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**Suspended Life and Poetics of Everyday Survival:
Governmentality and Biopolitics in Mosab Abu Toha's
*Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear***

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Abstract: This paper examines how Mosab Abu Toha's *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear: Poems from Gaza* (2022) represents the regulation of everyday life under conditions of prolonged occupation. While existing scholarship has primarily approached Abu Toha's poetry through the frameworks of trauma, memory, resistance, identity, and siege, this study argues that the collection also reveals how political power reorganizes ordinary life through restrictions on movement, surveillance, bureaucratic control, infrastructural insecurity, and material deprivation. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopolitics, the paper analyzes how the poems depict the governance of mobility, domestic space, communication, healthcare, and bodily existence. To explain the recurring condition represented in the collection, the paper introduces suspended life as an interpretive concept describing the continuation of everyday practices under persistent uncertainty and the constant possibility of interruption. Rather than presenting Palestinian life exclusively through the language of death and destruction, Abu Toha's poetry repeatedly foregrounds ordinary activities such as cooking, caring, remembering, travelling, and maintaining relationships. The paper further argues that the collection functions as a counter-archive by preserving memories, objects, bodily experiences, and family histories that often remain absent from administrative records and official representations. By bringing together literary analysis and Foucauldian theory, this study contributes to contemporary discussions of Palestinian poetry, everyday life, and the politics of representation.

Keywords: *Palestinian Poetry, Mosab Abu Toha, Governmentality, Biopolitics, Suspended Life, Counter-Archive*

Introduction

In the Palestinian context, prolonged occupation has shaped not only experiences of direct violence but also the ordinary conditions through which everyday life is sustained. Movement, electricity, food, medical care, communication, domestic space, and access to places can become subject to restriction and uncertainty. In Gaza, restrictions on mobility, borders, infrastructure, healthcare, and access to essential resources have become part of everyday experience. Concentrating on visible destruction may therefore overlook how political power enters everyday life itself. Biopolitics and governmentality provide useful approaches to this problem because they pay attention to the regulation of life, population, conduct, and the conditions within which ordinary activities become possible. In colonial contexts, however, such regulation often works alongside continuing exposure to injury and death. This relation between governing life and exposing it to insecurity provides the starting point for reading Mosab Abu Toha's *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear: Poems from Gaza* (2022).

Mosab Abu Toha is a contemporary Palestinian poet, essayist, and founder of the Edward Said Library in Gaza. His first poetry collection, *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear*, records everyday experiences shaped by war, displacement, and restricted mobility. Abu Toha's collection repeatedly places political conditions within ordinary settings. Houses, kitchens, streets, hospitals, borders, food, electricity, documents, suitcases, bodily wounds, and family memories appear alongside drones, aircraft, bombs, and destroyed buildings. The poems move between these registers without treating everyday life and political violence as separate worlds. Domestic routines are reorganized by insecurity; movement becomes dependent on borders and permissions; medical care takes place under difficult conditions; and military sounds enter childhood, memory, and sensory experience. Abu Toha introduces the collection through an image of making poems from "shards of glass, concrete, steel bars," a process that leaves the poet's hands bleeding and his gloves burnt (Abu Toha, 6). Writing emerges from the material remains of destruction, but the collection is equally bothered about what happens to ordinary life when restriction and insecurity become recurring conditions.

Existing scholarship has approached *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* through trauma, memory, resistance, siege, home, identity, and poetic form. Muhammad Ubaidullah examines physical violence, oppression, survival, defiance, and resistance, emphasizing poetry as a "subtle yet powerful tool of resistance" expressing Palestinian experience under occupation (2). Some scholars use cognitive poetics to study traumatic cultural memory and the ways poetic language communicates experiences of war arguing "the readers' engagement being the witness to the traumatic suffering is achieved through prototypical cultural schema of innocent versus the war" (Riaz et al. 204). Nisreen Yousef and Nasaybah Awajan identify "siege, trauma, home, and identity" as central concerns and

examine the “techniques perceived range from using direct and homely expressions to figurative language, unpunctuated verses, enjambment, and literary allusions” as well as the autobiographical elements through which these concerns are represented (17). These studies establish important approaches to Abu Toha's treatment of trauma, displacement, memory, resistance, and poetic form which “propelled straight to violence and loss of poet's existence” (Woffenden 60). However, the representation of the governance of everyday life remains relatively underexplored.

