

مَدِينَةُ  
الْمَدِينَةِ

## FOOD

Musakhan is the national dish of Palestine. It's just a round piece of bread with chicken, onions, and a ton of sumac. That's it! Simple but delicious. You eat it rolled up like a sandwich or flat like a pizza. When I eat musakhan I always think of my mom and aunts cooking it in huge trays, layer after layer. We'd sit and eat, drinking tea and Turkish coffee, playing card games like hand and trix. At times we'd even forget about the wall. ● The Arab Bedouin culinary tradition centers around what's available—goat, sheep, camel and horse meat, as well as milk, cheese and butter. The predominant dish among Bedouins in Syria, Jordan and Palestine is something called mansaf, a mixture of lamb and garlic boiled in a fermented yogurt sauce called labne. In the old days, you could also get raw wheat from farmers, which was boiled with the mansaf. Nowadays we use rice, which is shipped in. ● The new generation of kids don't like the traditional food! Maybe when they get older. They like fried chicken—even Kentucky Fried Chicken. ● Even though we're only 10 or 15 miles from the sea, Israel lies in between, so people in the West Bank and Jordan are not really fish eaters. Our bay is called Al-Aqba; it's too small to meet the needs of the people, so we have to import fish. One kilo of good fish costs seventy shekels—a whole day's wage—and it's probably only enough to feed one child. For this reason, people don't really eat fish.

## MARRIAGE/DATING

Our faith dictates that the woman decides on her spouse. If a love interest occurs within the family—cousins marrying cousins, for example—it's almost guaranteed that the family will approve. My son left the choice up to his mother, my wife. She heard from neighbors where to find the girls: south of Jerusalem, north, center, in every part of the city! Once she found suitable partners, she took our son to see each of them. They sit together in a room once or twice just to talk and see how things feel—if they have, as we call it, “the chemical touch.” ● My friend is a Dutch Israeli who went to school in America and met a Gazan man. They fell in love, married and had a child. I was at the wedding here in Israel. There was no groom! Just the bride. Because she's not allowed to go to Gaza and he's not allowed to go to Israel. But they're lucky! Since she's Dutch, he might get naturalized in Holland and come to Israel on his Dutch passport. He could end up living just a couple miles from his home in Gaza. This would be a precedent-setting case; Israel doesn't want any non-Jews to become citizens. ● Before a traditional marriage, the groom's family will ask, “How much money do you want from us?” The normal price is 300 grams of gold (about \$6,000–\$10,000). That's very expensive; and then it costs thousands of dollars to have the wedding on top of it. But the gold is for the bride alone: that's her money, not her husband's. It's up to her if she wants to share. ● Some friends my age date, but it's really hard here. Not all families allow their kids to date a stranger they're not engaged to. I think that if you're going to get engaged you should know each other for at least a year as friends. Here in Nablus, in our religion, when a couple gets engaged they are essentially married. If they break up while engaged, judges will consider it divorce.

## MOVEMENT & TRAVEL

When the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created in 1994, the Occupied Territories were divided into three zones. Zone A (17%) includes the main cities in the West Bank and Gaza where the Palestinians were given authority to run the civil administration and security control in this area. In Zone B (22%), which includes those cities' surrounding villages, the PA runs civil administration and security is supposed to be shared between Palestine and Israel. Zone C—the largest part (61%)—is completely under Israeli control. We can't do anything over there without getting permits from the Israelis: we can't build, can't plant crops, can't leave. This is where all the settlements except Hebron's are located, and where the Jewish-only settlement roads are located, which trap Palestinians going city to city. Area C has a great deal of resources and fertile land, but there is no industry there for us because we are not allowed to develop it. ● It's difficult to move from place to place in Palestine because of the checkpoints. It can take me three hours to get to my university five miles away in Abu Dis. Sometimes the checkpoint is closed when I try to pass through, so I have to return home and miss class. It really depends on whether the soldier on duty that day wants to let you in. It's their personal decision. They're not following any set guidelines. ● My husband was killed twenty years ago. He is a martyr. He was wanted by the Israeli army, and they killed him. Even now there is collective punishment for my whole family. For example: my son was six months old when his father died. He wants to go abroad to Cairo to continue his study, but he was prevented from leaving because of his father's crime. Last year he had his high school exit exams. He scored a 96%, and got a scholarship to go to a college wherever he pleases outside of the country. But Israel prevented him from leaving; they said he was a security risk. If your father, brother, uncle or anyone in your family has been detained by the Israeli police, you will never get a permit to leave. His dream is to be an engineer, but this dream has been destroyed. Even now, twenty years after they killed my husband, they are still punishing my family. ● We are only residents in Jerusalem; we're not citizens of any state. I know a man who married a woman from the West Bank, not far from the separation wall. They've been trying for nine years to get residency status for her in Israel. But they still have not succeeded, and he has to go renew her permit every six months. There are tons of stories like this. Some kids are allowed to live in Israel or East Jerusalem until they turn 18, and then get kicked out because their West Bank “citizenship” is activated; which of course isn't citizenship at all. ● I'm on my school's soccer team. It's too hard for our bus to make it through the checkpoints to another school, so we can only play against ourselves.

