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Breaking taboos and freeing your 'Jasad'

Posted By [Dana Moukhallati](#) On April 2, 2009 @ 9:42 am In [Cover Story](#), [Media/Marketing](#), [Regional](#), [The People](#), [society](#) | [No Comments](#)

[1] [Jasad](#) (Arabic for body), a magazine recently launched in Lebanon, is breaking taboos and raising controversy in the nation. The taboo breaking magazine addresses issues such as masturbation and homosexuality. Joumana Haddad, writer, poet, and chief editor of the cultural pages of the Lebanese daily An-Nahar, personally financed and launched the first issue of the quarterly magazine in December 2008.

"It's true this is a first in the Arab world," said Haddad in an interview with [2] [AFP](#). "I put open handcuffs near the word Jasad on the cover of the magazine to illustrate that I wanted to unlock a taboo. We need to stop treating our bodies, especially we women, as if they're something to be ashamed of."

"We have so many issues to deal with without having the extra weight of needing to cover our bodies."

The magazine's subject matters offended Arab readers, who are predominantly conservative. The first issue, sold for \$10, dealt with issues such as self-mutilation and cannibalism; while March's cover story focused on the penis. Other subject matters include battered men and women, transsexuals and the Kama Sutra.

Furthermore, the magazine features regular column titled "My First Time", where famous figures describe their first sexual experience, and art works by famous artists such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso and Francis Bacon as well as regional artists from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Even Haddad admits that some of the article and images in the magazine are shocking to the Arab world.

Jasad has been under scrutiny by religious authorities and women's organizations in Lebanon demanding the magazine stop publication on the grounds of it being pornographic.

"We are all in favor of modernity, but this magazine, under cover of being cultural, appeals to sexual instincts," said Aman Kabbara Shaarani, head of the Lebanese Council of Women. Adding, "Subjects that teach our youngsters how to make love do not fit in with our moral values and civic education."

Haddad argues that the publication does not target minors in any way, which is why it is sold in a sealed plastic envelope marked for adults only.

Ramez Maaluf, director of The Beirut Institute for Media Arts at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, disagrees with Shaarani. "I honestly didn't get a chance to read the magazine but my philosophy has always been let people do what they want. If others don't want to read it, they don't have to," he said to Kipp.

Other media specialists take a more moderate view: "I have read about this matter (Jasad Magazine) and I would like to say that I am with freedom of the press and with breaking taboos," said Pascal Monin to Kipp, head of the Journalism Department at Saint Joseph University of Beirut. "However, we should keep in mind the society we live in and make sure we are not offensive or vulgar. Even though we should practice freedom of speech, we have a responsibility to our society; it should be done within limits and gradually. We do not want to

shock them.”

He adds, “As long as the matter is legal and Joumana Haddad has a license, there should not be a problem. I have much respect for her work in An-Nahar.”

Haddad has been a target for threats, and claims her website has been hacked into 15 times with the Quranic verse “There is no God but God” left on the server.

“I’m not afraid of controversy,” she says, and goes on to explain that she is passionate about this project and is convinced, as the sales prove, that the Arab world is in need of such a magazine. All 3000 copies of the first issue were sold out within the first 11 days of its launch. “Outside Lebanon the magazine is sold by subscription only as bookstores in the Arab world would not dare stock it,” said Haddad. Out of 400 subscribers, 282 are from Saudi Arabia.

“Why should we treat the Arab world as a minor?” she explains. “People against this project should go back to our own literary heritage which includes ‘The Perfumed Garden’ and ‘Thousand and One Nights’, these works could shock even the most liberated of Western readers.”

But is the Arab world ready for such a publication?

So far, the Lebanese authorities have said nothing about banning the magazine.

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[1] Jasad : <http://www.jasadmag.com/en/index.asp>

[2] AFP: http://kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NDEwMTYONzkz

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