

Life under the Last Sky: History, Memory, and Trauma in Dudu Busi's *Noble Savage*

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“Living under the same roof as Yefet and Sima is like living in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.”¹ This is how Eli, the fifteen-year-old protagonist of Israeli novelist Dudu Busi’s *Noble Savage*, describes living with his mother and her husband, Yefet. Life with the pair of ex-drug addicts in southern Tel Aviv’s Argazim (Crates) neighborhood renders Eli’s life a veritable nightmare.² The nightmare begins in the place that should signify the origin of life—the home—which in this case is comfortless; the world outside, beyond the doors of the house, provides little comfort or salvation. When night falls, darkness spreads over the half-lit neighborhood, and the barking of dogs mixes with the cries of a beaten woman and the sound of crickets “sawing themselves to death.”³ Neither the house nor the neighborhood is a pleasant or safe place.

Eli’s house, like the Argazim neighborhood itself, is a far cry from those spaces of childhood opportunity that originate in a certain emotional and economic abundance and go on to foster a sense of trust in people and in the world, spaces in which the future is bright and hopes are not merely dreams. Writing about Busi’s first novel, *Ha-yareah yarok ba-vadi* (The moon goes green in the wadi), Sami Shalom Chetrit remarks that “anyone who grew up in a poor immigrant neighborhood can point to the moment when he realized that he lives in a slum and not in a vast, boundless playground; no matter how much you love your neighborhood, at that moment you understand that there are other places with different destinies.”⁴ Like the southern Tel Aviv Hatikva neighborhood at the heart of Busi’s first novel, the Argazim neighborhood in *Noble Savage* is not a “vast, boundless playground,” but a place that is circumscribed, as are the prospects of the individual. Childhood games give way to a struggle for survival, to a life

under constant threat, not only from the outside world but also from those one is closest to.

The alleyways of his neighborhood and the walls of his house transform Eli's life into a labyrinth of daily survival, a form of self-defense against the pervasive violence, whether the violence of the neighborhood or of the home. "You should always take a club with you when going out for a nighttime stroll in the neighborhood," he says;⁵ and at home, when Yefet or Sima loses control, Eli locks himself in his room with a book. Sometimes he runs to his father Yom Tov's house at the other end of the neighborhood. Most of the time he just opens the refrigerator and eats—a symbol of the quintessential, primordial act of human survival: "Yefet started threatening that he was going to end it all. . . . I went to the kitchen and made myself another sandwich with a thick layer of spreadable chocolate. I scarfed it down while making another sandwich, which I also devoured like a starved animal."⁶ Eli's overeating, like his reading of books, is a form of self-defense against the violent world. Instead of confronting violence, Eli reads or eats, burying his fear and anxiety in food or words. Reading books carries him to other worlds, while eating is a way of channeling his overwhelming feelings into his body.⁷

The existential struggle manifests in various survival tactics aimed not only at preserving life itself but also at trying to control and shape it. When Eli packs up his clothing and tries to run away from home, his uncle Nahshon scolds him: "There's no life for a runaway out there, besides drugs and prostitution. . . . They all get stuck in the same place. C'mon, be a good kid, go back home and everything'll be okay!"⁸ For Nahshon, Eli's return home is what will ensure his future, as if the house were protected from the delinquency outside its walls. But Eli knows that his home has nothing better to offer than does the outside world. Therefore, to return home is to fall into exactly the same place. Eli's refusal to live with Sima and Yefet is a rejection of their way of life and their fate.

Eli's life as a daily struggle for survival against violence is not an exceptional story in the history of Mizrahim in Israeli slums. Walter Benjamin writes that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."⁹ Seen from this point of view, Busi's protagonist lives within a constant "state of emergency" stemming from the ever-present violence. This daily struggle for survival is not only a norm, a struggle for the preservation of life in the most basic sense, but also a fight for the quality of one's existence and the possibility of shaping and controlling it. The possibility of taking control of life—indeed, the possibility of shaping one's life—is created only through assuming responsibility with regard to violence, whether that violence is directed at oneself or

at others. This argument is based on a theoretical foundation ranging from Freud to trauma and testimony studies, W. J. T. Mitchell's and Michel Foucault's theories of space, and Frantz Fanon's postcolonial thought. Utilizing these theories, and through a close reading of Busi's novel, this essay exposes the complex of violent affinities between space, body, and subject and examines the ways in which the subject is constituted by and through violence in the text.¹⁰

The Argazim neighborhood is a site where violence reigns over every aspect of life and blurs the boundaries between the public and the private, the general and the particular. It seems that its residents have no control over their lives. It is a place where individuals and the community live in a permanent state of emergency, a condition that governs the ways in which individuals relate to the space in which they live. This reading, I argue, gives rise to a conscious sense of responsibility that governs the protagonist's actions. Becoming responsible for one's violent acts is the only possible way out of the complex of violence that governs life. Assuming responsibility opens the way for the work of mourning, the essence of which will not erase the violence from history or from the body but will expand horizons of possibilities of existence for those who have been removed from the territory of life.

Engaging the question of responsibility, I suggest understanding Dudu Busi's position as not merely that of an author but more as that of a Mizrahi intellectual in Israeli culture. Fanon demands that intellectuals assume a critical stance, which Busi assumes in his novel, the essence of which is a confrontation not only with his community but also with his own life through a deep self-examination of the history of his body. In this regard Eli, who embodies Busi's stance, functions as a critical intellectual speaking directly to his community, calling upon them to assume responsibility for their lives.