## SETTLEMENTS

The Israeli settlements in the West Bank perform three key functions. The first is territorial; it's about fragmenting and isolating Palestinian communities. The second is to control the distribution of resources. Water, land and government services are taken away from Palestinians and given to Jewish settlers. The third is surveillance. In the Occupied Territories, all the settlements are on hills; this gives them a military advantage and lets the settlers watch the Palestinians. If Palestinians cross boundaries to harvest olives, the settlers can see this and attack them. ● Settlements look like American suburbs plopped down in the middle of the desert. They have lawns and swimming pools, while we depend on a truck to haul water 15 or 20 kilometers for drinking and watering our sheep. When the Israeli army is here, they prevent the truck from reaching our village. They tell the driver they will shoot his tires if he continues on. There is a water pipe that runs under our land up to the settlement nearby. If they wanted to provide us with water, it would be easy. But they want us gone. ● The settlers used a trick to establish some of their outposts. First, they get a permit to dig into an area that they claim is a biblical site. Then they move their mobile homes there for the excavation. After a while, the army will notice there is no biblical site. They remove the permit to do the excavation, but the settlement remains. ● You must ask the Israeli army for protection from the settlers. You can imagine how well this works! At times, the army will agree to accompany a farmer working close to the settlements. But some of the settlers are so fanatic and aggressive that they'll even stone the Israeli army. ● Let's say in twenty years we reach an agreement under which all these settlements are to be demolished. What will happen to the people who are living in settlements? They are creating a new refugee problem. Israel knows this. They intend for the settlers to never leave.

## RELIGION IN DAILY LIFE

There is a village near me called 'Ayn Adi that has become a symbol of religious coexistence. In this village, you can't tell the difference between Christians and Muslims. Here it is strange to ask the question, “What's your religion?” All the families come out for weddings and funerals. When a new building is built, everyone comes out to help. Christians even helped to build the mosque. ● There are four types of women who wear head coverings. The first are pious girls of the Muslim faith who wear them voluntarily. The second are young women who wear head coverings because their family or others pressure them into it. The third cover their heads to show they are older women who should be respected. And the fourth are those who want to cover up some mischief, because when you wear the veil, people assume you're a Muslim and will not question you! ● I think Muslims in Palestine are more liberal than those in the rest of the world. We are not as closed-minded because we've always lived among Christians and Jews. When Hamas came into power in Gaza they were trying to impose Shari'a, which is unusual for Palestinians. Next election, the Islamist movements will lose a lot of ground. Palestinians think religion is between the individual and God. We don't need the state telling us what to believe.

# CONFLICT KITCHEN

**CONFLICT KITCHEN is a take-out restaurant that only serves cuisine from countries with which the United States is in conflict. Our current version focuses on Palestinian food, culture and politics. The restaurant rotates identities in response to current geopolitical events. [www.conflictkitchen.org](http://www.conflictkitchen.org)**

The text on this wrapper is taken directly from interviews we conducted with Palestinians living in both Palestine and the United States. Each section highlights the perspectives of multiple people.

