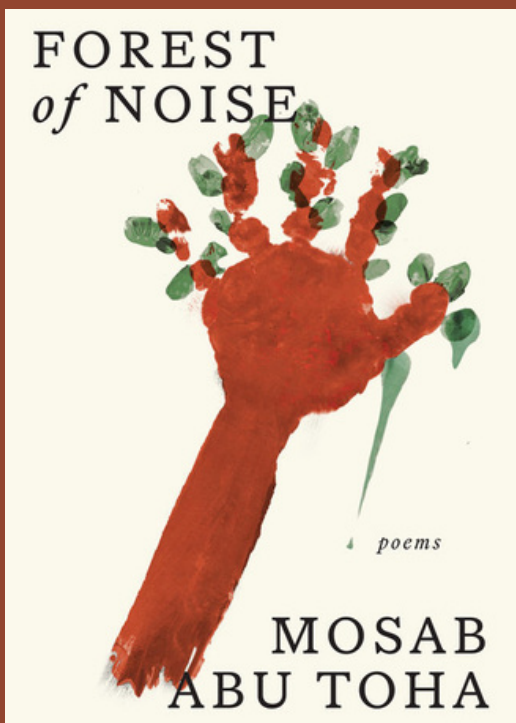


BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

FOREST OF NOISE: POEMS

MOSAB ABU TOHA



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BOOK SYNOPSIS

*You are alive
for a moment
when living people
run after you.*

Barely 30 years old, Mosab Abu Toha was already a well-known poet when the current siege of Gaza began. After the Israeli army bombed and destroyed his house, pulverizing a library he had painstakingly built for community use, he and his family fled for their safety. Not for the first time in their lives.

Somehow, amid the chaos, Abu Toha kept writing poems. These are those poems. Uncannily clear, direct and beautifully tuned, they form one of the most astonishing works of art wrested from wartime. Here are directives for what to do in an air raid; here are lyrics about the poet's wife, singing to his children to distract them. Huddled in the dark, Abu Toha remembers his grandfather's oranges, his daughter's joy in eating them.

Moving between glimpses of life in relative peacetime and absurdist poems about surviving in a barely livable occupation, *Forest of Noise* invites a wide audience into an experience that defies the imagination—even as it is watched live. Abu Toha's poems introduce readers to his extended family, some of them no longer with us. This is an urgent, extraordinary, and arrestingly whimsical book. Searing and beautiful, it brings us indelible art in a time of terrible suffering.

AUTHOR BIO: MOSAB ABU TOHA

MOSAB ABU TOHA is a Palestinian poet, short story writer, and essayist from Gaza. His first collection of poetry, *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear*, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry and won a Palestine Book Award, an American Book Award, and the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry. Abu Toha is also the founder of the Edward Said Library in Gaza, which he hopes to rebuild. He recently won an Overseas Press Club Award and a Pulitzer Prize in Commentary for his essays on Gaza in *The New Yorker*.



Photo: © Mohamed Mahdy



**LEARN MORE ABOUT MOSAB ABU TOHA ON
THE AUTHOR'S SUBSTACK PAGE.**

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

- ① **The title of the poetry collection is drawn from a poem in which Abu Toha describes his city and street as a “forest of noise.” What sensory and emotional layers are evoked by this metaphor?**
- ② **Abu Toha quotes Audre Lorde at the beginning of *Forest of Noise*: “Poetry is not a luxury.” What does writing—and reading—poetry accomplish in moments of extreme crisis?**
- ③ **Half of the poems in *Forest of Noise* were written before October 7, 2023. Through reading this collection, do you feel that history is an isolated event or a repeating pattern?**
- ④ **The poem “Palestinian Village” imagines neighbors sharing tea and lounging under a pomegranate tree. How do sketches of daily life function as both scenes of mourning and hope?**

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER KNOPF AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- 5** What role does setting play in reminding both poet and reader of what remains and what has been destroyed?
- 6** The poem “Request Letter” addresses the angel of death. What feelings does this image convey to you? And what do you think Abu Toha wanted to impart when using English and Arabic in the poem? Are there any other images throughout the collection that stood out to you?
- 7** In your opinion, can poetry be a call for empathy? Or raise uncomfortable truths? Are there other examples of poetry like this that you’ve read?

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RECIPE: MUSAKHAN

ROASTED CHICKEN & FLATBREAD WITH SUMAC, OLIVE OIL & ONIONS

Musakhan is Palestine's national dish and once you try it, you will look forward to making it again and again. There are layers of flavors to this meal. The caramelized sumac onions that top the fluffy flatbread known as taboon with the tender roasted chicken is just divine. When my mom would make this, we would dive in! No cutleries, just our hands ripping the bread with pieces of chicken and often dipping it in yogurt for the perfect bite. You will find that the sumac and olive oil, which are staple Palestinian ingredients, are the stars of this mouthwatering dish. Musakhan is not only vibrant in flavor, but color as well, and makes for a showstopping meal.