Violence Inscribed in Space: A Neighborhood and Its Otherness

The Argazim neighborhood, a shantytown comprised of tin shacks and structures improvised out of construction materials, is flooded with rain and mud in the winter, and its inhabitants have to evacuate their homes until the water recedes. At night large parts of the neighborhood are unlit; drug dealers and their clients lurk among the stray dogs and cats. According to Yom Tov, Eli's father, "Living in our neighborhood is about as pleasant as wiping yourself with sandpaper. The Argazim was and always will be the Jewish Deir al-Balah [a Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza], that no one in the establishment has ever given a damn about or ever will."¹¹ Sima's boyfriend, Yefet, describes the neighborhood along similar lines: "This fucking country has

been shitting on us ever since they brought us here, like we don't pay taxes, like we don't go to the army, like we're Arabs in a refugee camp."¹² Both Yefet and Yom Tov describe the neighborhood as a refugee camp, a transient territory that was seized and then pushed outside the boundaries of the social order.

The relegation of the Argazim slum to outside the social mainstream is described as an act of violence, one directed not only at the people of the neighborhood but at the space itself. In his article, "Imperial Landscape," W. J. T. Mitchell portrays such spatial violence as a product of social power relations: "As a fetishized commodity, landscape is what Marx called a 'social hieroglyph,' an emblem of the social relations it conceals."¹³ But the Argazim neighborhood is not a fetishized commodity, nor does it conceal anything. The violence inscribed in its space does not undergo a process of refinement or masking. Its violence is overt and clearly visible. The miserable, barbed-wire-encircled houses and the filthy alleyways hound the observer; they look him straight in the eye with a wounded gaze that refuses to be erased.

The analogy between the Argazim neighborhood and a Palestinian refugee camp goes beyond the material circumstances or the signs of violence that circumscribe each of these spaces. Yefet's and Yom Tov's descriptions of the neighborhood as a refugee camp are descriptions that can be understood, after Mitchell, as a double vision of the same space:

If "seeing a landscape" or "looking at the view" is constituted by acts of erasure and blindness . . . a critical seeing is always an act of double vision. Either one looks and then looks again at what was hidden or forgotten, or one looks at a view while remembering another view.¹⁴

Both descriptions of the Argazim neighborhood are given from the vantage point of double vision, vision that reminds Israeli readers of the "other landscape," the Palestinian village of Salemeah on whose ruins the Argazim neighborhood was built after the 1948 War. The appearance of the "other landscape" is also the appearance of another history, a history not always visible to the eye, one that points out what no longer *is*, or in the words of Michel de Certeau, "The places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences . . . places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories."¹⁵ The appearance of the "other landscape," like its actual history, expands the "social hieroglyph": beyond the relations between the Mizrahim and the Zionist establishment are the relations of the Palestinians with the same establishment. These relations are located on a violent historical continuum that is not necessarily constructed as one event preceding another, but rather as one event causing or explaining the occurrence of the other.

The Argazim neighborhood becomes a place that also symbolizes the “other place,” a place with its own history, one that includes the memory of the Palestinian village of Salameh, a memory that reactualizes the history of the 1948 War and its violent acts, which the Zionist establishment has attempted to erase. The combination of an indelible past, and a present that continues it, renders the Argazim neighborhood a haunting spatial presence for Tel Aviv, a threatening material testimony to the unfinished conquest and expropriation of 1948. Keeping Foucault’s essay “Of Other Spaces” in mind, the Argazim neighborhood and its otherness can be understood as a heterotopia, a nonplace located outside The Place, outside the Israeli social center and its order.¹⁶

In “Of Other Spaces” Foucault writes about sites that have a “curious property”—that exist “in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”¹⁷ These sites are of two primary types: utopias and heterotopias. Utopias, writes Foucault, are sites that have no real place; they are ideal sites in which one finds neither the individual nor society. The heterotopia, by contrast, is a real place—one that is situated outside of everyday spaces and that conducts relationships of otherness with them.¹⁸ Scholars Ketzia Alon and Dalia Markovich write that the immigrant transit camp, the housing project, and the development towns appearing in Israeli literature function as heterotopian spaces in which the Mizrahi Other is situated. *Noble Savage*, they argue, is an example of this kind of Mizrahi literature set in such a space.¹⁹

As a heterotopia, in which life takes place in a different order and time, life in the Argazim neighborhood transgresses the rules of those hegemonic places with which the neighborhood holds relationships of otherness. Eli describes the neighborhood’s cats:

The cats in the Argazim look like strung-out junkies: crushed, scarred, and desperate, just like them, so different from the fat and satiated house cats playing themselves on soap operas.²⁰

The otherness of the neighborhood in relation to central Tel Aviv is equally evident in the livelihoods of the inhabitants:

Among the self-employed you will find stand owners in the wholesale market, nightclub owners, but primarily big-shot meat importers—importers of human flesh, sold to glamorous escort services. Among those in the free professions you will find eminent engineers—in the field of safe-cracking; senior pharmacists—in the field of narcotics; and regional judges with an expertise in arbitration between the crime sharks.²¹

Eli lives in an Other space, a place whose rules are not subject to the sublimation or internalization of the social order. The heterotopian order in the novel creates a social and mental reality that transgresses the order of The Place. The relationship of otherness that exists between the Argazim neighborhood as a heterotopian space and the hegemonic place, whether it is the city of Tel Aviv or any other city, reveals the “social hieroglyph”: the construction of the Israeli national space involves ethnic exclusion, primarily the relegation of Mizrahi Jews to beyond the limits of the Zionist time and order. Unlike the kibbutz, the *moshava* (the rural Jewish settlement), or the Hebrew city—spaces that symbolize the utopian order of rehabilitation and establishment of the new Zionist subject—the Argazim neighborhood operates as a heterotopian space under a different order, an order of violence that defines not only the space itself but also the individuals within its borders. Foucault writes that “the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces.”²² Thus the neighborhood and the home turn into spaces that forge the identity of the place’s inhabitants:

In our neighborhood any softness you may have disappears around age four or five. At this age, most of the neighborhood’s urchins turn from cute little punks into the kind of punks you don’t want to run into in a dark alley. In the neighborhood they’re called the children of the Intifada, because they’re always throwing stones or broken bricks at passersby, but mostly at one another.²³

The male identity forged by the neighborhood also circumscribes the identities of those who deviate from it. Relating to his father, Yom Tov, Eli says that “the Argazim neighborhood did not manage to educate him as it educates most of its inhabitants.”²⁴ Elsewhere in the novel he explains the above statement: “Everyone sees him, because he does art, as half crazy and half gay.”²⁵ But neither Yom Tov’s other masculine identity nor his works of art signify the possibility of complete escape, whether from the neighborhood boundaries or from the violence that constitutes its inhabitants’ identity.

