

A Publisher and Champion of the Palestinian Narrative

Sani Meo

A collective endeavor*

A quintessential Jerusalemite and a significant figure in the publishing world, Sani Paul Anton Boulos Meo is making a profound impact through his dedication to promoting the Palestinian narrative as publisher of *This Week in Palestine (TWiP)*. Established in December 1998 as the only English-language cultural magazine that presents the Palestinian viewpoint, *TWiP* provides a platform for diverse perspectives and various voices, and owes its success to Sani's creative ingenuity and perseverance.

Sani is the driving force who selects themes (frequently in consultation with his team, in particular, with Taisir Masrieh Hasbun, the magazine's outstanding artistic director) and chooses authors to produce articles that showcase the richness of Palestinian culture and heritage. He aims to foster understanding and awareness by offering insight into the multifaceted Palestinian experience while adhering to top-notch quality standards. The "eternal optimist," Sani is skilled at bringing out Palestine's positive qualities and was recognized by the 2022 Storyteller Award that *TWiP* received from Rebuilding Alliance¹ and the World Media Summit's Global Award for Excellence 2014, granted by China in January 2015. The magazine's has 35,000 followers on Facebook, and Sani personally is admired and much appreciated by them.

Sani fully understands the power of cultural dialogue and exchange in fostering understanding and building bridges between communities. By providing a platform for Palestinian artists, musicians, writers, and scholars to share their



This notice in *Falastin* newspaper from March 15, 1913, titled "The American Way," reads: "An armed street robber wearing a balaclava with a pistol tried to mug Boulos Meo, his son, and his servant. 'Hands up. Identify yourselves,' the robber demanded. They complied. They complied. The robber fired two shots. The first went through Boulos Meo's son's hat! The second broke the servant's cane. No one was hurt." (The notice was found by Maha Abu Shusheh and translated by Rami Meo).

work and experiences, Sani highlights Palestinian literature, traditional crafts, culinary traditions, and contemporary art and thereby also contributes to the preservation and celebration of Palestinian cultural identity. His monthly column, "The Last Word," is a favorite among readers, and his insightful, impactful commentary – at times critical, at times humorous – has been quoted by other authors and in various media.

Sani recognizes the importance of addressing the political and social challenges that Palestinians face and ensures that *TWiP* serves as a forum for discussion of such topics as the occupation, displacement, human rights, and social justice. Featuring well-researched articles, analysis, and occasional interviews, the magazine encourages a deeper understanding of the Palestinian struggle and fosters engagement and informed dialogue. Acknowledging the significance of historical narrative in the Palestinian experience, Sani chooses themes that shed light on prominent personalities and significant milestones, thus enhancing the collective memory of Palestinians and promoting a greater appreciation of their resilience and aspirations.

Understanding the link between cultural promotion and economic development, Sani actively highlights Palestinian entrepreneurs and startups, artisans, cultural and social organizations, and businesses within the pages of the magazine. By featuring success stories, innovative projects, and initiatives that support economic growth, he aims to foster a thriving Palestinian economy, showcase the resilience and creativity of Palestinians, encourage support for local businesses, and contribute to sustainable development.



Sani Meo in Beijing, receiving the World Media Summit's Global Award for Excellence 2014.

Sani's role as *TWiP*'s publisher goes beyond curating content for a magazine. His commitment to promoting Palestinian voices, culture, and perspectives has made a significant impact in fostering understanding, challenging stereotypes, and building bridges between communities, humanizing Palestinians as a people with a history, a culture, and a past, present, and future. With mainstream media focusing mainly on the "conflict," Sani aims to direct attention to the people. Through his dedication to empowering local writers, promoting cultural exchange, amplifying marginalized voices, and utilizing digital platforms, Sani has successfully expanded *TWiP*'s reach and influence. His work has created a platform that informs, inspires, and challenges readers to engage with the multifaceted issues that face Palestine and Palestinians.

Sani furthermore is committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and minorities. He recognizes the intersectional nature of their experiences, strives to ensure that their stories are represented, and advocates for greater inclusivity and social justice.

As Sani solicits authors to produce the rich and varied content of the magazine's thematic monthly issues, he actively engages with members of the Palestinian community, valuing their input and involvement. This is not only the most challenging part of his work but also the task in which he excels and which he seems to enjoy most. He collaborates with local writers, experts, and community members to ensure that diverse and authentic perspectives are represented and invites international artists

and thinkers to engage with the Palestinian community. By doing so, he fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment within the Palestinian community, encouraging active participation in shaping *TWiP*'s content.

Under Sani's leadership, *TWiP* has expanded its international reach and impact on a global audience, including Palestinian communities in the diaspora – Chile, in particular. He effectively challenges misconceptions and biases that surround Palestine, making the publication an essential resource for individuals who seek a deeper understanding of the region. The magazine has gained recognition as a trusted source for accurate and nuanced information about Palestine, impacting researchers, educators, policymakers, and individuals worldwide.

