYBuwYtgK44&t=675s
– Simge Akkaş, “ Yasaklanan Festival ve Konserler” https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/liste/yasaklanan-festival-ve-konserler
– “Açık Radyo’nun kapatılmasına dair merak edilenler” https://apacikradyo.com.tr/duyuru/acik-radyonun-kapatilmasina-dair-merak-edilenler

Cases

The Directorate of Religious Affairs filed a criminal complaint against singer Volkan Konak for “inciting the public to hatred and enmity” after he criticized the share the state-affiliated institution receives from taxes on entertainment venues, posting, “I’ll raise a toast to you with my next glass.” (January)

Five members of Grup Yorum were detained during police raids on the İdil Cultural Center and the People’s Law Office in central Istanbul. (February)

The Bingöl Governor’s Office and Security Directorate banned a concert by Metin and Kemal Kahraman, which had been planned by the Eğitim-Sen teachers’ union to mark International Mother Language Day on 21 February. (February)

The Governor’s Office of Adana barred four members of the music group Kolektîfa Rîtmên from performing live, citing ongoing investigations into alleged “membership in a terrorist organization” and “terrorist organization propaganda.” (March)

In the trial against folk musician Pınar Aydınlar –launched over her performance at the 21st Munzur Culture and Nature Festival in Dersim in 2023 and her social media posts– the court acknowledged that the songs she sang were protected under freedom of expression. Nonetheless, she was sentenced to 18 months and 24 days in prison for her social media posts. (May)

A planned concert by the band Dolu Kadehi Ters Tut at Gaziantep University was cancelled after the Gaziantep Family Platform targeted the band for its support of LGBTI+ rights. (May)

The İdil Cultural Center, where Grup Yorum rehearses, was raided, and Grup Yorum member Eser Çelik was detained. (July)

Four members of the band Koma Özgün, who performed in Kurdish at a wedding in Hakkari on 28 July, were arrested for allegedly engaging in

"terrorist organization propaganda" by singing the songs "Keçe Kurdan" and "Şervano." The members were released after the first hearing on 14 August. (August)

A group attempted to assault veteran folk singer Suavi following his performance at an event hosted by the Municipality of Beykoz in Istanbul on 19 August. (August)

A planned concert by Suavi, organized by the Seydişehir Municipality in Konya, was cancelled after a meeting between the municipality and the ultranationalist Gray Wolves organization. (August)

Members of the band Koma Hevra, detained after their Kurdish-language performance in Diyarbakır, were released later the same day. (October)

Kurdish musicians Helim Arslan (Omerî) and Azad Bedran Kızılkar, who had been arrested in Diyarbakır on suspicion of "membership in a terrorist organization," were released under judicial control measures after four days of detention. (October)

Kurdish musician Ali Baran, who resides in Germany, was detained on suspicion of "terrorist organization propaganda" upon arriving in Istanbul to work on a new album. (October)

The Supreme Court upheld a 23-month and 12-day prison sentence against singer Ferhat Tunç over his social media posts. (November)

A planned concert by Kurdish musician Azad Bedran, scheduled for 15 November at a hall owned by Muratpaşa Municipality in Antalya, was cancelled. (November)

Venue owners cancelled scheduled concerts by Kurdish singer Xecê in Erzurum (16 November), Ağrı (20 November), and Muş (21 November). (November)

The Governor's Office of Kars cancelled Xecê's planned concert on 17 November, citing "building renovation" as the reason. (November)

A planned concert by Kurdish musician Diljen Roni at the Şişli Cemil Candaş Urban Cultural Center in Istanbul on 6 December was also cancelled on the grounds of "building renovation." (December)

Küçükçekmece Municipality in Istanbul cancelled a planned concert by Kurdish singer Rojda Şenses at the Yahya Kemal Beyatlı Performance Center on 17 November, without providing any justification. (November)

The district governor's office in Osmangazi, Bursa, banned a planned concert by singer İlkay Akkaya on 18 November. (November)

Folk singer Pınar Aydınlar was detained as part of an investigation launched over her display of a poster of Seyit Rıza, an Alevi Kurdish political leader, and her remarks at the Tunceli Culture Meetings event held in Yenikapı Square, Istanbul. (December)

Rapper Ekin Can Arslan, also known as Sansar Salvo, was arrested on charges of promoting drug use and endangering public safety through a music video released on digital and social media platforms. (December)

Visual Arts

"Makas Bayramı"na taş koymak
Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş

"In my dream, they were holding something called 'Scissors Day,' and I was required to attend. (...)"
Gülçin Aksoy
03.12.2014, Twitter

Censorship –the restriction imposed on a form of communication by a power group using the means at its disposal– can sometimes take the shape of a "founding censorship" so deeply rooted that society comes to see it as part of its own identity. At other times, as we have seen increasingly in recent years, it emerges in new forms, crafted by governments to suit their interests amid changing social conditions. It restricts, it judges, it punishes.

The Susma Platform's 2024 report offers numerous examples of censorship. There, we see that censorship can be as crude and blunt as a district municipality canceling an exhibition in a space it "owns," citing "scheduling conflicts" due to a dinner for *muhtars* (elected neighborhood administrators). It can also be long-term and systematic, serving the evolving, intensifying, and targeted strategic goals of the government. At times, it takes the form of shutting down a radio station simply to avoid any confrontation with the shameful chapters of this land's history, or blocking exhibitions that allow the LGBTI+ movement to share its own narrative and gain strength. It may even aim to restrict how sexuality and gender are understood and expressed, keeping them confined within the government's increasingly narrow framework.

In addition to de facto bans, the instrumentalization of the law to target artistic output is another widely used form of censorship today, as those whose expressions have been censored often find themselves in court. Yet one of the most powerful ways censorship operates is through the gradual imposition of restraints on the minds and actions of individuals, groups, and ultimately society itself – in other words, through the birth, growth, and spread of self-censorship from person to person, from community to community. So where exactly is self-censorship born? At what moments does it take root and develop? And in response, what kind of consciousness and awareness must we cultivate to dismantle it and prevent its spread? What can be done?

Although I don't believe the arts can be easily separated from one another, let us, for the sake of this article's framing, focus on how visual art is "created" today. By understanding the process and environment in which art is produced, we can begin to see where self-censorship enters the equation – where it weakens the will, and where it silences. I say 'where' because, along the roadmap of creation, self-censorship as a counter-act occupies both a moment and a specific place. While it tells the artistic impulse— which seeks what has not yet been discovered, spoken, or depicted – "do not discover, do not speak, let it remain hidden," it too is an act: the result of a decision, or more often a series of decisions. It is a personal, collective, and societal state of being stifled that grows with each repetition of that series.