The neighborhood’s insistence upon forging a particular gender identity renders walking through its alleyways a struggle. But this struggle is waged neither in the neighborhood per se nor in the home; rather, it is waged in the body—the body as a focal site for the formation of identity. This is what happens when Eli walks to the Hatikva neighborhood to visit his Russian friend, Anna. He runs into a group of children who, as they walk by him, laugh and sing “songs only for fatsos.” Eli ignores them, but once they disappear, he stops and says: “There we go again.

Godzilla feels small, like a tiny comma in a long essay.”²⁶ This is what happens every day when he walks into the mini-market: “Shimon, the owner of the mini-market, looked at me like a veal calf. ‘Hey, chubs,’ he calls from behind the counter.”²⁷ For Eli, the encounter with the residents of the neighborhood is a violent one. The violence directed at him reduces his being to nothing more than a material presence, a body. Eli’s transformation into a body strips him of his desires and dreams. He no longer dares to visit Anna. Embarrassed, he turns around and returns home. “I got home and threw my bag on my bed . . . a moment later I came out and opened the refrigerator. I wanted to take out my frustration on a couple of sandwiches.”²⁸

Eli’s body, like the bodies of the neighborhood’s residents, is a physical site upon which the violence of the place unfolds. The beautiful Anna, who eventually becomes Eli’s girlfriend, is no more protected than he is from the violence of the neighborhood and its residents. “Anna is God’s masterpiece. Seeing her walking around in the alleys of her neighborhood, the nearby Hatikva, is like observing a giant pearl rolling on the top of a garbage can.”²⁹ Anna’s otherness, against the backdrop of the neighborhood’s wretchedness, makes people turn their heads. But in this place, with its different order, head turning can easily become violence. One day in the middle of recess, Eli walks into the classroom and sees Anna crying. Sitting next to her is Eran, his hand gripping her leg and his mouth up to her ear. A few days later, in gym class, as Anna is changing from her jeans to leggings, Eli notices black and blue marks on her inner thigh, close to her groin.

The struggle with daily reality is imprinted on the body itself. The violence of the house and of the neighborhood dictates the materiality of the body. As heterotopian spaces, the house and the neighborhood constitute their residents as subjects who reflect the spaces in which they were formed. Hence the body, as a product of these, becomes a heterotopia within a heterotopia, a signifier of a signifier. The violence of the world becomes the violence of the subjects: they defend themselves against the outside violence by their own violent acts. The body is transformed by the soul and its power into a true heterotopia, one that reflects the home and the neighborhood.³⁰ The struggle between the body and the space becomes yet another struggle, one that takes place not only in the house and in the neighborhood but also between the individual’s body and soul. It is with this struggle that Eli begins his story: “About a month after my tenth birthday, Yom Tov, my biological father, told me that the reason I keep getting fatter is that I’m accumulating concrete deposits in my soul.”³¹ Eli’s struggle with daily reality becomes a struggle with the concrete deposits in his soul, deposits that undergo a transformation from soul to flesh and become the body itself.

Eli eats, not to satisfy his hunger but primarily in order to survive. A moment after yet another quarrel with Yefet, Eli angrily slams the door and locks it: "I grabbed the box of cookies and, holding it, threw myself onto my bed and devoured all of its contents."³² By eating, Eli tries to escape the violence that is directed at him, to put on another layer of skin. But what begins as an act of self-defense, as an attempt to deflect, turns into the accumulation of violence in the body itself. Eli describes this self-imprisonment as follows: "The first moment after gorging myself there is a feeling of elation and detachment," he says, "detachment from Yefet, from Sima, and from all the destruction around me. Ten minutes later comes the punishment. The big flagellation . . . I squeeze this disgrace with both hands, knead it hard, dig my fingernails into it."³³ Eli cannot evade the violence. It is the violence that evades him, morphing into something else. Through the soul, external violence is internalized, and the order of the place becomes that of the body as well.

Eli's survival attempts are inscribed in his body. Around him are other struggling bodies—Yom Tov, Sima, and Yefet—all trying to survive in different ways by using drugs or alcohol. Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that "against the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it."³⁴ Every one of the characters in the novel is trying to turn away from that world. "It was because we couldn't deal with things or feel anything that we started with the drugs," Yefet explains, and later on Sima turns to Eli, saying that she "would much rather keep on numbing myself. I don't have the strength to live; I don't have the energy to feel."³⁵ Eli, for his part, conceals his feelings by binge eating, while Yom Tov retreats into his house and buries himself in his art when he is drunk. Each of these survival methods involves not only turning away from the world and protecting oneself from it but also destroying the body and the self. Death leaves not one of the characters untouched, whether by suicide, murder, or starvation. The individual is caught in a noose of violence, violence that originates with the place and continues with the self.

The Argazim neighborhood becomes a place where the individual is trapped in a double prison—a spatial prison and a prison of the soul, a place in which the circumscribed reality signifies a constant state of emergency, one in which the individual is constantly on the lookout for the next danger.

Domestic Violence: Danger and Destruction of the Home

In the alleyways of the neighborhood and within the walls of the house, Eli's life becomes subject to daily danger. His body is tossed from one danger to the next, each threatening his being and that of his loved ones. The most significant danger

for Eli is not related to the neighborhood hoodlums, nor does it have to do with Yefet or Yom Tov. Rather, the danger is connected to Sima, his mother. In his lecture “Anxiety and Instinctual Life,” Freud writes that the anxiety that arouses the child’s desire for his mother is one that originates with a threatening external danger that the child must believe in, which Freud implies is the threatening presence of the father—that is, the fear of castration.³⁶ But in Eli’s case, if there is a danger lurking, it does not originate in the oedipal struggle but in the lack thereof. Eli is not fighting for his place—not against Yefet and not against Yom Tov, the two most significant men in Sima’s life.

