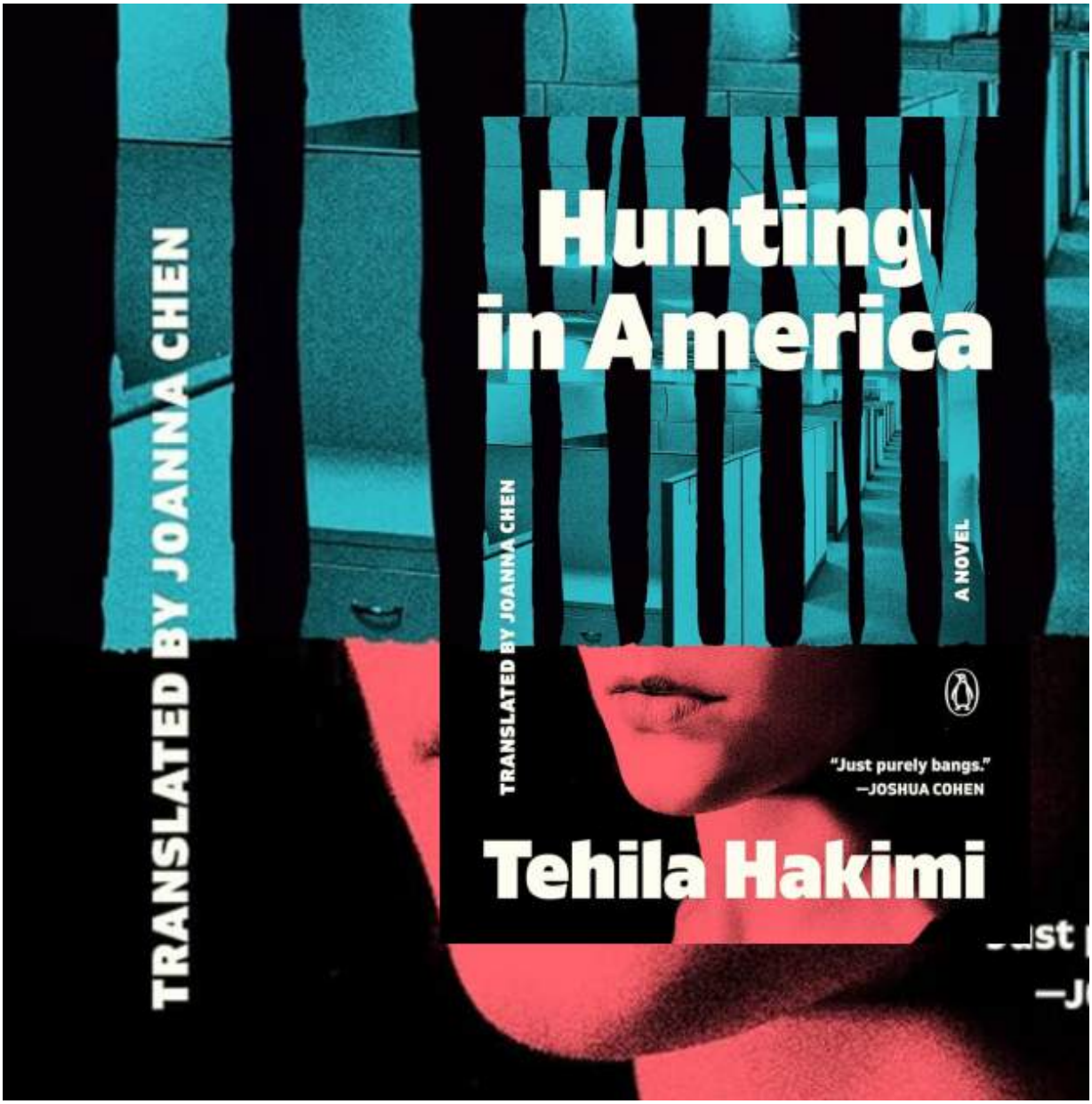
‘The Heart of What You Wish to Forget’: A Conversation Between Tehila Hakimi and Joanna Chen

Anna Stolley Persky July 21, 2025



Tehila Hakimi’s Hunting in America is a dark tale

about a woman who moves from Israel to America to leave her past behind. In this new country she becomes increasingly obsessed with hunting. Originally published in Hebrew, Hunting in America won the Jewish Book Council's 2023 Paper Brigade Award for New Israeli Fiction. In addition to being a novelist, Hakimi is an accomplished poet. The nov el has been translated into English by Joanna Chen.