Servings: 10-12

Caramelized Onions

10 large yellow onions, diced

2 cups (480 ml) olive oil

½ tbsp (3g) cumin

⅓ cup (32g) sumac

Salt, to preference

½ tsp pepper

Roasted Chicken

3 lemons, juiced

2 tbsp (30 ml) white vinegar

1 tbsp (18g) salt

4 (3-lb [1.4-kg]) whole chickens, cut in half

RECIPE: MUSAKHAN

Marinade

¼ cup (60 ml) olive oil

1 lemon, juiced

Salt and pepper, to preference

1 ½ tbsp (9g) allspice

2 tbsp (12g) all-purpose poultry seasoning

⅓ cup (32g) sumac

For Serving

6 tbsp (36g) sumac

6 thick, 12-in (30-cm) round flatbreads, taboon bread, gyro-style or naan

Handful of chopped parsley

½ cup (53g) toasted almond halves

Plain yogurt

Jerusalem salad (page 84, *Dine in Palestine* by Heifa Odeh)

In a large pot, mix the diced onions with olive oil. Cover and cook on medium heat while sporadically stirring so as to not burn the bottoms. The onions will start to soften. This can take 20 to 30 minutes.

While the onions are softening, combine the juice from three lemons, vinegar and salt and let the chicken halves soak in this for 10 minutes or so before rinsing them off and patting them dry.

Now, make the chicken marinade by mixing together ¼ cup (60 ml) of olive oil, the juice from 1 lemon, salt, pepper, allspice, all-purpose poultry seasoning and ⅓ cup (32g) of sumac until it looks sauce-like. Add all the chicken halves to a lightly oiled baking pan. Then, completely coat them with the chicken marinade.

RECIPE: MUSAKHAN

Cover the chicken with foil and bake in a 420°F (215°C) oven for 1 ½ hours. The chicken is cooked once it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C).

At this point, the onions should be very soft and translucent. Now, add the cumin, ⅓ cup (32g) sumac, salt and pepper, as desired. Let this simmer together for 10 minutes, and then drain and reserve the olive oil from the onions, which will be used shortly. Taste and adjust the salt if needed and then set the onions aside.

Take out the thick flatbread you will be using for the dish. If you have access to taboon bread, it would be perfect for this. First, oil the bread evenly with the drained oil. Then, top with the cooked onions evenly. Then, sprinkle 1 tablespoon (6g) sumac on each flatbread evenly. Repeat with the other flatbreads.

Broil the flatbreads in the oven for 2 minutes until they are lightly crisped.

To assemble, top the flatbreads with the cooked chicken, a garnish of parsley and toasted almonds. Enjoy with plain yogurt and Jerusalem salad (page 84, *Dine in Palestine* by Heifa Odeh).



EXCERPT FROM **DINE IN PALESTINE: AN AUTHENTIC TASTE OF PALESTINE IN 60 RECIPES FROM MY FAMILY TO YOUR TABLE** BY HEIFA ODEH. PAGE STREET PUBLISHING CO. 2022.

SELECT MEDIA FEATURING MOSAB ABU TOHA

- *NPR / Weekend Edition Saturday* – [Mosab Abu Toha writes poetry to preserve memory and bear witness to Palestinian life](#)
- *MSNBC / All In with Chris Hayes* – [Acclaimed Palestinian poet who escaped Gaza speaks with Chris Hayes](#)
- *New York Times* – [For a Raw Portrait of War, Look to Palestinian Poets](#)
- *Democracy Now!* – [Palestinian Poet Mosab Abu Toha on New Book, Relatives Killed in Gaza & More](#)

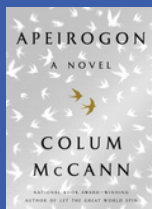
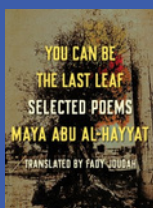
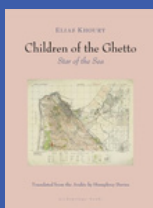
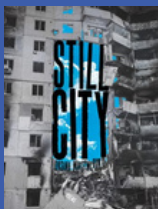


Click image to watch full interview on YouTube.

BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy *Forest of Noise*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below:

- *Still City: Poems* by Oksana Maksymchuk
- *Children of the Ghetto: Star of the Sea* by Ilyas Khuri
- *You Can Be the Last Leaf: Selected Poems* by Maya Abu al-Hayyat
- *Apeirogon: A Novel* by Colum McCann
- *Something About Living* by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha



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