Where do the sources of creativity lie? Is the source for visual artists found in the visual language that surrounds them, one they learn, practice, and reshape with their own contributions? We're always talking about the myth of "finding inspiration," perhaps sensing where it comes from without being able to describe it precisely. Where does inspiration lie? We say, "I was inspired," but where do these creative breezes blow from? Our breath? "Come back to the concrete world," I can hear you saying. Yes, freedom, a free society, is the condition of creativity. An artist can only learn, explore, experiment –in other words, create– in a free society. But a free society is not a given. Freedom, the essential condition, the primary environment and material, is something that must be constantly fought for. It demands ongoing struggle.

Creativity and self-censorship at a conceptual crossroads

What do artists call themselves these days? I'm not asking what they say to themselves in private –that's something I will come back to– but rather, what term they use to describe themselves publicly. Both "contemporary art" and "modern art" are well-established labels. Some prefer "visual arts" as a broader term, one that includes both the contemporary and the non-contemporary, allowing them to avoid being confined to a single era. It is a way of laying claim to all artistic periods in a time when humanity seems poised to discard not only its past, but possibly its final generations as well.

All of these terms can be useful at times, but I would like to return to the term "conceptual art." It may feel a bit passé or somewhat outdated in 2025, but

it still maintains meaningful connections with other independent creative fields. “Conceptual art” is a term I have always advocated for defining more thoroughly, expanding, and applying across all branches of the arts. In fact, it complements the word “art” more effectively than the suffix “-ist,” which can sometimes distort the meaning of what we are trying to express and, at other times, just sound slightly off. For instance, when we refer to a “contemporary artist,” we might simply mean that they are our contemporary. When we say “modern artist,” we risk overlooking those whose relevance has endured across centuries. Meanwhile, “visual artist” falls short of capturing the full spectrum of artistic practice, as many artists work with sound, touch, even scent. By contrast, the term “conceptual artist” clearly signals that the work is grounded in ideas, that its process, form, and spirit draw their strength from the conceptual stage and from the relationships between concepts. This is the point from which we can begin to evaluate today’s art and artists, to locate them on maps that are burning on all sides, and to assess their relationship to self-imposed limitations – self-censorship– which is, after all, the central concern of this article. Just as creativity is nourished by the conceptual stage, it is also where the traces of self-censorship can be most clearly seen.

When working not just as a field but as a collective, how do artists think, how do they feel, what do they do through reflection, and what do they do with their emotions? How do they find their point of orientation, what we have called concepts in this text? How do they move across whatever forms they work in – painting, sculpture, video, installations, magazines, letters, writing? Can we detect self-censorship, can we pinpoint it at certain moments, curves, breaks, or slips in this movement, even if we can’t document it in a report?

As soon as it began to question itself and to encompass the shifting appearances, cadences, techniques, and ultimately the mediums of the modern world, art made one of its most radical and ambitious moves toward freedom and independence in relation to its “subject.” Art would no longer submit to the imposition of a fixed subject, a limited range of renditions, or a prescribed mode of interpretation. A landscape could now also be –or be about– mental illness. A massive collage was undoubtedly a reflection of consumer society, but it simultaneously proposed a new thesis and practice in color theory. No one could argue that a few minutes of silence wasn’t art; and indeed, we still speak of it with reverence for its depiction of infinity in

a pure medium, and for the layered presence, change, and persistence of truths that can only be grasped through abstraction in every realm of life. Art would no longer allow anyone to dictate what it could or could not do.

An autopsy of self-censorship

Former hierarchies between subjects and themes imposed on art by power groups external to it were thus dismantled. Through its magnificent destructive force, art ultimately claimed its freedom. In doing so, every hidden element –long embedded in the fabric of life– emerged as a valid subject of artistic exploration. Put simply: no part of life’s diversity could any longer be deemed off-limits for art. Art placed at the very center of its practice the determination to reject authoritarian censorship, any form of power that sought to dictate what it could or could not do. While this radical act of liberation laid the foundation for the rich variety of visual languages and media in contemporary art, that diversity is a result –not the source– of this breakthrough. We must be careful not to mistake the appearance of diversity for genuine freedom and independence.

Today, when we perform an autopsy on art –weakened, stifled, and ultimately killed by self-censorship– the first thing we find damaged is this radical freedom. While art had once claimed the freedom to choose its own subject, forge its own connections, and select its own materials, under sustained pressure it began to settle into a conceptual world that it had either constructed itself or inherited – one that had ceased to grow or evolve. It sacrificed its destructiveness. In limiting itself, in repeating itself without producing anything new, it began to rot and collapse. This also amounts to a betrayal, an abandonment of the rebellious, radical, and independent legacy of art I have tried to briefly outline above.

In the case of an artist who, under prevailing social conditions, sets out never to challenge any form of authority –old or new– and who becomes a vehicle for both the government’s agenda and their own interests as aligned with power, it would be almost misleading to speak of art or self-censorship. The only reasonable response is to distance ourselves from such artists, who eagerly present their “beautiful” works for use in government propaganda at every opportunity. What we are trying to understand and dismantle is the condition of the artist who, in the very act of creating art, interrupts themselves, holds back, and retreats. Of course, there is always a learning

dimension: art is undoubtedly a lifelong process of learning from the world, from other artists, and through self-instruction – a process that might even be considered a definition of art itself. Thus, identifying the points where self-censorship infiltrates the discourse and practice of the educator/artist is another crucial dimension of the autopsy of self-censorship.

These are the clues that help us map out self-censorship, sometimes even in our own actions. We can trace it whenever we avoid taking a new step, refrain from asking a new question, and continue to repeat what we have done before within an unchallenged network of relationships. So, where can we observe maps of self-censorship? In the work of an artist whose early output was full of curiosity and the thrill of discovery, but who, a decade or two later, continues to produce similar work within the "same" conceptual framework, using the same materials and touch. Yet of course, the framework is no longer the same: the conceptual lens that once helped interpret and shape a personal or historical moment has fallen out of step with time; it has expired. There may be many reasons behind this kind of self-censorship, akin to pulling one's own brakes. Perhaps the artist's early work became "popular," gained recognition within a particular social discourse, and they are reluctant to give up that position. Or perhaps the artist has come to realize that the drive that once powered their work could now land them in trouble. To mention an exception: Could an artist become aware that they are hitting the brakes, and incorporate that very act of restraint into their work? Of course they could. That would mean forging a new conceptual framework, one that creates its own terms. But for such a move to take place, certain conditions must be met – conditions for an art that cannot be defeated by self-censorship: namely, remaining critical, questioning oneself, and never surrendering that critical stance for the sake of any other consideration.

In lieu of a conclusion: When it smells like censorship

Let's return to the dream my dear friend Gülçin had, and to the tweet she posted about it, the one I quoted at the beginning of this article (yes, there once was a place called Twitter, where censorship, both domestic and international, could be at least partially circumvented). First, let's take a look at the full tweet, which I previously quoted only in part: "In my dream, they were holding something called 'Scissors Day,' and I was required to attend. Is that the smell of censorship? Let's hope for the best..."