This paper therefore reads Abu Toha's collection through Michel Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopolitics. Governmentality refers to a way of examining how conduct is shaped through mobility restrictions, surveillance, documentation, bureaucracy, infrastructure, and uncertainty while biopolitics, “power over life” directs attention to bodies and the conditions through which life is sustained (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 139). Studies applying these concepts to Palestine are particularly relevant. Jan Busse's work on governmentality draws attention to biopolitics and surveillance as dimensions of political regulation which manages the population process such as “birth, death, or health” (Busse 7) while Nigel Parsons and Mark B. Salter show how closure operates through checkpoints, permits, identity documents, differentiated infrastructures, and other mechanisms regulating Palestinian mobility (702). Scholarship on the governmentalization of Palestinian futures further demonstrates how uncertainty itself can shape present conduct by making movement, residence, access, and future possibilities difficult to secure. These perspectives allow Abu Toha's everyday details to be read as encounters with broader structures of regulation rather than as incidental backgrounds to violence.

At the same time, the collection cannot be understood only through the management of populations or the restriction of movement. Political restriction repeatedly reaches the body through breathing, injury, hunger, sleep, medical treatment, fear, and proximity to death. To describe this recurring condition, the paper constructs suspended life as an interpretive concept. It refers to the precarious repetition of everyday life when the material conditions of its security are still vulnerable to interruption. It does not describe Palestinian life as passive. Abu Toha's speakers continue to cook, care, play, remember, write, maintain relationships, and imagine futures. Yet these activities take place where mobility may be stopped, infrastructure may fail, homes may become inaccessible, and bodily safety cannot be assumed. Suspended life reorganises this tension between the continuation of ordinary existence and the recurring possibility of its interruption.

The collection also resists reducing Palestinian lives to the categories through which they may be governed or publicly represented. Abu Toha preserves names, voices, household objects, family memories, bodily sensations, sounds, missing places, and fragments of everyday experience. This

paper reads that poetic practice as a counter-archive that preserves memories, emotions, family histories, and everyday experiences often absent from official records, administrative documents, and statistical accounts of Palestinian life. Poetry does not replace historical documentation or political records. Rather, it preserves another register of experience; the objects carried from a home, the sounds retained by the body, the memories attached to a place, and the ordinary practices through which individual lives remain recognizable.

This paper proceeds through three connected stages. The first examines spatial containment and everyday governmentality, focusing on borders, mobility, bureaucracy, infrastructure, and domestic routines. The second turns to embodied biopolitics and suspended life, considering how these conditions enter breathing, bodily vulnerability, healthcare, and the uncertain relation between survival and death. The final section examines poetic testimony and the counter-archive, asking how Abu Toha's poems preserve particular lives and experiences against disappearance and abstraction. Through this movement from governed space to vulnerable life and finally to poetic preservation, the paper argues that *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* represents containment not only as territorial restriction but as a condition that reorganizes the everyday possibilities of living. At the same time, Abu Toha's poetry records forms of memory, care, relation, and ordinary experience that cannot be fully contained within the political structures governing them.

Biopolitics, Governmentality and Life under Containment

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics provides a way of analysing how political power takes life and population as objects of regulation. Modern power, in this account, cannot be understood only through sovereign authority to punish or kill. Phenomena such as birth, death, health, disease, and longevity largely became matters of political knowledge and intervention. Catherine Mills explains this shift by denoting that Foucault places the "new political subject of the population at the centre of governmental calculations," with the fostering of life becoming an important concern of political power (Mills 2). Biopolitics therefore draws attention to the ways bodies and populations are organized, regulated, and sustained through political practices.