The external danger is instead from the mother. When Sima gets out of the shower “in one of her sexy nightgowns,”³⁷ Eli can’t take his eyes off her body. A century after Freud, Eli’s desire for Sima is perceived as a necessary stage in the development of sexual desire. So long as this desire is nourished by the protected and inspirational space of fantasy, psychoanalysis encourages its expression. Any taboo on oedipal desire is found in its realization. This is not Busi’s casual gesture to the works of Euripides or Sophocles. Nor is it a literary caprice. Eli will be sacrificed on the altar of desire, a disrupted desire whose traces are revealed between the walls of the house.

In one of their weekly meetings at the neighborhood club, Yom Tov tells Eli about Sima’s suicide attempt six years earlier. Horrified, Eli leaves Yom Tov at the club and runs home as fast as he can. If Sima ties the rope around her neck again, Yom Tov won’t be there to save her. *Eli must be there in his place*. He bangs hysterically on the door and for the first time calls Sima “Mom.” “Don’t die, I love you, I’m sorry,” he says, kissing her cheek. Wrapped in a towel, Sima pulls Eli inside and locks the door. “What happened?” she asks in panic. Eli does not answer and cannot let her go. He holds on to her as if her body were life itself. Sima turns her head, looks at the closed window, and firmly pushes Eli away from her. For a moment it seems that Sima’s aggressive act will rescue Eli and herself from the horror, but this is merely the wish of the reader, who fears the worst. Sima’s aggression is not directed at Eli’s desire but is itself an expression of desire. Her towel falls off and Eli stares in shock at his mother’s naked body. Sima approaches him and strips him. A moment later the worst happens.

Medea murders her sons because of their father’s desire. Sima is cleverly nicknamed “Medea Hamami” in the novel, and it is her own desire that destroys Eli’s life, thereby sentencing the most precious thing of all, whether body or soul, to death. Against his will, Eli’s body becomes a witness—witness to a house’s violence, witness to a mother’s violence. The body’s testimonial has no words;

it is a testimonial that precedes the possibility of speech. Similar to speech, however, and to the possibility of liberation that it entails, the body seeks to purge itself of the horror. The day after the rape, when Sima approaches Eli and caresses his cheek, he is overcome with nausea and runs to his room. When Anna, Eli's girlfriend, kisses him, the traces of the traumatic experience appear in his consciousness: "I saw many images in that intoxicating moment . . . for a moment all of those colorful images hid the ugly image of Sima."³⁸ The "ugly image of Sima" is another expression of the encoding done by the traumatic memory. This memory can appear in flashes while Eli is awake or sleeping.³⁹ The reappearance of the traumatic experience, whether through bodily symptoms or flashes of memory, makes daily reality more dangerous than ever. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Luis Herman writes that "after a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment."⁴⁰

In the wake of trauma, the danger that lurks for the individual is the danger of the reemergence of the traumatic experience. Trauma always appears twice: first at the time of its initial occurrence, and later through repetition compulsion.⁴¹ Just months after the rape, Eli experiences the reappearance of the trauma, in which the traumatic experience is reconstructed not as a memory belonging to the past but as a real event in the present.⁴² One evening, after having dinner at a local restaurant following a film premiere in which Anna participates, Eli walks toward Anna's house, where he sees her harassed by Sergei, her partner in the film:

I saw Anna standing under her two-story house, trying to push Sergei's hands off her; he was trying to kiss her, practically forcing her. . . . I find myself hiding behind a small bulletin board, peeking and choking. Not doing anything. Just letting the fear paralyze my body. Why don't I rush to rescue her?⁴³

Seized with fear, Eli looks at the horrible image, an image that will be replaced by the "ugly image of Sima." In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra writes that one of the dangers in the reappearance of the trauma is the collapse of time, the collapse of the distinction between the "here and now" and the "then and there," a collapse whose behavioral repercussions can be disastrous.⁴⁴ The distinction between the horrible image of Sergei and Anna and the "ugly image of Sima" collapses, and it is Sergei who pays the price. Substituting the actual danger is a danger of monstrous proportions, which sends Eli's self-defense system completely out of control. Instead of freeing Anna from Sergei and thereby protecting the most precious thing of all—the body that is also his body, the soul that is also his

soul—Eli is overtaken by a powerful feeling of rage, a rage that is directed at Sergei and results in his destruction.

The violence—whether Sima’s sexual violence toward Eli, Sergei’s toward Anna, or Eli’s violence toward Sergei—is beyond control. In *Intimate Violence*, Dalit Yassour-Borochowitz writes that emotional or physical violence between intimates is perceived as an attempt to restore something to the self that has been lost.⁴⁵ LaCapra writes about violence as a means of returning something lost:

In converting absence into loss, one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made “us” lose. Therefore, to regain it one must somehow get rid of or eliminate those others.⁴⁶

Violence, as an attempt to return to the state that preceded the loss, transforms into an action that results in an additional loss, a loss for the other.

Eli’s loss, like his relatives’ losses, is just one loss in a chain of losses, all of which begin and end in violence. The history of this violence is not “Sima’s Greek blood” or “Yefet’s murderous gaze” but, as Fanon writes, the circumstances of life itself, a life in which the individual has lost sovereignty over his body and his life.⁴⁷ In his essay “Torture,” Jean Amery describes how violence negates this sovereignty:

Whoever would rush to the prisoner’s aid—a wife, a mother, a brother, or friend—he won’t get so far. . . . At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down. The other person, *opposite* whom I exist physically in the world and *with* whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow.⁴⁸

The torture chamber about which Amery writes is not accessible to the intimate other. The other remains outside it, distanced and deprived of the ability to defend. For Eli, however, the torture chamber is located in the very house where the most intimate other is the one who gives the “first blow.” The “first blow” in the house evokes another loss, one that moves beyond the borders of sovereignty over the body, leading to loss of the house itself.