There is a day of festivity, and the artist who dreams it is required to attend. This forced inclusion is, in fact, one of the most insidious aspects of censorship. Upon waking, she senses the trap, detects the smell of censorship, and feels uneasy (perhaps Gülçin meant to write fear of censorship rather than smell –*korkusu* instead of *kokusu*– but I'll keep it as she posted it). For one of the most disturbing parts of the story is that the censorship regime presents its oppressive universe as a celebration, as a form of salvation. With her words, "Let's hope for the best," Gülçin signals her readiness to resist and makes it clear she won't surrender to the threat of self-censorship, something that has reached her subconscious, but which she defies by recounting her symbolic dream to the world. To borrow Aslı Odman's phrase, she asserts her right "not to ride on the train of the powerful." In that spirit, let this be our principle against censorship and self-censorship: we will not attend any Scissors Days; we will rock the boat instead.

Cases

The censorship-themed exhibition *Vallus* by the Eskişehir-based initiative Ye'r Community was closed earlier than planned on the grounds that the venue would host a dinner for neighbourhood administrators (muhtars). (May)

After an artwork intended for the exhibition *Çarpışma* ("Collision"), part of the *Le Mur Istanbul* project by the Institut Français highlighting street art in Istanbul, was censored by the institute for being political, both curators and artists withdrew from the show. (May)

The exhibition titled *Dön-Dün Bak: Türkiye'de Trans Hareketinin Tarihi* ("Trans-Yesterday Look: A Retrospective of the Transgender Movement in Turkey"), organized by the 10th Trans Pride Week Exhibition Collective and opened at the Tütün Deposu Exhibition Hall in central Istanbul on 26 June, was banned by an order from the Beyoğlu district governor's office issued on 11 July. (July)

Artist Fahrettin Örenli announced that some of his works exhibited at the İstiklal Arts Gallery, run by the Beyoğlu Municipality, had been removed following a visitor's complaint about "obscenity." (October)

An exhibition organized in Tatvan, Bitlis by the Aryen Huner Association to mark 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, was shut down by the police. Art teacher Fatma Zozan Bor was detained and her paintings were confiscated. (November)

Theater

Fine self-censorship, ugly idea

Derviş Aydın Akkoç

"What do you read, my lord?
Words, words, words..."
(Shakespeare, Hamlet)

Lenin wrote an interesting preface to his seminal work Imperialism, written in 1916 during his stay in Zurich. Owing to the constraints of exile, he had limited access to primary sources – none from Russia, and only a handful from France and Britain. Nevertheless, he engaged deeply with J. A. Hobson's writings and meticulously compiled a wealth of materials: statistics, official reports, articles, and books that informed his analysis of the imperialism concept. But when it came to expressing his thoughts, Lenin encountered a much harder nut to crack: censorship. The pervasive censorship of modern power structures, compelled authors toward self-censorship, regardless of their intentions. Lenin himself lamented the "slavish speech" he was forced to adopt in certain parts of the text, a concession to the limitations imposed by censorship:

"This pamphlet was written with an eye to the tsarist censorship. Hence, I was not only forced to confine myself strictly to an exclusively theoretical, specifically economic analysis of facts, but to formulate the few necessary observations on politics with extreme caution, by hints, in an allegorical language –in that accursed Aesopian language– to which tsarism compelled all revolutionaries to have recourse whenever they took up the pen to write a 'legal' work."[6]

In 1917, during the "days of liberty" following the revolution, Lenin expressed that it was "painful" for him to revisit the self-censored sections of his own writings. He described these parts as tainted by phrasing that was "distorted, cramped, and compressed in an iron vise." Leaving aside the question of how pre-revolutionary censorship mechanisms were uniquely reproduced after the seizure of power –and their impact on the aesthetic field in the Soviet experience– it is clear that the "allegorical language,"

6 Lenin, Selected Works, Moskow: Progress Publishers, 1963.

"extreme caution," and "hints" Lenin speaks of will be instrumental in problematizing the dialectic of censorship and self-censorship, as they are symptomatic. In a linguistic landscape shaped by dominant powers, the need to make compromises is ever-present. We must always consider the law and its various sanctions, which continually reshape the phrases we choose to use in discourse. Even the act of expressing something in a "legal" manner is a significant concern – one that affects not only politics but also the arts more broadly, and remains an unresolved issue. Taking a closer look at the functioning of self-censorship in artistic production, without ignoring the relationship between the arts and politics, one can observe a conspicuous force at work: the law.

Lenin's experiences with "legality," referring to the pressure and oppression imposed by the law, exemplify a key aspect of self-censorship. Throughout history and still today, anyone seeking to share a political or artistic message (especially one of dissent or protest) must make a deliberate effort to avoid drawing the attention of the law. Of course, the law is not so incapable that it fails to detect expressions or works built on allegorical language and metaphor, or to piece together hints scattered across a collection of words. But doing so requires a process: legal experts, an army of specialists, and trial procedures – all of which take time. Not to mention the various lines of public debate that allegorical expressions can spark. It is far more economical to suppress expression at the outset, before it even begins to take shape, by enforcing self-censorship.

In addition, the law operates to regulate the artist's imagination –the backbone of aesthetic production– through various means and tools. Even if concealing expression or clouding meaning is not the only strategy artists develop to avoid the law's gaze, the use of ambiguous language and tone that shifts a work from clarity to vagueness, furnishing aesthetic undertakings with allegories and metaphors, is quite common. The allegorical language that Lenin rightly criticizes also serves a constructive function, enabling works to partially bypass censorship and ease self-censorship. Not only political thought, but also the history of literature is rich with allegorical and symbolic works, each more valuable than the last. Every climate of oppression gives rise to its own forms of expression. The reason various mechanisms of censorship and self-censorship take shape is to suppress and undermine the fundamental human powers of creation.

Yet even if creative capacities are diminished and the reserves devoted to aesthetic production are depleted, they do not vanish entirely. Any subject who holds words and experiences they wish to manifest will, in one way or another, find a means to express themselves and release their output into the flow of the world. The ideology of a work is expressed not only in its content but, well before that, in its form. Every work carries a unique spirit as its content, which seeks out its audience – its readers and viewers. This search is driven by a desire to make an impact, though the nature of that impact cannot be foreseen. Such unpredictability is not something modern governments readily accept. Although power attempts to disable the dynamics of interaction and block channels of communication, it cannot fully impose its will. Uncertainty continues to speak in its own language and with its own character, and the work of art persists in dispersing and distributing its effects.

Another, and more significant, point to consider about self-censorship is that the law does not simply appear after aesthetic production has taken place; it operates beforehand. To put it more plainly: the law is not external to the subject but internal; it is not out there, but right here. This is where the real crisis takes root. The gaze of the modern state's law –one that arrests, prosecutes, morally or legally investigates, or convicts through conscience– has embedded itself deep within the subject's spiritual mechanisms. It is here, and it is inside. In this context, piercing the armor of self-censorship is not as easy as it might seem. Certain words and expressions, political labels, and even forms of commentary are preemptively claimed by the state – or at the very least, their risk potential is intuitively grasped, and their usage framed accordingly. The law, which singlehandedly underpins the structures of modern governance –be it totalitarian, theocratic, or the now frequently lamented liberal-democratic form– appears to pursue a singular aim through its sweeping reach: to extract, in tangible form, the idea embedded within a work that speaks in allusions, dons irony when necessary, and conveys itself through images or metaphors charged with political resonance. And if that distilled idea holds any criminal potential, the law seeks not only to punish the work, but also, inevitably, its creator.