Foucault's concept of governmentality extends this understanding from population to the broader organization of conduct. Governmentality is not limited to the formal actions of the state; it includes administrative practices, institutions, forms of knowledge, surveillance, classification, and other techniques through which possibilities of action are shaped. Foucault describes power in terms of relations concerned with "conduct of conduct" (Foucault, "Governmentality" 5). Governmentality is useful for this study because it makes it possible to examine power beyond direct force. Movement, access, communication, healthcare, and other the organization of space.

Jan Busse applies this framework to Palestine through the Foucauldian idea of governmentality which “acknowledges the importance of contingency of power relations.” (Busse, 6). His study identifies biopolitics, surveillance, and technologies of the self as related dimensions of governmentality. Biopolitics concerns the management of population processes while surveillance makes individuals and populations visible within systems of regulation. Busse’s approach is useful because it moves analysis beyond isolated moments of military violence towards the arrangements that shape everyday possibilities. It also draws attention against representing Palestinians only through victimhood or resistance, since such approaches can overlook the different way people continue to act and organize everyday life within restricted conditions.

The spatial operation of such power is developed more specifically by Nigel Parsons and Mark B. Salter by examining how closure operates through practices of “differentiating, quantifying, documenting and disciplining” the Palestinian population (Parsons and Salter 701). Movement, from this perspective, is not simply permitted or prohibited. It is monitored, delayed, and made dependent on administrative decisions.

The effects of these practices extend into everyday life because access to employment, education, healthcare, family, and other necessities often depend upon mobility. Parsons and Salter describe a system involving “physical separation, curfews, checkpoints and documentation” (707). They also show that regulation can operate through uncertainty. Routes, restrictions, and possibilities of movement may change, requiring people to organize their actions around what may or may not be permitted. As they observe, “the point of control is not so much the law itself or the incarceration, but the control over the possibility of control” (710). Power therefore operates not only when a restriction is imposed but also through the anticipation that it may be imposed.

This temporal dimension is further developed in “Governmentalizing Palestinian Futures: Uncertainty, Anticipation, Possibility.” The study examines permit restrictions, military orders, bureaucratic procedures, access to land, and house demolitions to show how “governmental techniques that instrumentalize threatening possibilities to manage the conduct, imagination and attunement of the Palestinian population” (Foucault, “Governmentality” 1). Movement may be denied, residency made insecure, access interrupted, or a home placed under threat. Such uncertainty influences decisions about mobility, dwelling, livelihood, and future planning. Governmentality therefore works through both space and time. it regulates present possibilities while requiring people to anticipate conditions that remain unsettled.

A biopolitical reading of Palestine is particularly important because conditions of direct violence and exposure to death continue to exist alongside practices that regulate everyday life.

Postcolonial scholarship has questioned any simple historical progression in which sovereign power disappears when biopolitical forms of governance emerge. Michael R. Griffiths argues that sovereignty, discipline, and governmentality may coexist within colonial and postcolonial formations (Griffiths 1). This is significant because the regulation of life can occur alongside practices that expose populations to injury, deprivation, and death.

Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics help clarify this proximity to death. Agamben's concept of bare life draws attention to life that is exposed to sovereign power through exclusion from ordinary political protection, while Mbembe's concept of necropolitics examines conditions in which populations are subjected to sustained exposure to death. Both have put forth the discussions of Palestinian spaces and occupation. But concentrating only on bare life and necropolitics may cause understanding Palestinian existence with mere condition of death. Abu Toha's poetry repeatedly presents something that requires a slightly different emphasis: people continue to care for children, cook, communicate, seek treatment, remember, write, and plan while the conditions supporting those activities remain insecure.

To describe this recurring condition, this paper uses suspended life which does not replace biopolitics, governmentality, bare life, or necropolitics, nor is it presented as an established Foucauldian category. Life continues, but movement may be interrupted, infrastructure may fail, homes may become inaccessible, medical care may be uncertain, and future plans may be suddenly altered. The emphasis is therefore on continuation under uncertainty, rather than on death or biological survival alone.