## FOOD CUSTOMS

It's a Bedouin tradition to always serve tea and coffee to guests. The first cup is a “welcome” cup, and we'll fill it up one-third of the way. If you push the cup back, we'll fill it another third. You don't need to say anything, just push it back. Push it back a third time and we'll add more, making one full cup of coffee. But if you ask for more than this, you'll be seen as a greedy, unwelcome guest. At this point you should shake the cup to say, “No, no more coffee.” ● Food tourism is a strange concept for Palestinians. It's more common among Israelis—although, of course, they steal all the recipes from us [laughter]. If you come to eat in a Palestinian home, you're going to be a guest, not a customer. I work with Palestinian women here in Nazareth and I explain that inviting people into their homes is a way of sharing their stories. The tourists want to hear what they have to say. Otherwise the women think, “Why would people pay for something that we would give them for free?” ● We take our tea with herbs. In the wintertime it's served with sage; in summer, with mint.

## NAKBA

The only large-scale demographic shift in Palestine in the last 5,000 years happened in 1948, when 530 Palestinian villages and cities were completely wiped out. This was the largest refugee crisis since the second World War. And it's still the largest refugee population on earth today. There are 7 million displaced or refugee Palestinians, out of a total population of 12 million. The day after Israelis celebrate Independence Day, we commemorate al-Nakba—“the catastrophe.” But catastrophe is not the right term; it sounds like an earthquake or something unpreventable. What happened was an intentional and ongoing offensive. ● We're refugees; we came in 1948 from Jaffa. When we were expelled, they said, “You have to leave Jaffa for just one night and then you can come back.” I was eight years old at the time. So we left everything, even the food in the kitchen drawers. They told us that Jaffa had fallen to the Zionist troops. My mother said, “You told us we would be gone only one or two nights! Now we have to go back to get our things, to get our money.” So we took the risk and tried to return by car. The soldiers shot at us on the way to Jaffa. My father was a sailor and had a special naval grenade made from canned beef tins that he used to kill fish. He threw grenades back at the soldiers while we were driving. But it was dangerous, and eventually we abandoned the idea of returning home. We were lucky to make it back to safety, others fared far worse. ● In 1940, the Zionists assembled something called the “village files.” They sent scout groups with an intelligence officer that looked like they were just kids going out for a weekend hike. The Palestinians, being hospitable, would take them to the leader's tent or home. They'd ask innocent questions like: “Where do you get your water from? Who's in charge of the village? How many families live here?” In this way, the Israelis compiled information on each community—their water, defense capabilities, who they could likely recruit as an Israeli collaborator, everything. This intelligence became critical in the military destruction of 530 Palestinian villages in 1948. It was all systematically designed. ● My village was destroyed in 1948, but I know every inch of the land. Israel now uses it as a resort for hikers and picnics because of its beauty and the natural springs there. All of the buildings in the village were demolished. But my father would take us there as children and make us trace the place where the houses were. He'd say, “This is your grandfather's house, this is your uncle's house. This is where we had our trees. This is your land.” We will never forget. This is our dignity. My youngest son knows everything about this village even though he's never seen it. Even the third and fourth generation, they imagine it and dream about it, though they have seen it only as a forest.