Every individual work of art –whether a painting or a poem, a piece of contemporary art or a novel or play– ultimately rests on an idea it seeks to express and make heard. These ideas may support the established order and

its political and aesthetic ideology, or they may oppose that order, challenging its functioning and offering visions of an alternative or higher world. Yet whether they align with or stand against the existing order, for modern governments, ideas are always suspect – persistent problems to be monitored. This is, of course, due to the complex relationship between ideas and action.

Although thinkers like John Stuart Mill might argue that "no one is persecuted or sanctioned for voicing their opinion because opinions and actions are not the same thing," modern governments rarely treat the link between opinions and actions as entirely separate. Hobbes, one of the founding figures of modern political thought and state theory, maintains that not only bodies but also ideas must be governed. In this view, to secure complete obedience to authority and to prevent society from rising up in anger, "sickly opinions" must be entirely scraped from the social body. But who is to carry out this act of scraping, and on what legitimate grounds? If there are such things as sickly opinions, who decides which opinions are healthy? What is the logic behind the obsessive attitude that modern structures of government assume toward opinions, whether found in a work of art or in a seemingly ordinary piece of writing? It is clear that a destructive concern is at work here. According to Hobbes, actions arise directly from opinions. Opinions are dangerous: they pervert, provoke, disturb, transform, startle, encourage, urge, divide and disperse, gather and unite... Hobbes may have tried to extirpate passion from opinion, to refine thought by stripping it of potentially threatening metaphors and imagery, and thereby erase the action within thought before it could be born – but is there any government that does not deploy this political technique to subtly consolidate its power? In Hobbes's view, the ambiguity and distance between opinion and action is erased. This view –still widely accepted and increasingly expanded– holds, at a deeper level, that having an opinion is already a form of action: the act of thinking.

If an opinion does not imply action and instead serves to reinforce existing power relations, it is acceptable to sovereign power; if the opposite is true, it becomes a serious inconvenience. The suppression of sickly, ugly, deviant, or disruptive opinions at the political level –and, at times, the use of force to eradicate them at the source (the drowning of expression)– is one of the hallmarks of modern power relations. The roots of these exclusionary, delimiting modern practices can, of course, be traced back to Plato. Plato sought to banish poets from the polis –that is, from political

space– not because they engaged in the "imitation of ideal forms," but because they interfered with the law, wielded language maliciously, and subverted established meanings and values. The language of the law sees the language of art as an adversary. When the poet Cemal Süreya said, "poetry is against the constitution," he was attempting to break with this long-standing tradition. Art and governance are not harmonious pursuits, but rather antagonistic practices, sworn never to reconcile. Poetry being "against the constitution" is not merely rhetorical flourish; it represents a crystallized form of the historical consciousness of the oppressed. In contrast to legal mechanisms that stigmatize, silence, and dangle death to make disease seem acceptable, art draws its emancipatory potential from the expression of its own libidinal energy...

With this alarmist apparatus always on guard against opinions, whether in the ancient or modern era, these political regimes that cause a storm in a teacup, in fact, timidly concede something in the process. Any expression, understood as opinion-action, is a force, a weight, something with impact – something that not only is shaped by the world but also intervenes in its current operation. Expression is vital to the organization and continuity of social and political life. For Hobbes, determining which ideas may circulate and how –deciding "who shall examine the doctrines of all books before they be published"– and thus defining what is right and what is wrong, ranks among the sovereign's primary responsibilities. This sacred duty encompasses the arts no less than politics or judicial institutions.[7]2

"All the world's a stage," said Hobbes' contemporary William Shakespeare, and like everything else, censorship and self-censorship, too, have their place on this stage. The theater, after all, operates within its own distinct ideal-aesthetic regime – one that is rich in allegorical and symbolic expression, irony, distortion, and techniques such as trickery, veiled language, double entendre, and a range of performance styles. In the theater, writing itself becomes a stage; and while the writer-subject recedes into the background –eventually disappearing within the dramatic flow and the physical movements of the actors– it is ultimately the writer who becomes politicized, and whose words carry aesthetic charge. At the same time,

7 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 p. 118-119. (A new Turkish translation of this book by Utku Özmakas and Ferit Burak Aydar is forthcoming from İş-Kültür Publications.)

theater is a deeply direct and collaborative mode of expression, constantly evolving through the collective contributions of directors, actors, designers, lighting technicians, and even the audience. However, before this collective aspect comes into play, the writer is often alone in the night, navigating the parameters of censorship and self-censorship. Self-censorship affects the playwright just as much as any other artist, and perhaps in different, even more intense ways. Beyond being a tactic for survival, caution becomes a technique that matures over time. The playwright shapes their aesthetic output through hints, imagery, ironic dialogue, and satire when necessary. In crafting the birth and structure of words and ideas, they consider not only the moral and normative codes imposed by political power but also the wider social and ethical dimensions. Even when relegated to the background, the writer remains onstage and visible; in fact, they are often the direct target of the modern state's gaze. For this reason, playwrights or dramaturgs often try to break through the shell of censorship and self-censorship by shifting time and place, relocating their characters to entirely different contexts and coordinates, particularly in works with high potential for political backlash. One of the masters of this art of indirect expression –through twists and spirals, and at times by transforming prose into poetry (poetry being another strategy for navigating self-censorship)– was, of course, William Shakespeare, whose plays were staged before kings and queens.

A play on stage can easily provoke a reaction in the moment, whether due to being misunderstood, pushing the limits of expression in its treatment of everyday situations, or most importantly, because opinion and action unfold right there, in real time, on stage. In the theater, opinions take concrete form not only through letters and words, but also through action – through sound and silence alike. This manifestation follows aesthetic and political lines that shift depending on other content and effects. In this context, it is not only political thought but also morality that has become a minefield of censorship and self-censorship in the realm of theater.

The economy of gesture is one of those acts that can easily trigger an explosion in the minefield of morality. Gestures carry significant weight in how the relationship between words and actions is represented on stage and perceived by the audience. For instance, Samuel Beckett was unable to convince a director to accept a stage direction in Waiting for Godot that required Estragon's belt to come loose, exposing his genitals to the

spectators. Such gestures of nudity would have had a morally scandalous impact. Disturbing moral authorities through nudity and sexuality, political authorities through protest or satire, or religious and political powers through religious or ethnic allusions –and thereby provoking backlash in the form of bans, penalties, stage raids, or even lynching practices– is the hard and thorny path that theater often must walk. Even if a playwright imagines their speech freely, they may still feel compelled to trim it back under the pressure of the broader social dynamics that surround the stage. Overcoming the censorship and self-censorship mechanisms –forms of theatrical self-castration– or at least softening their grip, depends on the wider condition of "freedom of expression" and the presence, development, and richness of the rights that sustain it.