The destruction of the body is also the destruction of the home. And the destruction of the home is the destruction of the body. But the destruction of the home does not imply some original wholeness or security, whether the mother’s womb or the four walls of the house—not for any of them: “This was never a home,” Eli says to Yom Tov. For her part, Sima tells Eli how when she was a child her room became a dungeon where she was locked up for days. The house did not

feel like a home, didn't look like a home, and didn't function like a home. The negation of the possibility of a home, which began with the establishment's and The Place's rejection of the neighborhood and which relegated its inhabitants to existing beyond the territory of life, is perpetuated by those in the house itself. LaCapra writes that "in terms of absence, one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had."⁴⁹ The recognition of loss as a variation on absence has the potential to sever the chain of loss and violence and to open up possibilities for working through the trauma and for the work of mourning,⁵⁰ processes that cannot end with the return home, since there never was a home:

Working through the past in any desirable fashion would thus be a process (not an accomplished state) and involve not definitive closure or full self-possession but a recurrent yet variable attempt to relate accurate, critical memory-work to the requirements of desirable action in the present.⁵¹

Only the process of working through and the work of mourning can open up the gates of life for Eli, even if these gates do not open to a complete rescue.

Surviving Violence: Mourning and Testimony

Michal Ben Naftali writes in "On Retreat" that the destruction of the home "is therefore the destruction of the ability to say 'I' and to tell a story in the first person."⁵² The destruction of home and body by the space and those in it takes away Eli's possibility of speaking in the first person. Eli can express neither the violence nor the loss:

I looked at the spiraling newspaper and I thought about Sima, who defiled something in me. I felt that the tears were choking me once again. I buried my head in my hands and cried. . . . Something in me wanted Yom Tov to interrogate me and try to get out the pus that I was carrying around from the day before. But I had no great expectations from that ostrich.⁵³

Eli doesn't tell Yom Tov about the day before. He returns home, packs his bags, and leaves: "Everything came back to me when I opened the door and turned on the light in the living room. I rushed to the bathroom and threw up . . . with my bag of clothes and my school bag I walked out of the house and walked to Yom Tov's house, determined not to return to the scene of the crime."⁵⁴

Eli leaves home, a departure that signifies recognition of the home's destruction. Just a few months earlier he could still imagine Yom Tov, Sima, and himself living under the same roof. But the destruction of the home is also the shattering of his

dream, and for the first time Eli sees the domestic territory as a “crime scene” and Sima as “Medea.” The shattering of the dream marks the beginning of the work of mourning. In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud writes that mourning is a reaction to the loss of a loved one or of a substitute object: “Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object.”⁵⁵ Whether it is the actual mother and house or their utopian counterparts, Eli recognizes that their loss was not preceded by a whole and secure presence.

The recognition of the loss and the mourning that is manifested in expressions of anger and aggression signal the first appearance of a self with demands and feelings, a self with a biography that is waiting to be told. Freud writes: “Mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live.”⁵⁶ The appearance of the self and the recognition of the destruction of the home grant Eli sovereignty over his life, but this recognition is only the beginning of another recognition—that of the destruction of the body, which violence has indelibly marked. Recognition of the destruction of the body becomes possible only after the reappearance of the trauma. Here the defilement of Anna’s body substitutes for the defilement of Eli’s body. Thus, the reappearance of the trauma is Eli’s first attempt to digest the traumatic experience and the loss it entails. This attempt is essentially a reprocessing of information about the self and the world.⁵⁷

The distinction between the “here and now” and the “then and there” becomes possible, and later on in the novel, the time of the story shifts from past to present. Fifteen-year-old Eli is now a twenty-one-year-old young man on the most important day of his life: “In an hour and a half the party will begin . . .,” Eli recounts, “I am about to celebrate at the N.A. shelter a year of being clean of drugs.”⁵⁸ At the Narcotics Anonymous shelter in the nearby neighborhood, Eli tells his story, taking the reader back six years to the beginning of the novel and telling his life story up to the moment of Sergei’s murder. Surrounded by friends and in the presence of his father, he opens his mouth and begins to speak, to sketch the outlines of his biography through the history of the body. Eli recounts the destruction of the body, describing the violence step by step, whether it is Sima’s and Yefet’s violence or his own. The testimony regarding the destruction of the body reveals events and details to the reader that had not been mentioned up to that point in the novel, a reflection of the fragmentary and elusive nature of the traumatic experience. The testimony is constructed simultaneously from a series of events and a series of lapses, lapses that preclude

a linear narrative, both of the witnessing itself and of the story's plot, which is cut off after Sergei's murder.

The difficulty of telling the story—possibly resulting from anxiety that the trauma and its concomitant dangers will repeat themselves—is pushed aside because of a feeling of necessity, a hunger for testimony. Testimonies, we learn, “are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time.”⁵⁹ And indeed, Eli did wait for a long time; he waited not only for the moment that speech would be possible but also for the presence of an empathetic listener. His friends in the drug rehab program encourage him: “We love you, Lilo . . . go on, keep on sharing your time.”⁶⁰ Eli describes how important their presence is: “The atmosphere at the shelter was very charged, electrifying. Everyone looked at me with their mouths agape, and many of them had tears in their eyes.”⁶¹ Eli's loneliness is broken. His pain becomes the pain of the world, and through empathy he achieves recognition of his disaster. The world's acknowledgment of his disaster opens the way for Eli to experience sorrow, sorrow over lost innocence and the lost mother and home, sorrow that gives way to forgiveness.