Anna Stolley Persky: First off, I'd like to say how much I was influenced by your novel, particularly your ability to weave a complex story through a series of deer hunting trips that grow increasingly disturbing. When you began writing this book, what did you set out to accomplish? Did you start with the idea of hunting trips or something else?

Tehila Hakimi: This book started from my extensive exploration of the idea and concept of work in our time, and in particular women at work. I was thinking about our culture and how the nature of work has shaped our lives, emotionally and intellectually, when we all spend most of our waking hours at work. So, I had in mind this female protagonist, who is very much invested in her career, and I wanted her to get a promotion. Then I thought about the idea of "relocation," which, for the Israeli middle class, is the holy grail of promotions. It became

clear to me that she would be moving to America and holding a gun; she would go hunting. At that point, I had in mind both Israeli and American gun cultures, and, of course, the ties between the two countries. There's a web of links between the two when it comes to weapons and the use of weapons, culturally, politically, and financially. In Israel, children grow up hearing the phrase: "Eat well, and you will grow up to be a soldier." In the US, the right to bear arms is constitutional. In these devastating times, and as Gaza is being bombed and destroyed by the acts of Netanyahu's government, and now the frightful war with Iran, the connections and dependencies between the US and Israel are obvious. This brotherhood of arms fascinated me. I also knew that the fact that she is Israeli and holds a gun in America would unfold layers I wished to explore. And still, this instrument, a gun, holds different references and meanings in Israel and in the US. Of course, a weapon is a weapon, but when you change something in the equation, like the circumstance or the culture, the context changes. People use guns, rifles, or weapons for all sorts of reasons. What intrigued me was how those reasons—and what a gun represents—transform across borders.

AP: Your novel details a woman who loses her sense of boundaries and perhaps her connection to

reality. Interestingly, you never name the protagonist. What went into your decision to leave your protagonist nameless? Was there a particular effect you were going for?

TH: That's a good point, and thank you for asking this question. My leading thought or instinct about this female protagonist was that she was very much invested in her career, to the point that she became some sort of instrumental part of the system. So this thought affected the way I wrote her voice, which is cold, distant, and non-reflective. Materialwise, I was often thinking of metal, and more specifi cally of steel. Even though I thought of her as sort of an instrument, she was still human; she is definitely not a robot, she is a human being, but the choices she made influenced her life and her soul. In regard to the name and the choice of point of view, because I do think these two aspects are tied to each other, I can say that at some point, after I already had the first draft of the novel, I was asking myself if this story should be told from a different perspective, from someone else's, not hers, an omniscient narrator of some sort. But then I knew that if I made this change, it would not have the same effect, as this is a bodily experience: the handling of guns, the hunting, the memories the body holds, and of course being a woman at this particular age, almost

forty. Is it crucial for me that she remains nameless? For me, this protagonist is every woman, or any woman; she could be me, and she could be someone else. I wanted all these options to stay open.

AP: Your protagonist appears to be trying to escape her past and build a new identity, but she's struggling to assimilate into her new life and country. Her corporate position in the US doesn't go smoothly at all, and I was curious about your experience in the corporate world and how it relates to the protagonist's painful efforts. How did your background and interests play into the world you created for the protagonist? In addition, there are all kinds of tensions for a woman trying to succeed in a male-dominated structure.

TH: Work is a major topic in my literary work. My poetry, earlier hybrid prose, and also the graphic novel I co-published with the artist Liron Cohen, all revolve around the issue of work in our time. I can add that Hunting in America was also influenced by the fundamental works of David Graeber, and in par ticular Bullshit Jobs: A Theory and this idea of people spending years, even a lifetime, at a desk doing work that feels meaningless. I wanted to explore what happens to someone when the very center of their life—work—is hollowed out or taken from

them. At the same time, I couldn’t ignore the ongoing reality that, in most countries today, women are still paid less, promoted less, and expected to carry more—at home, at work, and in life. That tension was crucial to bring into the story. The way employment works worldwide today, there is no such thing as work/ life balance—and that dissonance is reflected in the novel. Specifically, my ten years in engineering also influenced aspects of the novel, such as the characters and the pace of things, as I was part of this machine, and I still am; like everyone, we are all part of this system. I also had some experience with working very hard, taking your job really seriously, putting it at the center of your life, and then the company I worked for went bankrupt. This experience made me much more suspicious about the place work should take in one’s life and also about the risk of merging ambition and passion, which usually comes with a serious career path.