## RESISTANCE

We have protests at the wall every Friday in Bil'in. We film them and upload them to YouTube. At one protest, Israeli soldiers aimed tear gas canisters directly at protesters only a few meters away. When they shot our friend Bassim, it made a big hole in his chest and killed him. The canister was made in Western Pennsylvania; you can see that printed on the side. ● How can you compare Israeli F-16s, which are some of the best military planes in the world, to a few hundred homemade rockets? You're punishing the Gazans who have been under your siege for eight years already. You're attacking, arresting and killing guilty and innocent people alike. You have 1.8 million people in an area half the size of New York City, but without proper housing, water or infrastructure, and no way to make a living. They are banned from dealing with anyone outside Gaza. You're pushing them to the absolute extreme. So what do you expect? Palestinians are not going to just let you in and drop their arms. No, they're going to kill and they are going to die. Not because of religion. It doesn't have anything to do with religion. It has to do with the way they're living and coming of age under this oppression. We're creating and perpetuating a culture of death. ● Land confiscation and Israeli settler attacks happen every day. Our experience is not unique. But instead of violent resistance, or giving up and leaving, we've decided our resistance should reflect our Christian beliefs. For this reason, we open our farm to Israelis and internationals so they can come and see what is happening here. We refuse to be enemies. We believe that education is more powerful than antagonism. ● The Israelis can't evict us because our family has a deed from the Ottoman Empire. But I've had to stop going to school in order to protect our land and trees from the settler attacks. I'm the smallest of my brothers, so I'm too young to be arrested. My older brothers can't help; they would just be put in prison. It's happened over fifty times. The police justify arrests by saying that we have been fighting with the settlers. If we don't stay here, Israel will take our land and we will never live here again. We made twenty tins of olive oil this year, but we made no profit from it because my father was in jail for resisting the settlers. We had to sell it at a loss in order to quickly raise money to pay his police fine.

## THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

We have two problems. The first is the occupation and the second is the Palestinian Authority. The PA is not working for the people; they're only interested in business, in putting money in their pocket. Some Palestinians would welcome a return to the full occupation. Many would prefer the way of life before 1988, before the settlers arrived. Of course, there are others who believe we can have a state with freedom and democracy here, but the PA is not working in that direction. I was put in jail for 14 days just for questioning the PA. ● In 1994 Israel recognized the Palestinian Authority. They essentially picked the leaders of the PA, because everyone who wasn't corrupt and was fit to lead the PA had either been assassinated, imprisoned or was in exile. The Israeli government agreed to set a Palestinian path to statehood. But by 1999, it became clear they wouldn't adhere to these terms. They built segregated roads, and suddenly we had no way to get into Jerusalem. The settlements started building up; they constructed a massive wall that separates us from Israel and cuts through our fields. All this happened after the PA came to power. The situation became even worse than it was under full occupation. ● I was an intern at a hospital in the West Bank before I came to the US. It's really bad over there. The Palestinian Authority didn't set up a way to govern the hospital system. They have some supplies, but their physicians are not really trained. They can't do even simple procedures at Palestinian hospitals, with the exception of one in Ramallah. Palestinians have to go to the Israeli hospital in Jerusalem for advanced care. It's terribly expensive and the PA doesn't pay for treatment at those hospitals. So who's fault is this? Who is responsible? Is it the Palestinian Authority? Is it Israel? I think it's both.

## OLIVE TREES

Olives are more than just food to Palestinians. We see olive trees as symbolic of our character—strong, resilient and extremely difficult to uproot. Every single olive tree planted has its own significance, so it's extremely traumatic when Israel bulldozes one of our orchards. Whenever my uncle sees me, he greets me with an olive in hand and says, as-salamu alaykum, salam, “peace be with you.” ● We have some very, very old olive trees. Some are from my grandfather's time, and others are anywhere from 500 to 3,000 years old. Recently, the settlers came and cut some of them down. They cut our throats when they cut our trees. ● The olive harvest is a month-long festival that starts in the north and works its way south. If one family doesn't have enough workers, others will join them to help. This is part of our social tradition. All the schools and some public facilities close during the olive harvest to give people the opportunity to join their families. ● We have been making our olive oil soap [available at Conflict Kitchen] in Nablus the same way for 142 years, using the same process. But now we have to import the olives from Italy. There's not much local olive oil anymore because most of the trees have been destroyed. This is occupation. The Israelis import soap to the West Bank—even though we produce it here—so we export most of our soap to Jordan. The only reason the soap factory stays in business is that it is owned by a very wealthy family. They pay out of their own pocket to cover losses from the business, just to keep this tradition alive. ● By the time the olive harvest season is over, our fingers are callused and stained with oil. Once my cousin, who was studying in an East Jerusalem Hospital and had to pass through a checkpoint every day, was denied entrance because the fingerprint scanners couldn't read his fingers in that state. The soldiers see him every day and know his name, but wouldn't let him through for a week until his fingers had healed.