In *Forgive and Not Forget*, Yotam Benziman writes that characterizing an act as unforgivable is tantamount to excluding the perpetrator from the circle of people with whom society is willing to come into contact.⁶² The unforgivable act and its perpetrator are excluded from the borders of humanity. Eli's persistent refusal to forgive Sima is thus also a refusal to recognize her humanity. Sima is relegated to existing outside human territory, an exclusion that leads to suicide; she is not worthy of living—not in Eli's eyes, not in the eyes of the world—not even in her own eyes. Had Sima taken responsibility for the act before Eli and before the world, perhaps her fate would have been different. Instead she justifies her act through the chain of violence and loss in her own life. Her refusal to take responsibility for her acts is evident in her recurring declaration that she has turned into another person: “Look, Eli, I've changed . . . I'm not the same person.”⁶³ Sima's transformation into another person makes her acts seem as if they do not belong to anyone. As Benziman writes, “No one takes responsibility for the act. It belongs to ‘no one.’”⁶⁴

Sima's refusal to take responsibility for her act is also a refusal to acknowledge having destroyed Eli's life and taken away his sovereignty over both his body and his life. In his essay “Resentments” Jean Amery writes that he does not want to coordinate with his torturers: “I demand that the latter negate themselves and in the negation coordinate with me.”⁶⁵ Sima's suicide—the negation of her own life by her own hand—is what allows Eli to forgive her. This forgiveness does

not signify the erasure of her act from either her biography or Eli's body. The forgiveness does not heal or blur the wounds but turns them into an inseparable part of his body and life. Eli does not distinguish between the person, Sima, and her act, and thus he also takes responsibility for his own acts: "Court or no court, sane or insane, aware or not aware, walking free or imprisoned—none of these change the fact that I wrenched someone from his life. The feeling that I murdered someone will never leave me."⁶⁶ The recognition of his personal obligation to take responsibility for his acts is a product of his recognition of Sima's obligation to take responsibility for hers, and this precludes the possibility of forgiving himself for Sergei's murder. When two of his friends shout at him, "With the help of the program and a merciful God you will be able to forgive yourself!" Eli answers, "I doubt it."⁶⁷

For Eli, working through trauma and the work of mourning go beyond the self and touch others—Sima, Sergei, Anna, and Yom Tov. Their presence in the mourning process requires Eli to recognize not only their responsibility for their acts but also his responsibility for his own acts. In the labyrinth of responsibilities, Eli paves his way to his own responsibility and thus to life. LaCapra writes that working through trauma "may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity) but . . . may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency."⁶⁸ Working through and the work of mourning do not signify salvation for Eli, nor do they signify complete extrication from his situation. Rather, they dictate a life that is essentially a never-ending working through, or in Eli's words, "An addict is an addict is an addict. Always replacing one drug with another, and always with an overdose. In my case, alcohol replaced food, cocaine replaced alcohol, and caffeine replaced cocaine."⁶⁹

The comprehension that a complete transformation of the soul is not possible precludes the possibility of complete escape, whether from the home and the neighborhood as real places or from the soul that is identified with them. After his testimonial in the rehab shelter, Eli returns to Yom Tov's house and imagines his future. It is a future that does not go beyond the borders of the neighborhood, not even to another reality: "I don't know what I'll do in the future. Maybe I'll go back to school. Sometimes it seems to me that my whole life is behind me. I'm only twenty-one, and I've already managed to absorb and exude enough evil for an entire lifetime."⁷⁰ Eli's life does not go beyond the borders of the neighborhood, neither in reality nor in imagination. His fate is interwoven with the fate of his parents—he cannot circumvent the chain of violence and loss. The ability to work through the

trauma and recognize the loss, however, does allow him to take responsibility for his life and maintain a certain amount of control over his fate.

Reading and Writing and Its Discontents

Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman write about “a life-testimony [that] is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*.”⁷¹ As a textual testimony addressed to others, Dudu Busi's *Noble Savage* is a vehicle for the transmission of reality, transgressing the limits of literature and moving into life itself—into other poor neighborhoods and other broken homes. With events that resonate with a reality beyond the literary text, the experience of reading the novel becomes an act of listening to a testimony—the testimony of a single body about survival in the slums and in the home. Concerning the delicate, complex relationship between a survivor's testimony, whether textual or oral, and the listener or reader who receives it, Laub and Felman write:

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels.⁷²

The encounter between the posttraumatic literary testimony and the reader or literary scholar is unsettling; the trauma of the witness evolves into a secondary trauma for the reader of the text.⁷³ According to LaCapra, observing and writing about a traumatic experience presents difficult issues of representation for both scholarship and other fields: “Unqualified objectification and narrative harmonization as well as unmediated identification are particularly questionable.”⁷⁴ LaCapra presents a middle path for the scholar, a kind of reading and writing that contain “empathic unsettlement.” This kind of reading implies neither absolute empathy nor a distanced observer's stance but rather the constant movement between these two poles—between close involvement and distanced observation, between the intimate and the distanced, between subjective writing and objective scholarship—enabling “a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response to the voices of victims.”⁷⁵

Responding to Dudu Busi's novel upon its release, literary critics in Israel vacillated between these two poles. Tamar Landau, writing for *Haaretz*, takes a clear stance:

Perhaps had Busi chosen to focus only on the “authentic” documentation of life in the Argazim neighborhood, we would have gotten something out of it. Hard lives need not transform in literature into an Iraqi soap opera. Holocaust, discrimination, Greek tragedy, Russians, murder, sexual harassment, and drugs—all at once? Maybe it’s a little bit too much.⁷⁶

Landau dismisses the unsettling reading experience in favor of a distanced critical standpoint: *Noble Savage* is no more than an “Iraqi soap opera”—in other words, it is literature that has no bearing on life. The literary “congestion”—Holocaust, discrimination, Greek tragedy, Russians, murder, sexual harassment, and drugs—becomes the object of resentment, and the critic’s resentment may be understood as an expression of self-defense against a surfeit of trauma. Landau’s refusal to see *Noble Savage* as describing a possible reality is also her refusal to recognize the evolution of Eli’s suffering. In this refusal she essentially turns her back on the literary testimonial. On the obligation of the listener to the traumatic testimony, Laub and Felman write:

The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony.⁷⁷

The elusive border between listening to the other and listening to oneself, between the trauma experienced by the witness and the secondary trauma felt by the listener or reader, is blurred in Landau’s reading experience. Absent a distinction between witness and listener, and between text and reader, the dangers for the former become the dangers for the latter, and one of the ways of defending oneself against these is by erasure.

