



Fighting for publishing in the turmoil of Lebanon

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Rasha al Ameer, founder of Dar Al Jadeed, the Lebanese company which earlier this year won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award Publishing and Technology Award, on setting up a publishing house in one of the most turbulent countries in the world



Dar Al Jadeed Publishing was founded in Beirut in 2000; can you tell us a little about your focus and inspiration when you originally set the company up?

When the Lebanese and non-Lebanese civil wars were coming to an end in 1990, many Lebanese abroad, including my brother Lokman Slim and myself, thought about returning to our country to serve our homeland. We came back from Paris where we had studied and thought about establishing a publishing house to match the scale of our dreams. We dreamt of producing free, avant-garde books that were interesting and smart, and that is what we did.

In early 2021 you experienced a terrible tragedy when your brother and co-founder, the writer and translator Lokman Slim, was assassinated. Can you tell us about your plans to honour his memory?

In a few months we will be announcing the launch of the Lokman Selim Foundation, which will carry the legacy of the visionary who bravely advocated a constellation of moral and linguistic values that are crucial for our world to be resurrected.

How big is the company now, in terms of staff and number of books published each year? How has that changed over the years?

After a decade of working in the field of Arabic publishing, we decided to transform ourselves from a company into an institution. In addition to Dar Al-Jadeed, Lokman established 'Umam Documentation & Research', which is one of the most important research institutions in the Arab world. Through the collaboration of Al-Jadeed and Umam, we were able to shape the literary world as we wanted it. Umam welcomes researchers from different universities around the world. We have a fully trained and dedicated team in both institutions, and this team is constantly growing.

Dar Al-Jadeed has published over 400 books and our writers are some of the best, including Aqlam Arabiay Mohemah's '*Prominent Arab Writers*'. We have released a number of book series including Beshahdat Al Asel's '*As per the original*' (these are translated books that include the original text and the translated text), Tebq Al Asel's '*Facsimile*' (rare first editions), Ajzaa Al Qawl wa Atnab's '*Conciseness and Prolixity*' (which



support young poets), Kutat 'Plans' (architectural books) and Hamza (grammar books).

Dar AlJadeed won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award Publishing and Technology Award in 2021. Which achievements and innovations at AlJadeed are you most proud of?

We are always amazed by the loyalty of people who read our books. We are proud of every reader who can tell the difference between Al-Jadeed books (both in taste and content) and other Arabic books. Winning a Sheikh Zayed Book Award was a proud recognition of this.

What is the general bookselling and publishing atmosphere in your country like right now?

Lebanon today is in a very bad place politically and economically - I would describe it as a state of clinical death. Therefore, we are currently selling to the Arab world only, as the infrastructure does not exist for us to export our books.

Are there any challenges you face publishing books in Arabic?

The Arab world was once the home of reading and literature – today we find that reading in Arabic is dying out, as there are no efficient educational policies in Lebanon to prevent this. Because of the febrile situation in the Arab world, Arab publishers are left to face their fate.

Which books and authors do you feel most excited about in 2021?

In cooperation with the Lokman Selim Foundation we will publish the works of Iskander Riachy, the lost journalist, and we hope to start publishing a collection of books on the history of Lebanon.

What are your hopes for the rest of 2021, and, having won a Sheikh Zayed Book Award, what are your plans for Dar AlJadeed in 2022 and beyond?

I'm hoping to see a permanent conference of Arab academic officials who will be able to draw up effective plans to improve education in the Arab world.

For more information about entering the Sheikh Zayed Book Awards, please see [here](#).

Pictured: Rasha Al Ameer (cr Dar AlJadeed)

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