This formulation draws partly on scholarship concerning the governmentalization of Palestinian futures, where uncertain possibilities shape present conduct, and on postcolonial biopolitical discussions of suffering that becomes embedded in "the everyday and the ordinary" (7). In the present study, however, suspended life is developed specifically through Abu Toha's poetic representation of lived experience. Governmentality explains how possibilities are organized through spatial restriction, bureaucracy, surveillance, and uncertainty; biopolitics directs attention to the effects of these conditions on bodies and the material processes of sustaining life; and suspended life describes the uncertain continuation that emerges when these forms of regulation enter everyday experience. Together, these concepts provide the framework for examining how containment moves from the organization of space into ordinary routines and bodily life.

Throughout the collection, large political conditions are encountered through ordinary spaces and objects such as houses, streets, borders, hospitals, food, electricity, documents, suitcases, children, and family belongings appear alongside drones, aircraft, bombs, wounds, and destroyed buildings.

Political violence is therefore not represented as separate from daily life. It enters the spaces, routines, and relationships through which life continues.

These recurring pictures make the collection particularly suitable for a reading through governmentality and biopolitics. Their significance lies in showing how broader structures are experienced at the level of ordinary life: through attempts to move, communicate, eat, receive medical treatment, maintain a home, remember a place, or preserve an object. The analysis therefore moves from the regulation of space and everyday possibilities, to its effects on bodies and the continuation of life, and finally to the ways poetry records what remains vulnerable to disappearance.

Spatial Containment and Everyday Governmentality in the Verses

Spatial containment in *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* is not represented only through walls or closed borders. It also appears in the conditions that determine whether people can move, communicate, leave, return, or maintain ordinary routines. Abu Toha's poems approach these structures from the level of lived experience. Borders, electricity cuts, documents, visa procedures, and displacement appear alongside kitchens, family histories, food, and household objects, showing how the political organization of space enters everyday life.

"Palestine A–Z" establishes this condition through the familiar structure of an alphabet. Under "B," the speaker describes a book containing maps of "every place except for my birthplace" and then defines borders as "invented lines drawn with ash on maps and sewn into the ground by bullets" (Abu Toha 9). The movement from the map to the ground is significant. What appears as an abstract line becomes a physical experience through violence. The verb "sewn" suggests something deliberately fixed into the land, while "bullets" replace the thread that would normally perform the act of sewing. Borders therefore appear not as natural divisions but as structures produced and maintained through force.

The alphabetical form places such borders beside apparently ordinary details. Under "E," the speaker remembers "an email account that I used when the power was on," through which he communicated with an aunt in Jordan whom the family had not seen since 2000. The same entry recalls learning to distinguish an F-16, helicopter, drone, and different weapons simply by sound. Electricity, communication, family separation, and military knowledge enter the same alphabet of everyday experience. A power cut affects communication, geographical restriction separates relatives, and repeated exposure to military technologies produces a learned knowledge of their sounds. The alphabet, usually associated with basic order and learning, thus becomes a form through which fragmented conditions of Palestinian life are recorded.

The difficulty of movement becomes more explicit in “Searching for a New Exit.” The poem begins with “The curtain/ heavy with fear, /does not rise” (28). Soon afterwards, “someone has turned off / the power,” (28) followed by the short statement, “We are powerless” (28). The repetition of “power” connects two conditions: the loss of electricity and the speaker’s lack of control over his circumstances. Infrastructural failure therefore acquires a political meaning. The poem later refers to “the boundaries of my state: / my nonexistent state” (28). The contradiction is central to the poem. Boundaries have real effects on movement even when the political status associated with those boundaries remains unsettled.

The title promises a search for an “exit,” yet the poem never provides one. It closes with:

“No applause.

The drama never ends.

The audience leaves

before I arrive” (Abu Toha 29).