Contrary to Landau’s reading, Noa Manheim proposes a different reading of Busi’s novel in a review in *Yedioth ahronoth*:

Busi . . . leads us into the very heart of personal pain and allows us to adopt it—piercing, wounding, and scarring—into our own heart. He spreads out a map in which the borders are marked by sea and land, light and darkness, laughter and tears. . . . It is no longer the voice of a wound that screams, but of a pain that speaks.⁷⁸

In Manheim's review the reading experience is presented as an emotional dialogue that takes place between the text and the reader. In her awareness of the act of reading as an act of listening to a testimony, Manheim adopts a dual stance, moving between empathy and identification with Eli, on the one hand, and an interpretative and critical view of his story that places it in the context of Dudu Busi's oeuvre, on the other. Comparing it to Busi's first novel, *Ha-yareah yarok ba-vadi*, Manheim writes: "In this sense, *Noble Savage* is a promise fulfilled. It is lacking the gushing primacy, the immense vitality, and, above all, the surprise contained in its predecessor. . . . The heroes of *Noble Savage* are more explicit, more aware, less innocent. Just like us."⁷⁹ Manheim's critique sustains the same tense reciprocity that LaCapra identified in the term "empathic unsettlement," which does not erase the trauma—neither through turning one's back nor through unqualified harmonization.

Landau's and Manheim's reviews present not only two distinct interpretations of Busi's novel but also two different reactions to a literary text set in an Other reality—a Mizrahi reality that is under constant threat. This threat goes beyond the borders of the reality represented in the literary text to the question of the novel's position as Mizrahi literature in the field of Israeli literature. The discussion about *Noble Savage's* position in the literary field as a "threatening" or "dangerous" book is broached indirectly within the novel itself.⁸⁰ At the Hatikva neighborhood local library, Eli gets into an argument with the librarian about one of Yehoshua Kenaz's novels.⁸¹ The librarian says:

"I didn't like it, I stopped in the middle. I'm not interested in all this country's wars and hatred. I read books to escape from those things. Just give me something light to read. Who needs to read about all the shit and misery in life? As if I don't know that life is shitty, and that it's full of miserable and violent people? I get all that from everyday life; I don't need to read about it in books. I can't relate to Kenaz. And not to any other writer who writes about the scum of life!" she declared with determination. "There are a lot like you, you're not alone," I said, pointing to the list of bestsellers hanging behind her.⁸²

The argument between Eli and the librarian revolves around two important, interrelated topics: the relationship between literature and reality and the reader's preferences regarding this issue. Like Landau's and Manheim's critiques, Eli and the librarian represent different stances regarding the questions of which literature is of value and what role literature should play. The librarian expects literature to be distanced from the difficult daily reality—literature should not be connected to the "scum of life." In contrast, Eli's stance is that whatever reality may be, literature's

role is to reflect it, even at the risk of putting off the public: “If this crap is people’s taste, I thought, then let them go fuck themselves.”⁸³

Eli’s demand that literature reflect reality is expressed in his essays for his literature classes:

Nagid once said to me that in my essays I paint Mizrahi culture as grotesque and violent and that if I were Ashkenazi, I’d be accused of racism. . . . He shot this stupid remark at me because of an essay I wrote for the class . . . on the subject of our neighborhood. . . . I didn’t give anyone a break in my essay, not myself and not the people in my neighborhood. I opened the essay with a very violent scene . . . this exists in real life, I didn’t invent a thing.⁸⁴

The two texts—Eli’s essay and Dudu Busi’s novel—are perceived as describing a threatening reality that is ignored, and even denied, by those surrounding it. The insistence on describing reality as it is, with all its violence, ugliness, and misery, is essentially the articulation of a critical stance vis-à-vis this reality and the people in it. Eli’s critical stance, which represents Busi’s stance, is made possible by his dual position—a position that is at once internal and external, a position of belonging and of being an outsider. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon writes about the outsider stance of the black intellectual, a critical stance whose essence is not only confrontation with his nation but also with himself. This stance, writes Fanon, is made possible through a deep self-examination of the history of his body. This self-investigation is a prerequisite for the intellectual’s ability to guide or lead his nation:

The native intellectual who takes up arms to defend his nation’s legitimacy and who wants to bring proofs to bear out that legitimacy, who is willing to strip himself naked to study the history of his body, is obliged to dissect the heart of his people.⁸⁵

The knowledge Eli gains by testifying about his life, through a description of the history of his body, is what enables him to face his surroundings. As a story of survival, the testimony enables Eli to sever the chain of violence and loss by working through the trauma and doing the work of mourning. A trauma that is not completely processed, according to LaCapra, is likely to imprison societies and individuals in a cycle of ethically and politically undesirable behavior of which they will not be aware and from which they will have difficulty freeing themselves.⁸⁶ Eli’s story of survival goes beyond the borders of the self and opens up the possibility of control over their fate for an entire neighborhood and its survivors, as well as for other distressed neighborhoods.

Busi's *Noble Savage* urges us to inquire about the position of the Mizrahi author and his role as an intellectual within Israeli culture. This requires further contemplation, but it is already clear here that we must pursue the connection between responsibility and control over one's life. Control over one's fate is invaluable and is related to freedom. It has to do with flying. In *The Earth Is Closing On Us*, Mahmoud Darwish asks: "Where should the birds fly after the last sky?"⁸⁷ At the place of the last sky, the birds don't fly anywhere. Control over one's life has less to do with the possibility of reaching a specific place than it has to do with the ability of flight itself, with the unremitting demand for self-responsibility and "dissection of the heart" that it entails. It is not a question of literary "authenticity" but a question of life, life in a place where there is no comfort, a life under the last sky.

