

Writing as an Adventure

TWiP's Success Story



By Ali
Qleibo

The first issue of *This Week in Palestine*, also known as *TWiP*, was published in December 1998. Initially, the magazine was published biweekly, with the intent that it would, in due time, become a weekly magazine. It ended up being a monthly publication, but its name has not changed.

Despite unfavorable circumstances, *TWiP* has become an entrepreneurial success story. The magazine was conceived as a small publication to advertise local events for the millions of tourists destined to visit the Holy Land on the eve of the new millennium. It was expected that income would be produced by promotional space, covering the cost of publication.

When the second Intifada broke out in October 2000, bringing tourism to a halt, Sani Meo and his team transformed the magazine into a publication that provides cultural, nationalist content that targets Palestinians, locals, and expatriates. *TWiP* now serves as a forum where Palestinians share their expertise and experience through monthly articles that invite readers to discover the Palestinian narrative. Against all odds, the magazine has been sustainable for the past years, with little funding beyond promotional space and the occasional sponsoring of specific themes by various institutions.

In efforts to promote and document Palestine, Palestinian culture, and Palestinian concerns, Sani and his team had the acuity and sense of good judgment to develop a thematic approach for the magazine. The bulk of the editorial content comprises roughly 15 articles, augmented by “In the Limelight” features that highlight a Palestinian personality; review a book, artist, or exhibition; and introduce readers to places to visit or a Palestinian recipe, among others. Through the past 300 issues, published monthly over two decades, *TWiP* has become a Palestinian treasure trove, an encyclopedia of Palestinian culture.

Every month *TWiP* has a new theme. As a regular contributor, I have thus submitted reflexive articles that inform and entertain while focusing on an aspect related to these topics. There are no dull subjects. Yet, writing can be an adventure, a challenge, and even a daily ordeal. There are no rules. Sometimes, the text flows easily and perfectly, and sometimes the process becomes painfully laborious, rising to Sisyphean proportions. Nevertheless, over the past 24 years, I have authored a series of articles, published through *TWiP*, which describe diverse aspects of Palestinian culture and social life.

The magazine has gained prominence by providing insider insight into social, ethnographic, economic, literary, and artistic Palestinian cultural expressions in English. By presenting diverse aspects of Palestinian culture in a sophisticated yet accessible and beautifully illustrated manner, the magazine has forged a new genre of literature that stands midway between uncompromising academic work and reader-friendly articles directed at local and international communities.

Testimonies

Yes, I am quite familiar with *TWiP*, and I’ve been following up since its inception!

Hanan Ashrawi
Ramallah, Palestine

TWiP Celebrates **300** Issues

For each new monthly theme, specialists, politicians, economists, psychologists, educationalists, anthropologists, and businesspeople, i.e., local experts, are invited to contribute articles. The magazine provokes the reader to explore fundamental issues such as gender roles, social history, folk customs, memory, economics, archaeology, communication, and personal and cultural identity in Palestine. Over the years, *TWiP* has rightfully come to assume its position as the major archive of Palestinian life. Words, photography, and artworks are braided together to project the image of the Palestinians as we see ourselves, presenting the Palestinian viewpoint and narrative. Objective yet reflexive, the magazine provides nonjudgmental space for negative as well as positive trends and practices on the institutional, social, political, cultural, and individual levels. While daily local and international politics and the Israeli occupation affect all aspects of Palestinian lives and thus can be detected throughout *TWiP*'s articles, they are not explicitly chosen as monthly themes.

TWiP, through Sani Meo, Kathy Baroody, and Bettina Ezbidi, as my first readers, has structured my relationship with Palestine along literary discursive lines, whereby every experience has become a potential idea, a paragraph, and an article on Palestinian cultural identity. Wherever I travel in Palestine, new horizons of knowledge are constantly revealed. Even an act as simple as entering a room I had not previously been in or taking a ride past a back-village street seems to open endless vistas of the Palestinian ethnic mosaic. The social-cultural pattern that emerges through familiarity with a cluster of neighboring villages is astounding.