The theatrical metaphor turns containment into an unfinished condition rather than a temporary interruption. The speaker can imagine an exit but cannot securely reach it. This recalls scholarship on the governmentalization of Palestinian futures, which shows how uncertain possibilities concerning movement, residence, permits, and access can shape conduct in the present. The importance of the exit lies precisely in its uncertainty: it remains imaginable but unavailable.

Bureaucratic control becomes the central concern of “To My Visa Interviewer.” The poem begins with a question: “Which one of me do you plan to interview? / I am many, some I don’t even know” (91). The opening immediately creates tension between administrative identification and a life that cannot easily be reduced to a single official identity. The speaker extends the imagined interview to his “clothes, books, / toothpaste, comb,” his baby’s diapers, and even “the food not yet digested in my belly.” He then remarks that the food “will have traveled before I do” (91). Humour becomes a way of exposing the extent to which movement depends on scrutiny and permission.

Parsons and Salter’s account of closure is relevant here because it shows how mobility is governed not only through physical barriers but through permits, identity documents, categorization, and administrative procedures. Abu Toha translates this larger structure into the intimate encounter of the visa interview. The speaker is expected to provide siblings’ names, dates of birth, addresses, email accounts, and phone numbers. Yet the information demanded by bureaucracy repeatedly encounters a life shaped by displacement. Asked for addresses from the previous ten years, he explains:

“During every Israeli assault, we were displaced,
living in an UNRWA school, my aunt’s house, or in the street.” (91)

The meaning of “address” becomes unstable here. An administrative form assumes that residence can be represented as a continuous sequence of fixed locations, while the speaker’s history consists of forced and temporary movements. The difficulty not only deals with the interrogation procedures rather it makes the person with complex lived experiences more complicated.

The same tension appears when the speaker is asked for email addresses and phone numbers. He explains that he used them “only when the electricity was on / and when someone was there to respond,” before recalling three friends who died in 2014 (91). A similar bureaucratic question opens into infrastructural insecurity and personal loss. Throughout the poem, administrative categories fail to understand the histories attached to the information they request: an address carries displacement, communication depends on electricity, and a contact list contains the names of the dead.

Governmentality is especially visible here because control operates through the organization of possibilities rather than through force alone. Research on Palestinian futures notes that such governmental processes can reach into “the minutiae of everyday life,” including family visits, international travel, housing, and medical treatment (Foucault “Governmentality” 2). The visa therefore functions as more than a document. It stands between the speaker and the possibility of movement, while the uncertainty of approval gives bureaucracy control over both mobility and waiting. The ironic image of food travelling before the speaker reduces this unequal relation to an ordinary bodily process: digestion continues while authorized movement remains suspended.

“Everyday Meals During Wars” brings these wider structures into domestic life. The poem begins by recalling earlier wars when neighbours “would share meals with us in our basement.” The speaker’s brother lights an old brazier, the speaker prepares tea, the father checks hens and ducks during truces, and the mother leaves water for sparrows and pigeons (Abu Toha 62). These are ordinary practices of food, care, and neighbourly relation, but each has been reorganized by war. Meals take place in a basement, caring for animals depends on periods of truce, and domestic routines are adjusted to intervals of danger.

The poem later turns the language of food against itself. F-16s “swallow the light from the sun,” bombs “punch the houses,” and finally “A house turns into stew of concrete-and-blood” (62). The metaphor of “stew” transforms a word associated with nourishment and shared meals into an image of destroyed domestic space and bodies. The reversal is particularly disturbing because the

poem begins with food as a practice of community. By the end, the vocabulary of eating has been absorbed into the language of destruction.

The final statement, “We no longer share meals with the neighbors” (62), is much quieter than the violent images preceding it. Its simplicity shifts attention from destruction as spectacle to what has disappeared from everyday social life. Existing formalist criticism has noted how the poem reverses the rituals of family and communal gathering through bombardment. A governmentality-based reading adds another dimension: the conditions surrounding an ordinary act such as eating, where people can gather, whether they can leave shelter, whether domestic infrastructure remains available, and whether the house itself survives are shaped by a wide structure of containment and insecurity.