As the most intense manifestation of the link between opinion and action, theatre—from playwriting to staging—has always drawn the attention of sovereign powers and been subject to their sanctions and restrictions. The theatre, though it may have stuttered at times under the weight of censorship and self-censorship, is a form of resistance that has transformed stuttering itself into a mode of expression. Unlike Mill's ideal of a disconnection between opinion and action, this form of resistance embraces and stages the specific forms of action embedded in every expression, conveying to the audience the audible and even visible dimensions of opinion. In this sense, theatre is a thoroughly public activity. That is precisely why it becomes a target for overt or covert interventions: trimming, silencing, and isolation. Any opinion voiced in the theatre, whether to be debated, refuted, or reaffirmed, acquires a public depth and a political dimension. Marx wrote that "once the idea finds its object, it is just a matter of time before all qualities of human existence acquire transformative power." In this light, both playwriting and staging go beyond the formal understanding of "freedom of expression" espoused by ruling classes, due to their inherently public and political structure. If all the world is indeed a stage, then stepping onto it –becoming visible– and stepping off it –disappearing– both require the possibility of movement and change. Mechanisms of censorship and self-censorship serve as legal and moral valves designed to block such movement and change (on whatever grounds), aiming to seize control of the stage and regulate the acts of seeing and being seen.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that today, one word stands out as the most frequently invoked –and most urgently in need of critical scrutiny– obstacle to opinions and their expression, often cited to justify self-censorship: terrorism. This plastic, amphibious word loaded with impact and functioning like a skeleton key has infiltrated both legal and moral domains, as well as all kinds of discourse, including that surrounding the theater. It has permeated fields of political and aesthetic speech and now looms before the problem of expression like a wall of ice. For political regimes, this magic word is also a cornerstone of self-censorship: expressions like "pen-wielding terrorists" have taken root in everyday language, while "counter-terrorism" jokes and practices have encircled the human mind and subconscious.[8]

The vision of a democratic society can accommodate neither censorship nor self-censorship, because expression –as a defining feature of being human– encompasses all forms of sensation and even instinct. History has shown that environments where sound is condemned to silence and speech to muteness tend to yield nothing but sudden, fiery outbursts and destructive upheavals. Humans are thinking and social beings who express their thoughts to others. Scandals, sensationalism, provocations, and shocks are as intrinsic to opinion as they are to art. Attempting to sort, classify, or rehabilitate thought by clamping down on the force of opinion –by turning human truths into rigid "norms" and demanding total obedience– is not only futile, but such governmental practices tend to produce even graver consequences. The image of a democratic society in which no one is forced into silence, where no one faces legal or moral trials for expressing an opinion, and where people do not flinch at the idea of action, remains the utopian horizon of the struggle for freedom – even if today, this elegant and enduring horizon may be in chains.

8 Tanıl Bora, "Terörsüz Türkiye," Birikim Haftalık, https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/11986/terorsuz-turkiye

Cases

The planned 17 January staging of the play *Qral û Travis* ("The King and Travis"), translated into Kurdish by Şano Ar and starring Deniz Özer and Bahoz Özsunar, was banned by the Patnos district governor's office in Ağrı. (January)

The planned 11 February staging of the Kurdish play *Qral û Travis* at the Zeugma Museum in Gaziantep, an institution affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, was banned without any grounds being provided. (February)

Following bans in Ağrı and Gaziantep, the Kurdish play *Qral û Travis* was also banned in Istanbul. A scheduled performance on 16 February at the Şişli Cemil Candaş Urban Cultural Center was blocked by the Şişli district governor's office, again with no justification given. (February)

The Bandırma leg of the Women's Plays Festival, scheduled to be held between 1-5 March, was canceled by the Bandırma Municipality just 15 days before the start date, with no explanation offered. (February)

The play *Manukyan*, which portrays an episode in the life of the late businesswoman Matild Manukyan, was banned by the municipality of Alanya –run by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)– after being targeted in the Islamist press. (February)

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism canceled five performances of comedian Metin Zakoğlu's play *Hayrola Kayrola* at the Atatürk Culture Centre after Zakoğlu made a joke about Murat Kurum, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) candidate for Istanbul mayor and the Minister of Climate Change, Environment, and Urbanism. (May)

The request by the Borçka Municipality in Artvin to use school halls for the 3rd Borçka Theater Festival, scheduled for 13–20 October, was rejected by the district governor's office. (October)

The planned free-of-charge 1 November performance of the play *Herkes Kocama Benziyor* ("Everyone Looks Like My Husband") by the Temsili Sahne troupe at

Ekin College in Hatay was banned by the Defne district governor's office just one hour before curtain-up, citing "missing documentation." (November)

The Directorate-General of State Theaters changed the title of Croatian playwright Miro Gavran's play *My Wife's Husband* ("Karımın Kocası"), performed on its stages and internationally under its original name, to "A Marriage Comedy" after it was targeted by HÜDA-PAR, a coalition-member ultra-Islamist party. No explanation was given for the change. (December)

In response to a parliamentary question regarding the bans on the Kurdish play *Qral û Travis*, the Ministry of Interior Affairs claimed the measures aimed to "prevent crimes from being committed" and to ensure "public order and security." (December)

LGBTİ+ Bans

Strategies for sowing stray weeds

Aylime Aslı Demir

We typically think of censorship as an intervention against an expression, discourse, or action that has already occurred, something that has taken place. However, censorship has the power not only to prevent what has already been realized but also to suppress what is merely potential. In this context, censorship operates more than just an epistemological tool of oppression; it should also be regarded as an ontological intervention. Ontological censorship functions as a systematic, preventive force against the emergence or even the possibility of a particular mode of existence. Beyond stifling authentic forms of expression, this power can effectively erase the very possibilities of existence and visibility.

For this reason, we should view the pressure on the existence of LGBTI+ not only as linguistic and cognitive manipulation, but also as a constraint on the "boundless" potential of the body. While it is clear that the LGBTI+ movement faces some of the most severe limitations on freedom of expression, we must also recognize this as an attack on the individual body, its potential for existence and its very reality. This form of censorship can also be defined as "anatomical censorship," which "castrates" the inherent diversity and richness of the body, hindering its capacity for self-actualization.