Traces of biblical significance, details of ethnographic interest, and vestiges of historical value keep prodding to provide insights that reveal the ethnic diversity

that underlies the rich tapestry into which Palestinian culture has woven its unique identity throughout the past five millennia. The primordial mythos of the land is inextricably bound to the traditional relationship of our peasants to their ancestral land.

Artist-cum-anthropologist, I have carried along my camera with which I have documented the experiential though evanescent moments to preserve them for posterity. My work as an artist, ethnographer, and writer inevitably juxtaposes the literary and artistic sides of my identity that find their expression in *TWiP*. The result is three parallel essays: ethnographic, photographic, and reflexive literary inserts that are inextricably linked. In the process, the articles in their entirety emerge as a narrative vista – rich with anecdotes gleaned from fieldwork – onto the manners and customs of modern Palestinians and their roots in ancient Canaanite myths and rituals, as revealed by archaeologists, historians, and writers in comparative religion.

The monthly article in *TWiP* is a multi-textual narrative that stands at a point of an axis between objective science, humanist literature, and art. The photographs, anecdotes, and reflexive passages interlace to transport the reader/viewer into a personal encounter with everyday Palestinians, including the narrator. The contrapuntal format of my work within the fields of social science, humanist literature, and art underlies its objective – namely, to humanize the other/Other, i.e., the personal and collective levels of Palestinian identity. Taysir, *TWiP*'s masterly artistic director, imparts in his choice and layout of the photos the special gloss to the sleek and slick magazine that gives *TWiP* its *je ne sais quoi*, its touch of class.

Writing is work. Everything is planned. Each article requires extensive research, fieldwork, and interviews before I spend

many hours outlining it. The research is the easiest. The outline is critical and intimidating; it delimits my choices and restricts the subject. Beginning the first draft is the hardest part because every idea of the outline has to be fleshed out in words, sentences, and paragraphs. The pleasure of writing begins with the rewrite because I feel that everything I do contributes to the development of the article's melodic flow, rhythm, and rich, vibrant texture. The *jouissance*, to borrow a Roland Barthes' term, lies in the final drafting.

I work hard so that Bettina and Kathy, my editors at *TWiP*, will not have a task that is too daunting. I write and rewrite, and rewrite and write, and derive a great sense of satisfaction in submitting to Sani and the team what I think is a finished article. In fact, I feel a special gratitude for my editors. Special thanks go to my ideal reader, Kathy. Through the years, our relationship has developed from mere editorial work in the employ of *TWiP* to warm mutual understanding and friendship. Over time, I have started to draft the article, pondering over the sentences and paragraphs in anticipation of her response. Kathy has become my muse.

My articles owe their special ethnographic style to Sani. He is my best reader, but he is also the one who created the outlet that punctuated my research on a monthly basis. To Sani, I owe deep appreciation.

Testimonies

There are very few remaining symbols in our small world that remind us of the possibilities. *TWiP* is one of them.

Carol Sansour
Athens, Greece

Political parties, religious bodies, and competitive economic enterprisers are in the process of exploring various strategies to build Palestinian infrastructure. Through its text and images, *TWiP* has stepped in to enable Palestinians from different crossroads, classes, religions, and ethnicities to see their own reflection: a Palestinian narrative written by and for the Palestinians. In its visionary project, *TWiP* provides an archive of the past and present that leads towards a viable dignified Palestinian future.

Dr. Ali Qleibo is an anthropologist, author, and artist. A specialist in the social history of Jerusalem and Palestinian peasant culture, he is the author of الأجداد: من الأزل إلى الأبد (The Land of Our Ancestors), A Jerusalemite in Japan, Before the Mountains Disappear, Jerusalem in the Heart, and Surviving the Wall, an ethnographic chronicle of contemporary Palestinians and their roots in ancient Semitic civilizations. Dr. Qleibo lectured at Al-Quds University and is a frequent contributor to This Week in Palestine.

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