Across these poems, containment moves progressively into everyday life. “Palestine A–Z” brings borders, electricity, separation, and military presence into the vocabulary through which Palestine is represented. “Searching for a New Exit” presents movement as desired but never secure. “To My Visa Interviewer” shows mobility becoming dependent on documentation, classification, waiting, and permission, while “Everyday Meals During Wars” carries the effects of these conditions into food, shelter, care, and neighbourly relations. Spatial containment therefore involves more than enclosing a population within territory. It shapes the practical conditions under which ordinary life can continue.

At this point, the question also begins to move beyond space. When restrictions and insecurity determine access to communication, food, shelter, movement, and medical care, their effects reach the body itself. The issue is no longer only how territory and conduct are governed, but how life is sustained when its basic conditions remain uncertain. This movement from controlled space to vulnerable bodies leads to the next section, where Abu Toha’s poems are read through embodied biopolitics and suspended life.

Embodied Biopolitics and the Condition of Suspended Life

The spatial restrictions discussed in the previous section do not remain outside the body. When movement, shelter, electricity, food, and medical care become uncertain, the effects of containment are experienced physically. Abu Toha's poems repeatedly return to breathing, injury, exhaustion, hunger, healthcare, and survival, showing how political regulation reaches the ordinary processes through which life is sustained. Read through biopolitics, these poems demonstrate that governing space also means shaping the conditions of living. They also reveal what this paper describes as suspended life, a condition in which life continues while its continuity remains uncertain.

“Hard Exercise” introduces this condition through one of the body's most ordinary functions:

“In Gaza,
breathing is a task.” (Abu Toha 34)

Later the speaker describes waking each morning as “coming back / from the dead” (34). Breathing, normally an involuntary act, is transformed into labour. Likewise, waking is no longer the beginning of another ordinary day but evidence that survival has once again been achieved. Abu Toha therefore presents life not as a secure state but as something repeatedly recovered. The poem shifts biopolitical attention away from spectacular violence toward the ordinary biological processes that have become difficult under prolonged containment.

This uncertainty extends beyond bodily survival to the infrastructures that support everyday existence. In “Sobbing Without Sound,” the speaker imagines simple wishes: uninterrupted electricity, birds singing without being drowned out by gunfire or drones, and the ability to read and write without interruption (32). Similarly, “Discoveries” refers simply to having “no light to read by” (33). These details show that infrastructure is not merely technical. Electricity determines communication, study, domestic routines, and the organization of daily time. Its absence therefore affects the ordinary conditions through which life is lived rather than functioning only as a background inconvenience.

The relationship between everyday life and bodily vulnerability becomes more striking in “Olympic Hopscotch Leap.” The poem initially presents familiar domestic scenes: tea is prepared, children play, mothers converse, and ordinary life appears to continue. This rhythm is suddenly interrupted by drones and bombardment, culminating in the haunting image of the speaker's infant niece represented only by “her milk bottle” (35). The milk bottle functions as more than an object left behind. Associated with nourishment, infancy, and care, it becomes the fragile reminder of an interrupted life.

The poem refuses to separate ordinary domestic life from violence. Tea, conversation, play, and childcare do not belong to a peaceful world later invaded by conflict. Instead, they exist within conditions where interruption remains constant. Everyday routines continue, but their continuation can never be assumed. The poem therefore illustrates suspended life not through direct statements about suffering but through the coexistence of ordinary care and the constant chance of its destruction.

Bodily vulnerability becomes even more explicit in “The Wounds.” Recalling his own injury, Abu Toha describes being taken by ambulance to Al-Shifa Hospital, where wounded people lie “on the floor like burnt matches” (89). The simile reduces injured bodies to fragile objects already consumed by fire, emphasizing both exhaustion and vulnerability. Later the speaker learns that the shrapnel lodged in his neck had narrowly missed his windpipe. Survival depends upon only a few centimetres.