Recognizing that the body's boundless potential is circumscribed by heteronormative demands forcing it into a singular mode of expression through "anatomical censorship", we can aptly name this phenomenon thus: Compulsory heterosexuality! In her 1980 article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich contended that heterosexuality is far more than a mere sexual orientation; it is a normative framework underpinning patriarchal society, imposed and reinforced by social, cultural, and political mechanisms. In this sense, heterosexuality operates not merely as an imposed orientation but also as a censorship regime that shapes the very fabric of social structure. This regime manifests through the suppression of non-normative desires and by dictating which modes of existence are conceivable and which identities are granted visibility and representation. In this way, power shapes social structures,

decides who may occupy public spaces, and determines which identities deserve recognition. This process first narrows the space for plurality, then, where possible, renders it invisible or eradicates it through a range of techniques.

The murder of gay imam Muhsin Hendricks9 in South Africa, occurring while this article was in progress, underscores that addressing censorship demands a far more comprehensive approach than merely policing discourse and expression.

For example, "compulsory heterosexuality" emerges as LGBTI+ individuals internalize societal norms from an early age. In childhood, they are confronted with the presumed correctness and purported "normality" of a heteronormative future. This is a case of systematic violence, which begins with the simplest obstacles to communication (removal of content, denial of access, and so on), is reinforced by ideological tools in education, law, and the media, and expands to –and eventually surpasses– "compulsory heterosexuality." From the outset, people's capacity to define and express their identities is constrained, their very existence cast as "invalid" or "impossible." A case in point is the Draft Proposal for Amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and Other Laws10, which was made public while this article was being finalized. However, we know that, contrary to common claims, heterosexuality is not natural, universal, absolute, or inevitable. If it were, there would be no need for such intense ideological, political, and legal efforts to continuously reproduce it, enforce it as a norm, and impose it on everyone. The media, the family, the school, and other social institutions are all enlisted to suppress individuals' potential to explore and express their own sexual and romantic desires. When individuals are denied the space to express their desires and live out their existence, they begin to develop reflexes of self-regulation and self-suppression. In this sense, self-censorship is not merely experienced as a restriction on one's freedom of expression. When it comes to the LGBTI+ community, self-censorship becomes a lifelong

9 "Eşcinsel imam Muhsin Hendricks öldürüldü", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/escinsel-imam-muhsinhendricks-olduruldu

10 Oğulcan Özgenç, "LGBTİ+'lar, Medeni Kanun ve Ceza Kanunu'nda yapılması öngörülen değişikliklerle hedefte", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/lgbti-lar-medeni-kanun-ve-ceza-kanunu-nda-yapilmasi-ongorulendegisikliklerle-hedefte

practice of individuals "precluding" potential forms of existence, beginning in childhood and extending into adulthood. This dimension of ontological censorship, reinforced by self-censorship and similar practices, ensures the continual reproduction of the heteronormative order and suppresses potential futures before they can even begin to take shape.

However, the existence of the LGBTI+ is rooted not merely in cultural or social constructs, but in a fundamental bodily reality. The "so-called normal that masquerades as natural" does not seek to suppress this bodily truth on any objective or subjective grounds, but rather through a normative stance shaped entirely by "feelings."

For the authorities, the existence of the LGBTI+ is not merely a "moral threat"; it strikes at a fundamental pillar of the dominant order at a much deeper level. In this sense, "morality" functions mainly as a tool for framing this threat to the wider public. The real problem with the conceptual framework employed by the authorities –with notions like "attempts to desexualize society," "deviant ideologies," and "harmful movements"– is that the existence of the LGBTI+ reveals not only that the world can be different from what it is but holds the potential to become something "richer." The issue at hand is preventing an existence constrained by stagnant madness from breaking free into a dynamic ontology.

Compulsory heterosexuality portrays the heteronormative order as natural, absolute, and inevitable. However, at its core lies systematic violence and "internalized coercion," which serve to suppress individuals' desires, bodies, and existence. The strength of the LGBTI+ struggle lies in its capacity to expose and deconstruct an order that is presented as rational, unveiling its foundation in coercion and violence.

However, violence should not prompt a simplistic view of the world as divided into "good people" and "bad people." Perpetrators of violence are not limited to central authorities, such as the state with its institutions and laws. Power functions as a network that permeates every aspect of the social body, shaping the daily lives of individuals and being constantly reproduced through these relationships. One might almost wish that the "real bad actor" were always so clearly identifiable, as in the case when the Governor's Office of Ankara banned all screenings of Pembe Hayat Kuir Fest in February

202411, or when the District Governor's Office of Kadıköy prohibited the film Queer12. Or when the website of Kaos GL, the leading LGBTI+ association, was blocked under various pretexts such as "protecting family and child rights" and "safeguarding youth"13, or when the March Against Homophobia and Transphobia in Ankara was banned on March 17, or during the assault on trans activists participating in the press statement and march on November 20, the Day of Remembrance for Trans Victims of Hate Crimes14.

Just as an employer firing an employee due to their sexual orientation is not merely a reflection of the state's homophobic policies but also a means by which those policies take root in social life, the removal of artist Fahrettin Örenli's work from the "Tek Yön" exhibition at the Beyoğlu Municipality's İstiklal Art Gallery — following an "obscenity" complaint and citing "sensitivities"15 — shows that even a municipality governed by the Republican People's Party (CHP) can serve as fertile ground for the entrenchment and expansion of power.

For these reasons, we may say that the nature of censorship does not lie merely in bans or direct punishments issued by a clear authority. It is instead multi-layered and involves multiple actors. With this in mind, we can now turn to a discussion of the differences and commonalities. Censorship and suppression targeting the LGBTI+ community can be grouped into the following five categories, the first of which I have already discussed in detail above:

1. Censorship rooted in ontological violence, beginning with anatomical censorship that obstructs the realization of potential and extending to the denial of existence and visibility.

2. Official Obstructions: Direct state interventions through decisions by the

11 "Ankara Valiliği'nden OHAL'e dönüş: Kuirfest yasaklandı!", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/ankara-valiliginden-ohal-e-donus-kuirfest-yasaklandi

12 "Kadıköy Kaymakamlığı "Queer" filminin gösterimini yasakladı", KaosGL, https://kaosgl.org/haber/kadikoykaymakamligi-queer-filminin-gosterimini-yasakladi

13 "KaosGL.org'a sansürün gerekçesi Anayasaymış", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/kaosgl-org-a-sansurungerekcesi-anayasaymis

14 "Ankara'da Nefret Suçu Mağduru Transları Anma Günü yürüyüşüne polis saldırısı", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/ankara-da-nefret-sucu-magduru-translari-anma-gunu-yuruyusune-polis-saldirisi

15 "Fahrettin Örenli's work censored due to "sensitivities", https://susma24.com/en/index.php/fahrettin-orenlis-work-censored-due-to-sensitivities/

Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTÜK), judicial rulings, and bans or closures justified on grounds of "obscenity."

3. Platform Policies: Content removal, age restrictions (+18 labelling), algorithmic suppression, account suspensions, and similar practices within digital spaces.

4. Societal Pressure and Attacks: Hate speech, targeting, physical or verbal assaults, event cancellations, and other forms of collective censorship.