Notes

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- 1 Dudu Busi, *Pere atsil* [Noble savage] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2003), 10. The book has not been published in English. Quotations were translated by Tamar Cohen.
 - 2 *Argazim*, literally meaning crates or cardboard boxes, is a neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv. It is a shantytown comprised of tin shacks and structures improvised out of construction materials.
 - 3 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 129.
 - 4 Sami Shalom Chetrit, "Kmo sfinot tekuot al sirton" [Like boats stuck in a sandbar], *Haaretz* 416, March 7, 2001, 1.
 - 5 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 129.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 30.
 - 7 Unlike reading books, overeating as a self-defense mechanism becomes a mechanism of self-violence. This mechanism is explained in the second chapter.
 - 8 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 231.
 - 9 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257.
 - 10 The issues raised here relate to a variety of sociological theories and approaches dealing with the linkages between violence, gender, and poverty. The main emphasis, however, is not on the social sources or origins of violence but on the presence of violence as a point of departure in a discussion of a different nature.
 - 11 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 9–10.

- 12 Ibid., 97.
- 13 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.
- 14 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Christo's Gates and Gilo's Wall," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 599.
- 15 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 108.
- 16 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.
- 17 Ibid., 24.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Dalia Markovich and Ketzia Alon, "'Yalda shkhora,' 'Pere atsil,' ve-'Avaryan tsa'atsua': Ha-giborim ha-hadashim shel ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit?" ["Black girl," "Noble savage," and "pseudo-delinquent": Hebrew literature's new protagonists?], *Ha-Kivun Mizrah* 8 (2004): 8–10.
- 20 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 129.
- 21 Ibid., 24.
- 22 Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, ed. Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 180.
- 23 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 11.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., 26.
- 26 Ibid., 111.
- 27 Ibid., 104.
- 28 Ibid., 112.
- 29 Ibid., 10.
- 30 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 30.
- 31 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 9.
- 32 Ibid., 100.
- 33 Ibid., 101.
- 34 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 24.
- 35 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 98, 134.
- 36 Sigmund Freud, "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 2001), 22:86.
- 37 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 50.
- 38 Ibid., 188.
- 39 Judith Luis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 37.
- 40 Ibid., 35.

- 41 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 6.
- 42 Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in *The Standard Edition*, 12:150.
- 43 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 257.
- 44 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 46.
- 45 Dalit Yassour-Borochowitz, *Alimut intimit* [Intimate violence] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2003), 23.
- 46 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 58.
- 47 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 309–310.
- 48 Jean Amery, "Torture," in *At the Mind's Limits*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 27–28 (emphasis in the original).
- 49 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 50.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 51 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 42.
- 52 Michal Ben Naftali, *Al ha-prishut* [On Retreat] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2009), 23.
- 53 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 180–181.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 193.
- 55 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition*, 14:244.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 256.
- 57 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 42.
- 58 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 261.
- 59 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 70–71.
- 60 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 264.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 266.
- 62 Yotam Benziman, *Lisloah ve-lo lishkoah* [To forgive and not to forget] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2008), 144.
- 63 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 264.
- 64 Benziman, *Lisloah ve-lo lishkoah*, 11.
- 65 Jean Amery, "Resentments," in *At the Mind's Limits*, 69.
- 66 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 263.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 90.
- 69 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 261.

- 70 Ibid., 269.
- 71 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 2 (emphasis in the original).
- 72 Ibid., 57–58.
- 73 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 102.
- 74 Ibid., 99.
- 75 Ibid., 109.
- 76 Tamar Landau, “Shoah, aflaya, tragedya Yevanit, Rusim, retsah, hatrada minit ve-samim be-vat ahat?” [Holocaust, discrimination, Greek tragedy, Russians, murder, sexual harassment and drugs all at once?], *Haaretz* 561, November 23, 2003, 6 (translation by Tamar Cohen).
- 77 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 58.
- 78 Noa Manheim, “Ha-za’am ve-ha-zohama” [Rage and filth], *Yedioth ahronoth*, September 14, 2003 (translation by Tamar Cohen). <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2755298,00.html>.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Dudu Busi’s novel is not the only novel in the field of Israeli literature that depicts violent acts such as murder and incest. For example, A. B. Yehoshua’s novel *The Liberated Bride* (2001), Zeruya Shalev’s novel *Love Life* (1997) and Dror Mishani’s novel *The Missing File* (2011) also include acts of incest. Despite this, they were not perceived as “threatening” or “dangerous” books. There may be many different reasons for this, such as the position of the author inside or outside the literary canon as well as the location of the story and whether or not the violent act is at the periphery or the center of Israeli society. The centrality of the violent act in Busi’s book is an essential question that should be examined. Either way, the question of what contributes to a book being perceived as “threatening” or “dangerous” and whether literature that engages with violence as a main theme deserves its own genre are questions that require a separate study.
- 81 Busi’s choice to place one of Kenaz’s books at the center of the argument between Eli and the librarian could be understood as an attempt to receive cultural legitimacy for his realism from the Israeli literary critics. The argument between Eli and the librarian, however, does not rely on the popularity or the canonical position of Kenaz’s novels in contemporary Israeli literature but on their unpopularity among contemporary Israeli readers. I argue that this can be explained by the question of reality and its presentation in literature. Kenaz’s first books—*Aharey ha-hagim* [After the Holidays] (1964) and *Ha-isha ha-gdola me-ha-halomot* [The great woman of the dreams] (1973)—in particular were received with disapproval, reservation, revulsion, and sometimes even with silence by Israeli literary critics.
- 82 Busi, *Pere atsil*, 115.
- 83 Ibid., 92.
- 84 Ibid., 75–76.
- 85 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 211.
- 86 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.

- 87 Mahmoud Darwish, "The Earth Is Closing On Us," in *The Victims of a Map*, trans. Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1984), 13.