



A Day in the Life of a Fourth-Generation Palestinian-Chilean

By Omar Salame



I am a 22-year-old law student who was born in Chile. My family, however, is from Palestine. Actually, my parents and grandparents were also born in Chile, but their parents came from Bethlehem from more than a hundred years ago.

I have a normal life. Every day I get up early and go to the university. It's not very easy because as a law student I have to read a lot and study hard, so it takes most of my time. If everything goes well, I will be finishing my studies by the end of next year. In my free time I like to go out with my friends and also I have many extracurricular activities.

Every Monday I meet with other students from the General Union of Palestinian Students of Chile (GUPS). We meet in the Palestinian Club and organize activities in our universities to promote awareness regarding the Palestinian cause. The members are all descendants from Palestinians, and we are proud of being part of this organization.

Every Tuesday and Wednesday I return to the Palestinian Club to attend *dabke* practice. *Dabke* is the Palestinian national folk dance. I love dancing *dabke* and people call us from many places to invite us to perform at events. Sometimes after the practice we stay in the club and chat for a while or smoke *argile* and spend some time together. I think that through *dabke* we show the world that the Palestinian culture is a way of resistance. Many of us are also part of GUPS and we dance *dabke* at their activities as well, so the people can get information about the Palestinian cause and also get to know a little more about Palestinian culture.



A young Palestinian descendant in Chile celebrates and maintains Palestinian traditions and culture, even though his family emigrated from Palestine over 100 years ago.

Recently I joined a volunteer program called Palestinian Language Acquisition Program in which I teach Spanish classes to Palestinians and Syrians so they can work and obtain basic skills to interact with the people in Chile. I like teaching Spanish classes a lot and I have met many nice people. Also, my students have become my friends so I enjoy spending time with them in class and outside of class. Teaching Spanish also gives me the chance to practice Arabic with them, so we help each other to learn.

On the weekends, I meet my friends from the Palestinian Club, many of whom I have known for a long time. In the summer, we meet almost every day in the club and swim in the pool or just

hang out together there. During the year, we generally meet in one of our houses and the *argile* is always present. We enjoy sitting around the *argile*, smoking while drinking Arabic coffee with Arabic sweets, or eating hummus and *labaneh*. We also like going to parties, which we do often. But our favourite party is the "Arabic Night" at the Palestinian Club. It occurs two times a year and is the best party in the world. An Arabic band plays at the party and we dance. Sometimes

A performance of Palestinian national folk dance, dabke, in Chile. Photo courtesy of the author.





Palestino, one of Chile's major league football teams.

we get together in a circle and do *dabke* moves. All night long, they sell the best *shawerma* you've ever had.

In Santiago there are a lot of Arabic restaurants, but there is nothing like the Arabic food that is made at home. In my house, my mother cooks the most delicious Arabic food—such as *warak dawali* and *mahshi*, *maqlube*, *shushbarak*, and *kabab*—almost every weekend, and my family and I love it all. It is so beautiful to see all the family together, having a marvellous time.

Another thing I love to do is to go to the stadium with my father to watch a football match, but not just any match; we go to watch our favourite team: Palestino! I have supported this team since I was a child, along with my father and grandfather. Almost every Palestinian in Chile supports the Palestino football team, so I run

into many friends at the stadium. It's wonderful to see the stadium full of Palestinian flags and the team uniform with the map of Palestine. My father and I always celebrate after the matches. It doesn't matter if Palestino wins or loses, for we are always happy when our team plays.

One thing that I always wanted to do is learn the Arabic language. In spite of the fact that my grandparents spoke Arabic, my parents didn't learn. My grandparents used to teach me some basics, but they died when I was a kid. Then I studied at the Arab School of Santiago, but I just learned the formal language and how to read and write, not how not to speak. Recently I travelled to Palestine for three months to study Arabic. There I learnt to speak, but still need more vocabulary and practice. That's why I decided to take private Arabic classes.

I'm Chilean and I love my country. Even though I wasn't born in Palestine, I feel Palestinian and I show my love for it in everything I do. Maintaining the traditions is very important to my family and to me. Although I'm 13,000 km away from Palestine, I fight for it in my own way: preserving the culture. This is the most powerful message Palestinians have: It doesn't matter where we are in the world. We are still Palestinians and we will resist until Palestine is free, because existence is resistance.

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Our Readers Say ...

"We were at Disney World and my brother and sister decided not to tell me that 'The Mummy,' is a scary rollercoaster. Instead, they said it was a simple game, nothing to be scared about. When we went up and it started, I got so scared I threw up on both of them. That's the definition of karma."

**Suheil Mustaklem
(Ramallah)**

"I was once walking down the streets of Germany with a friend. We were so hungry and were really wanted to eat a simple hamburger. We asked around, and ended up asking an old man, if there was a McDonald's. His answer was, 'Sometimes.' We never found McDonald's."

Issa Habash (Jerusalem)