5. Self-censorship.

According to the report "30 Years of Censorship: The Supreme Board of Radio and Television in its 30th Year"16 published by the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), RTÜK imposed fines totaling 568,000 TL on broadcasts related to the LGBTI+ between January 2023 and June 2024. The penalty imposed on the program where journalist and anchor İrfan Değirmenci hosted Esmeray, a trans parliamentary candidate, illustrates that even at the level of representation, the existence of the LGBTI+ community is met with significant sanctions. RTÜK's promotion of anti-LGBTI+ demonstrations through public announcements and the broadcasting of related videos demonstrates that the state has embraced overt political propaganda in enforcing compulsory heterosexuality.

Meanwhile, platform policies in the digital space serve as another form of censorship, restricting LGBTI+ representation. According to the MLSA report, in November 2023, RTÜK imposed administrative fines on six different platforms for hosting LGBTI+ content.17 The Supreme Board justified these penalties by citing reasons such as the "fictionalization of an alternative ideal world based on gender," the "failure to recognize gender boundaries," and the "protection of family and general morality from the normalization of such content." What sets digital censorship apart, however, is that instead of outright content removal, visibility is restricted through more subtle means, such as algorithms that limit access and deny exposure to certain content. The pressure RTÜK places on digital broadcasting platforms to restrict LGBTI+ representation forces media companies to

16 "30 Years of Censorship: A Report on the 30th Anniversary of the Radio and Television Supreme Council" https://www.mlsaturkey.com/images/RAPORLAR/RTUK%20REPORT%20ENGLISH%20Version.pdf

17 İbid.

internalize this pressure, leading them to adopt self-censorship. As a result, producers modify their projects to maintain state support, and employees in the sector engage in self-censorship to protect their livelihoods.

Additionally, the digital violence report "All of Suddenly: Research on digital violence against LGBTQI+ communities in Turkiye"18 reveals that 90 per cent of LGBTI+ individuals have experienced online violence. The report also shows that social media platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have marked LGBTI+ related posts as "inappropriate," thereby diminishing visibility and restricting access. This form of censorship, coupled with the promotion of digital violence against the LGBTI+, further restricts their ability to share their own stories.

The targeting and attacks on events organized by LGBTI+ artists, academics, and associations, as well as the spaces they occupy, also serve as a form of censorship through societal pressure and aggression. The conservative government's policies encouraging violence against the LGBTI+ community have been met with congruent reactions from certain individuals and institutions. A single "obscenity" complaint from a visitor led to the swift removal of a work of art by organizers at Beyoğlu Municipality; coordinated online harassment triggered the Eskişehir Directorate of Culture to initiate an investigation into the Odunpazarı Modern Museum, culminating in the premature closure of an exhibition19 and attacks on the "Ortadan Başlamak" ("Starting from the Middle") exhibition at Istanbul's Feshane art venue, managed by the Metropolitan Municipality20, are just a few notable examples.

However, I believe that self-censorship goes beyond simply limiting oneself or yielding to heterosexual norms for the LGBTI+ community. Self-censorship can also be understood as a survival strategy, rooted in the need to preserve one's existence while navigating and overcoming censorship mechanisms. In the process, it creates unpredictable spaces for resistance, at times through invisibility and at other times through strategic camouflage. As the LGBTI+ community and activists face increasing ostracism from mainstream media,

18 "All of Suddenly: Research on digital violence against LGBTQI+ communities in Turkiye", https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/all-of-a-sudden-0.pdf

19 "Eskişehir'deki 'Yas ve Haz' sergisine 'LGBT propagandası' iddiasıyla soruşturma", Bianet.org, https://bianet.org/haber/eskisehir-deki-yas-ve-haz-sergisine-lgbt-propagandasi-iddiasiyla-sorusturma-281780

20 "Feshane'ye Gerici Saldırılar", Artdogistanbul.com, https://artdogistanbul.com/feshaneye-gerici-saldirilar/

digital platforms, and heteronormative society, they continue to develop new, creative, and innovative ways to assert their presence.

The concept of the "rhizome,"21 borrowed by Deleuze and Guattari from botanical science, offers a compelling theoretical framework for understanding the strategies we have developed in response to censorship and oppression. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a structure without a central point, growing horizontally rather than branching out from a fixed root. It lacks a definitive beginning or end, perpetuating its existence through ever-evolving networks. The heteronormative order persistently reinforces the narrative that there is a singular root, one that does not belong to this geographic region, restricting LGBTI+ existence to a centralized, fixed definition within a controllable boundary. In contrast, LGBTI+ resistance does not conform to a hierarchical, vertical, or fixed model of control, unlike the tree the government envisions, whose roots could be contained and directed. Instead, this resistance spreads in multiple directions, like an unruly weed, untethered to any single root, continually evolving and expanding through ever-changing and multiplying forms. While power may devise countless tactics to gather and control all stray growths around a central root, the LGBTI+ movement responds with equally numerous and diverse lines of resistance.

Although censorship mechanisms seek to erase LGBTI+ representation, the rhizomatic nature of the movement transforms this pressure into an opportunity for reshaping itself and forging new connections. When a festival is banned, it can find life on alternative platforms; when a work of art is censored, it can persist by transforming into a new artistic practice; and when gathering is prohibited, dispersal itself can become an act of demonstration22. Therefore, self-censorship born of censorship may not mark the point where authorities have the "final say." On the contrary, it can become an opportunity for the rhizome to regrow. In this context, self-censorship does not signify absolute passivity or retreat; rather, it can serve as a strategy for remaining within the system and maneuvering along the

21 Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F.. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press, 1987

22 "LGBTİ'ler İstanbul'un her yerine 'dağıldı'", KaosGL.org, https://kaosgl.org/haber/lgbtirsquoler-istanbulrsquounher-yerine-lsquodagildirsquo

edges of imposed pressure. The creation of the "Lubunca" language, the parades, festivals, and events we have organized in defiance of censorship, and the very existence of each and every *lubunya* –the term used within the community's own jargon to refer to an LGBTI+ person– are all powerful examples of this

From this perspective, the *lubunya* can be seen not as someone who succumbs to fate, but as someone who challenges it — and in doing so, helps to transform the world. For this reason, rather than viewing LGBTI+ existence as mere victimization under censorship, oppression, and ostracization, we must recognize that these individual lives possess an inherent transformative power. The LGBTI+ movement should be understood as a force that not only defends its own rights but also challenges societal norms and power relations, unveiling a radical potential for a different world.

In conclusion, while censorship seeks to render the LGBTI+ community invisible, the true strength of the movement lies in its resilience and ever-evolving presence, much like a rhizome or a resilient weed. Every obstacle reveals an alternative escape; every prohibition sparks a new form of expression. Thus, just as the 'tragic hero's journey lays bare the unavoidable, so the LGBTI+ movement heralds the promise of a richer, more diverse world.