As the publishing landscape continues to evolve, Sani remains dedicated to meeting the changing needs and preferences of readers. From its modest beginnings in late 1998 as a printed magazine that was focused mainly on cultural events taking place in Palestine, *TWiP* has evolved into a theme-based monthly publication with a prominent online presence. Sani has successfully utilized the power of technology and created an informative website, social media channels, and digital subscriptions to ensure that the magazine remains accessible to a diverse readership, transcends geographical boundaries, and enables broader engagement with Palestinian culture and issues. He actively seeks feedback and input from readers, constantly refining the magazine's content and design accordingly. He strives to keep the publication dynamic

and relevant, attract new readers, and expand its impact. Currently, he is working on creating a search engine that will offer easy access to the thousands of articles in the magazine's archive.

In order to produce one monthly issue after another for more than 24 years, Sani has had to face and overcome numerous challenges that include navigating political and cultural sensitivities, censorship, limited resources – and Qalandia checkpoint. He has not missed a single issue, even amidst an ongoing Intifada. In April 2014, the Israeli military raided *TWiP*'s offices and stole its computers. In 2022, Sani's social media accounts and means of communication were blocked under false accusations, and it took months to fight back and regain access to the accounts,

which for some time affected *TWiP*'s online presence. Other challenges are economic in nature, as *TWiP*'s original business model of financing the issues through advertising has become less attractive with the rise of social media advertising. Consequently, the search for sponsors is a monthly challenge that, unfortunately, at times also affects the choice of themes because it is much more difficult to find sponsorship for some themes. Sani has sometimes covered the expenses out of his own pocket and with income generated through his design company Turbo Design. However, the

“Yalla, man, it's ten to twelve, so to speak, we need your article!”

cost of producing *TWiP* is beyond the means of a small business owner. All these challenges and hurdles Sani approaches while showing dedication, perseverance, and creative ingenuity.

Sani's roots lie in Jerusalem, where he was born and raised. Documented Meo family history has been researched at the Latin Convent, dating all the way back to 1640. Furthermore, Sani's family is deeply connected to De La Salle High School, located in the Old City near New Gate, with his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather having been proud alumni. The Meo family's iconic carpet and antiques shop, established by Boulos Meo in 1872 at the renowned Jaffa Gate, served as a testament to their enduring legacy in the Old City and remained a landmark for 124 years.ⁱⁱ Sani played an active role in the family business, upholding its traditions and values in the fourth generation until it had to close in 1996. However, he also forged his own path by obtaining a degree in computer science from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Beyond academia, Sani has a passion for music: he was a member of the Jerusalem Choir – which unfortunately no longer meets – and plays the piano, captivating listeners with his musical prowess. Another passion is playing Scrabble on his phone.

A gentle and gentleman-like yet persistent soul, Sani's unwavering devotion to his family is remarkable, and his daughters adore him as much as he adores them. He stands as a pillar of support, offering unconditional love and assistance whenever needed, cementing his role as an invaluable member of his family's journey. His daughters, Dina and Maya, point out how much his unwavering perseverance and optimism are shaping their lives (“You taught me to keep going, no matter



Sani with his wife Maha and daughters Dina and Maya.



With his sister Toula and Brother Ramzi in Moscow in 2019.

what, and always see the glass half full”), considering him their “hero,” “forever best friend,” and “the most intelligent, generous, humble, positive, funny, strong, and hardworking man I’ve ever met.” They compare him to a phoenix and “a lion who protects when everyone else scavenges for a bite.” Moreover, Sani is a devoted husband (who helps around the house) and a caring, faithful son, brother, nephew, and neighbor. In his free time, he frequently takes his younger daughter, Maya, and Chichi, the family dog, for rides, listening to music, telling her

about world events, and sharing life wisdom.

Non nobis solum but also for the benefit of future Palestinian generations, Sani ultimately strives to protect Palestinian culture, heritage, voices, identity, and narrative. His dedication to his home country is what keeps him going. To honor his closing statement in every “The Last Word” column, we would like to quote him:

“Long live Palestine!”

“Even though numerous followers on Facebook and countless others have urged Sani to share his story as a Jerusalemite who is making an impact, he has consistently declined. In response, a group that comprised his family, friends, and members of the TWiP team took it upon themselves to write this article without his knowledge. (Subsequently, we sought his consent to publish it, appreciating his modesty while acknowledging the compelling nature of the truth.)”

SCAN
TO SHARE



ⁱ Sani's acceptance speech in which he also briefly outlines the magazine's history is available on YouTube under “Rebuilding Alliance's 2022 Storyteller Award: Sani Paul Boulos Meo” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raB5Y5a1mbM&ab_channel=RebuildingAlliance.

ⁱⁱ Adam Abu Sharrar, “The Shop at Bab al-Khailil,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Winter 2002, available at <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/78030>; see also “The Meo Family Shop by Jaffa Gate: A Mirror of Family, Community, and City History,” *Jerusalem Story*, May 10, 2021, available at <https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en/photo-album/meo-family-shop-jaffa-gate-mirror-family-community-and-city-history>; and “Photographies de Terre Sainte: Meo, Boulos, fl.1895,” *Bonhams*, December 10, 2013, available at <https://www.bonhams.com/auction/21388/lot/171/meo-boulos-fl-1895-photographies-de-terre-sainte-jerusalem-boulos-meo-1899/>; and “WWI souvenir ‘Flowers of the Holy Land Jerusalem’ book of pressed flowers owned by Sergeant Walter Shiers, made by Boulos Meo Antique Shop,” MAAS Museum Powerhouse Collection, available at <https://collection.maas.museum/object/559522>.