This detail returns the discussion to breathing introduced in “Hard Exercise.” In both poems, survival depends not upon heroic resistance but upon the fragile functioning of the body itself. At the same time, the hospital demonstrates that bodily survival is inseparable from infrastructure. Ambulances, medical personnel, hospital space, and available treatment all become conditions through which life may or may not continue. Injury therefore exposes the dependence of the body upon wider systems already strained by prolonged conflict.

These poems also clarify why this study adopts suspended life rather than relying entirely on existing concepts such as bare life or necropolitics. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Agamben and Mbembe propose important aspects of Palestinian experience, particularly the exposure of populations to sovereign violence and death. Abu Toha's poems, however, remain equally concerned with continued living. His speakers continue to breathe, care for children, seek treatment, remember, cook, write, and sustain relationships. Their lives are precarious, but they are not reduced to biological survival alone. Suspended life therefore describes the unstable continuity that characterizes these poems; ordinary existence persists while its material security remains uncertain.

This tension is articulated differently in “We Deserve a Better Death.” The title itself unsettles expectations. Rather than demanding only the right to live, the poem insists upon dignity even in death. It turns from the dead body to names pronounced incorrectly, fading photographs, neglected gravestones, and failures of remembrance (61). Death is therefore represented not simply as biological ending but also as a struggle over recognition, memory, and mourning.

The demand for “a better death” exposes another consequence of prolonged containment. Political violence threatens not only life itself but also the conditions through which lives remain meaningful after death. Names disappear, photographs fade, graves deteriorate, and memories become fragile. Abu Toha responds by restoring individuality to those who might otherwise remain anonymous. The poem therefore prepares the movement toward the final section of this paper, where poetry itself becomes a means of preserving names, memories, voices, and everyday experience.

Across these poems, the body becomes the point at which broader political structures are experienced. “Hard Exercise” transforms breathing into labour. “Sobbing Without Sound” and “Discoveries” show how infrastructural insecurity enters ordinary routines. “Olympic Hopscotch Leap” places childhood, family care, and sudden violence within the same domestic space. “The Wounds” reveals how bodily injury is inseparable from the conditions of medical survival, while “We Deserve a Better Death” extends bodily vulnerability into questions of dignity and remembrance. Together, these poems suggest that Palestinian life cannot be understood through a simple opposition

between life and death. Instead, they depict lives that continue under conditions where interruption remains an ordinary possibility.

Suspended life therefore describes neither permanent victimhood nor passive survival. Abu Toha repeatedly depicts people doing their routines despite the instability surrounding them. What remains suspended is not life itself but the assurance that the material conditions supporting these ordinary practices will continue. The poems thus shift attention from death as a singular event to the uncertain continuity of everyday existence. In doing so, they prepare the collection's final movement toward poetic testimony, where memory, objects, voices, and stories become means of preserving lives that political structures often reduce to statistics, documents, or casualty figures.

Poetic Testimony and the Counter-Archive

The collection does not end with the management of life or the experience of precarity. It also asks how lives marked by displacement, bureaucratic control, and recurring violence can continue to be remembered. Abu Toha's answer is poetry itself. His poems preserve names, voices, household objects, family histories, sensory memories, and fragments of ordinary experience that rarely appear in official records. In this sense, the collection functions as a counter-archive, recording forms of life that exceed administrative documentation and political abstraction.

Anna Bernard observes that Abu Toha's poetry continually returns to the material details of everyday life rather than reducing Palestine to the language of conflict alone. Similarly, Richard Woffenden notes that the collection preserves ordinary experiences that survive alongside destruction. These observations help explain why seemingly insignificant objects occupy such an important place in Abu Toha's poems. They are not decorative details but repositories of memory and lived experience.

The title poem, "Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear," develops this idea through the body itself. The ear becomes an archive where intimate sounds coexist with the sounds of war. The speaker lists birds, lullabies, family voices, poems, and finally:

"The drone's buzzing sound.