Other Cases

The broadcast suspension and administrative fine imposed by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) on the TV series *Kızıl Goncalar* ("Red Roses") was upheld by a court, and the series was not aired on 8 January as a result. (January)

RTÜK launched an investigation into the weekly comedy show *Güldür Güldür* over a sketch about veterans, which led to the segment being removed from broadcast. (February)

The Banaz Penal Court of First Instance ruled that actor Farah Zeynep Abdullah had committed the crime of "insult" against Musa Orhan, a former army officer accused of sexually assaulting an 18-year-old. The court sentenced the actor to an administrative fine of TL 1,740, equivalent to 87 days of sentencing, and deferred the announcement of the verdict. (February)

RTÜK issued administrative fines to NOW TV, Show TV, Tele 1, Flash Haber, TGRT, and TV 52 on various grounds. (February)

Access to the website of the *Jiangzaitoon* manga and webtoon translation team, which publishes manga content in Turkish, was blocked for the third time. (February)

The Ankara Governor's Office banned the 12th Kuirfest, which was to be held under the theme "Back to Ankara." (February)

Celal İnedi, a prisoner at Afyonkarahisar Bolvadin Type T Closed Prison, reported in a phone call with his family that inmates were being prevented from listening to Kurdish music and that their letters were being confiscated. (February)

The Van Metropolitan Municipality, under government-appointed trustees replacing the elected mayors, prevented the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) and the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) from displaying Kurdish-language posters prepared for International Mother Language Day on 21 February and the upcoming local elections. (February)

The Middle East Technical University (METU) Rector's Office blocked the participation of journalist Hayri Demir, who had been invited to speak at a panel during the 8*th* Media Days organized by METU students' Media Club. (April)

The METU Rector's Office also cancelled an "Orchestra Concert" featuring the folk instrument *bağlama* and the play *Mahmud ile Yezida*, both scheduled to be performed by the university's Turkish Folklore Club, on the grounds that "the events were publicized on social media before receiving approval." (May)

A court case for "insulting the president" was filed against Gökhan Gündüz, a prisoner held at İzmir Buca Kırıklar No. 2 High-Security Prison for 31 years, whose release has been postponed multiple times despite completing his sentence. The case was based on a cartoon Gündüz had drawn. (May)

Scheduled concerts were removed from the Spring Festival program at Kocaeli University (13–15 May) and replaced with a performance by an Ottoman military band. (May)

An open-air event organized by the Swingamed Dance School in Diyarbakır was attacked by a group chanting "Allah is the greatest"; two people were injured. (June)

On 22 May, RTÜK fined Açık Radyo, a beloved community radio station in Istanbul, 189,282 Turkish Lira, the maximum administrative fine, and imposed a five-day broadcast suspension over a comment made by a guest on the *Açık Gazete* morning show on 24 April. The comment that lead to the fine said, "the 109th anniversary of the exile and massacres, massacres referred to as genocide, that occurred in Ottoman lands," and noted that the 24 April commemoration had been banned once again this year. (June)

RTÜK ordered Amazon Prime to remove the animated series *Sausage Party: Foodtopia* and imposed the maximum administrative fine, arguing that, even with a +18 label, it included scenes that violated "national and spiritual values" and "general morals." (July)

Access to the social reading and writing platform Wattpad was blocked by a ruling of the Ankara 10th Criminal Court of Peace on 12 July. No reasoned decision was issued. (July)

RTÜK revoked Açık Radyo's broadcasting license after imposing the maximum fine and a five-day suspension over use of the term "Armenian genocide." The penalty was enforced under Article 32, Paragraph 5 of Law 6112, which states: "(...) The broadcasting license of media service providers whose broadcasts are temporarily suspended and who continue broadcasting in violation of the decision despite being duly notified shall be revoked." (July)

After Amazon Prime, RTÜK ordered Netflix to remove *Sausage Party: Foodtopia*. It also directed BluTV and MUBI to remove the French-Belgian film *Climax* from their catalogues and imposed the maximum administrative fine, citing violations of "general morals" and "family values." (July)

The Antalya Governor's Office banned all demonstrations and public events throughout the province for 15 days during Pride Month. (July)

Thirty-seven student clubs at Boğaziçi University reported that the administration had been censoring film screenings and had asked that the term *BÜLGBTİA+*, referring to the university's LGBTI+ community, be removed from one club's social media profile. (August)

Poet İlhan Sami Çomak, imprisoned for 30 years, had his release delayed by an additional three months following a unanimous decision by the Administration and Observation Board. (August)

The draft of a book in Kurdish by artist Erkan Benli, currently imprisoned in Giresun Espiye Type L Closed Prison, and Kurdish translations of novels by Yaşar Kemal were confiscated. (August)

The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) blocked access to Instagram for allegedly failing to comply with catalogue offence regulations. Access was restored one week later. (August)

RTÜK fined Tele1 and Flash Haber for content aired on various programs and also sanctioned Kafa Radyo, Yıldız En, and Ekin Türk for violating commercial communication and advertising rules. (August)

RTÜK officially revoked Açık Radyo's terrestrial broadcasting license after the Ankara 21st Administrative Court ruled on 27 September to reject a request for a stay of execution. (September)

RTÜK fined the opposition channel Halk TV three percent of its revenue, alleging a violation of the personality rights of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Chairperson Devlet Bahçeli. (September)

The Karşıyaka People's Festival, organized by the Alawite Arab People's Solidarity Association (AHAD-DER), was cancelled after the Adana Security Directorate required at least 80 police officers to be assigned to the event. (September)

The Anka Language and Arts Education Cooperative, which runs multilingual workshops in Diyarbakır, was raided as part of an investigation by the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office. Several administrators and Kurdish-language teachers were detained. (September)

Two hundred thirty-one people, including journalists, writers, and filmmakers, were detained in home raids across 30 provinces. Among them were documentary filmmaker and translator Ardin Diren, cartoonist Doğan Güzel, photographer Emrah Kelekçier, *Pirpûka Kurdî* coordinator and publisher Baver Yoldaş, writer Hicri İzgören, and writer-translator Ömer Barasi. (November)

At a meeting following President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks calling TV series "a national security issue," RTÜK imposed 13 sanctions on networks including Halk TV, Flash Haber, Tele1, Sözcü TV, NOW TV, Star TV, Show TV, Kanal D, S Sport, Exxen, and TV8. (November)

At its final 2024 meeting, RTÜK imposed administrative fines on Sözcü TV, Halk TV, Flash Haber, Tele1, Akit TV, and NOW TV. (December)

RTÜK fined NOW TV over the popular series *Şakir Paşa Ailesi: Mucizeler ve Skandallar* ("Şakir Paşa Family: Miracles and Scandals"), citing scenes of children viewing and discussing nude photos. The council also cited scenes of violence in *Kızıl Goncalar* ("Red Roses"), stating the broadcasts violated the clause in Law 6112 that prohibits the promotion or normalization of violence. (December)

Ege University's Rector's Office labeled artist Orhan Bolat –invited to the 12th Ege Comedy Festival by the university students' Cartoons and Comedy Club– as "suspicious." (December)