

WAN Activities About WAN Contact WAN Join WAN Links Downloads Search

World Association of Newspapers

العربي english français

About APN Subscribe Contact APN Home

The Business of Newspapers  
Training & Events  
Press Freedom  
Resources

Newspapers in the Arab World

11 December 2008

**New Arab Magazine Reclaims Bodily Expressions**

**Breaking the taboo of rape in Egypt, foot fetishism, homosexuality in Lebanon, self-mutilation, cannibalism and the life of Syrian lingerie are among the subjects to be covered in the first issue of *Jasad*, a new quarterly magazine that wants to serve as a platform for bodily expressions, both erotic and non-erotic, for people throughout the Arab world. APN spoke to editor Joumana Haddad, who is also the editor of the culture section of the Lebanese *An-Nahar* daily and a poet.**

By Alexandra Sandels

*Jasad*, which means 'body' in Arabic, describes itself as a magazine 'specialized in the body's arts, sciences and literature' and is billed as being the first of its kind in the Arab world. On the cover of the first issue rests a long thick thread of crimson red silk in the form of female curves, flanked by the *Jasad* logo printed in gold on a dark black background. The first letter in the magazine logo is formed by an open handcuff with a chain dangling from it. But, as Joumana Haddad emphasizes when APN meets with her in a café in downtown Beirut, the open handcuff and the chain are not symbols for kinky sex like some readers might think, but a representation of the 'liberation of the body'. In addition, the creative constellation forms the Arabic letter for 'J' in *Jasad*.



Photo: Hayat Karanouh

Haddad says her inspiration to create the magazine grew out of her poetry in which she has an emphasis on the body 'and its dimensions'. She has long strived to have her own magazine - 'her own baby' - after getting discouraged by options such as short-lived poetry magazines and mainstream culture publications that she says only discussed 'the culture of the body'. So Haddad embarked on creating *Jasad*, which will discuss and debate bodily expressions and sexuality in a more bold way than other publications dare to in the Arab world.

#### Three themes in each issue

Each issue of *Jasad* will carry three main themes; one of which will discuss the body out as a social issue or phenomenon, one with an aesthetic element, and a third, 'non-aesthetic dossier'. In the first issue, contributing writers will explore homosexuality in Lebanon, foot fetishism, self-mutilation, cannibalism, breaking the taboo of rape in Egypt and the life of Syrian lingerie. Every issue will also feature interviews with personalities, personal essays, book reviews and explore art exhibitions and cinema.

Some might think that Haddad's magazine is a bit of a Western-styled concept with its glitzy cover and explicit passages of bodily and sexual expressions. To that potential charge, Haddad refers to the Arab world's own cultural heritage, saying that there are 'far more obscene' writings on bodily expressions and sex from the early Arab writers than any Westerners. 'Read your own books,' says Haddad to those critics, emphasizing that she's not trying to 'implement foreign views on anyone, whether in political, religious, or cultural terms'. According to Haddad, the magazine seeks to reclaim bodily expressions in the Arab world while nourishing and exploring Arab culture.

#### Turnout and feedback

Launching a magazine like *Jasad* in the Arab world is a rather bold move and it is perhaps no surprise the publication is based in Lebanon, which enjoys a greater deal of press freedom than the any other Arab country. Still, Haddad said that several potential writers were uncomfortable writing for the magazine because they thought that the publication would be deemed too controversial, especially since she forbids contributors to write under a pseudonym or anonymously.

Haddad explains that the reason for this strict policy is to spur 'needed change,' through unveiling the names of the writers. 'You have to exist. You can't be a fake person writing for us. Making the change we're striving for will not be reached if we hide behind pseudonyms'. In the end, more than fifty writers turned out for the first issue, including writers from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Half of the writers, says Haddad, are between their early twenties to thirty years old. 'These writers made a leap of faith with me,' says Haddad, praising the contributors for their boldness, commitment, and interest.

**WORLD PRESS PHOTO**  
Contest deadline 15 January 2009

RAP 21

News by country



Although Haddad emphasizes that her magazine has been met largely by positive reactions, she has also received insulting emails and been subject to criticism. She condemns those who accuse her for being an attention-seeker trying to stir the pot with her outspoken magazine, saying she's not 'doing it for fame'.

#### Highest number of subscriptions from Saudi Arabia

Haddad, who speaks seven languages, has been an established writer of several years and has during that time released numerous poetry collections, including *Bad habits* (2007) and *Mirrors of the passers by* (2007). Since her previous poetry collections have been banned in Saudi Arabia, it is perhaps with extra delight that Haddad views the interest of *Jasad* in the Kingdom. 'The highest number of our subscriptions come from Saudi Arabia,' says Haddad, holding up the magazine's advertising subscription flyer.

For the time being, *Jasad* will arrive to Beirut newsstands and book shops in a sealed cover and be delivered to subscribers in other parts of the Arab world via DHL in order to avoid censorship. But Haddad hopes that 'understanding' and 'acceptance' of her project will rise as her magazine hopefully gains ground in the issues to come. While open discussions on bodily expressions, sex, and eroticism are still labeled taboo in much of the Arab world, Haddad says she hopes that people gradually 'will be able to enjoy the magazine even in public'.

[Print this article](#) 

[Save this article](#) 

[Send this article](#) 