The roar of an F-16." (Abu Toha 99)

The sequence is significant because military sounds do not replace earlier memories; they accumulate alongside them. The body becomes a living repository in which affection, culture, language, and violence remain inseparable. Memory is therefore neither purely private nor exclusively political. It carries the traces of ordinary family life together with the conditions under which that life has been lived.

This intimate archive resists the bureaucratic logic. Official documents ask for names, dates, addresses, identification numbers, and travel histories. Abu Toha's poems preserve what such documents cannot record: the smell of a kitchen, the rhythm of footsteps, children's voices, songs, birds, and the sounds embedded within the body. Poetry therefore does not compete with historical or legal records; instead, it records another dimension of experience that administrative categories cannot adequately represent.

The same concern shapes "Forever Homeless." Although the poem speaks of displacement, it refuses to define home solely as a physical structure. Home survives through memories, relationships, language, and portable objects carried across different places. The speaker suggests that displacement transforms home from a fixed location into something continuously reconstructed through remembrance. Poetry becomes one of the means by which this reconstruction takes place.

This emphasis distinguishes Abu Toha's work from representations that define Palestinian experience only through destruction or victimhood. The poems repeatedly restore individuality through names, family histories, domestic routines, and sensory details. Rather than presenting Palestinians as anonymous casualties or statistical figures, they insist upon the particularity of ordinary lives. Each poem contributes another fragment to an archive built from lived experience rather than official classification.

The counter-archive is therefore not simply a record of suffering. It also preserves affection, humour, childhood, neighbourhoods, food, conversation, learning, and imagination. Even under conditions of spatial restriction and bodily precarity, the poems continue to document forms of care that political structures cannot fully regulate. This is especially evident in the recurring presence of mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, teachers, books, kitchens, gardens, birds, and everyday rituals. Such details prevent violence from becoming the only narrative through which Palestinian life is understood.

At the same time, Abu Toha's archive remains conscious of its own fragility. Objects may be destroyed, houses demolished, photographs lost, and voices silenced. Poetry cannot undo these losses. What it can do is preserve traces that resist disappearance. The ear, the remembered kitchen, and the family voice become portable archives that survive when official histories overlook or erase individual experience.

Governmentality explains how everyday possibilities are organized through containment, while biopolitics reveals how those conditions enter the body. Poetry responds by preserving the experiences produced within those conditions without reducing them to administrative records or political

abstractions. Abu Toha's poems do not deny vulnerability; instead, they ensure that vulnerable lives remain visible as lived, remembered, and narrated experiences.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Mosab Abu Toha's *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* through biopolitics and governmentality to understand how the conditions of containment enter everyday Palestinian life. Existing studies of the collection have drawn attention to trauma, memory, displacement, resistance, resilience, and poetic form. These approaches remain important, but a biopolitical reading brings another aspect of the poems into focus. Abu Toha does not represent political violence only through moments of bombardment, injury, or death. His poems also show how restrictions affect movement, communication, food, healthcare, domestic space, bodily safety, and the ability to plan for the future. The effects of power are therefore present not only in exceptional moments of violence but also in the ordinary conditions through which life continues. Abu Toha's poetry records another level of experience: what was carried from a house, what a child heard, what remained in memory, or what disappeared from a familiar place. Such details restore particularity to lives that can otherwise become abstract within political accounts.

A biopolitical reading of Abu Toha therefore shifts attention from violence as a series of separate events to the conditions under which life is repeatedly required to continue. Governmentality helps explain the regulation of space, mobility, documentation, and possibility; biopolitics brings attention to bodies and the material conditions of sustaining life; and suspended life describes how this uncertain continuation is experienced within the poems. Poetry, however, also exceeds these structures of regulation by preserving what cannot be fully contained within their categories. *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* records not only the threat to Palestinian life but also the ordinary practices, memories, relationships, and objects through which that life remains meaningful. In doing so, Abu Toha's poetry shows that the politics of containment concerns not only whether people live or die, but also how life is lived, interrupted, remembered, and carried forward under conditions where its future cannot be taken for granted.

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