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Cultural translation and the immigrant artist: Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi's works in context

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in contemporary translation studies, this article offers insights into the way translation links with multimodality and art to display the experience of migration. Its main contribution to the discipline is exploring these issues from the perspective of cultural translation – a concept that applies to the transformation of individuals and entire groups when they encounter otherness. Our case study is a selection of works by the Israeli artist Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi who emigrated from Ukraine to Israel during the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. In her art, which reflects a navigation between conflicting identities, she articulates the experience of "translated" women and men (to use Salman Rushdie's coinage). While examining her works through the prism of cultural translation, we explore several issues: the manipulation of stereotypes of the "other"; the transformation of people, especially in relation to immigration; the involuntary sharing of space; and hybridity.

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One of the main developments in contemporary translation studies is the acknowledgement of multimodality as a main feature of texts – whether in old media such as literature and the cinema or in new ones such as the Internet: "[…] the need for a focused consideration of translation in multimodal contexts is becoming increasingly urgent in the modern world as communication involving words, images, movement, gesture, music, and so on occurs with ever greater frequency" (Boria et al. 2020, 3). The text is conceived as a multimodal complex that combines the verbal, the visual and the auditory and appeals to several senses at one and the same time (Gambier 2006; 2016). In line with the notion of the "outward turn" (Bassnett and Johnston 2019), this new approach expands translation studies by establishing connections with other disciplines, such as visual culture studies and art studies (Vidal Claramonte 2022), which are particularly relevant in the case under consideration. As Mieke Bal and Joanne Morra (2007, 6) note, "translation is indispensable for understanding the visual realm", including art as one of its major representatives.

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Another focus of contemporary translation studies is the relationship between translation and migration, which is both analogical – both involve movement and the crossing of boundaries – and causal: migration triggers translation by and for the migrants (Bertacco and Vallorani 2021; Karas 2022; Rizzo 2017). Alessandra Rizzo has called attention to the triangular connection between translation, migration and art: "[…] the relationship between migration and the arts depends on the level of activism they contain, which, in turn, is transformed into forms of translation that map, assume, exhibit, and activate new migratory perspectives" (Rizzo 2017, 55; based on Heidenreich 2015, 105).

Rizzo (2017, 55) also notes that "all acts of translation are intimately connected with the formations of the self and the development of issues concerning individual and cultural identity". This leads us to the concept of cultural translation which stretches the limits of translation beyond the realm of texts and modalities and applies to people, whether individuals or entire groups. Originating in a number of disciplines, including ethnography, culture studies, translation studies and literary studies (Conway 2013; Maitland 2017), it is often associated with Salman Rushdie's coinage "translated men" (or women): "The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (Rushdie 1991, 16).

Though it has no single clear-cut definition, and its very inclusion in translation studies is disputed (Trivedi 2007), researchers who use this concept (a partial list includes Bharucha 2008; Buden and Nowotny 2009; Cheyfitz 1991; Dhulst 2008; Karas 2022; Niranjana 1992; Pym 2010; Young 2012; 2017) generally share the view that cultural translation takes place when "self" encounters alterity, particularly in a situation of domination or asymmetrical power relations. It is usually applied to immigrants, labor migrants and others who maneuver between their native countries and host societies, as well as entire ethnic groups and societies caught between their culture of origin and a dominant culture. Yet there are significant differences between researchers who focus mainly on cultural translation in the sense of subjugating a native society to a value system which annuls its independence and erases its original identity (e.g. Cheyfitz 1991), and others, like Homi Bhabha (1990; 1994), who reject the binarism embedded in contrasting a dominant group and those under its power. Instead, Bhabha suggests the concept of "a third space", a virtual site of encounter where cultures and individuals negotiate their contradictory identifications:

> Binary divisions of social space neglect the profound temporal disjunction – the translational time and space – through which minority communities negotiate their collective identifications. For what is at issue in the discourse of minorities is the creation of agency through incommensurable (not simply multiple) positions. (Bhabha 1994, 231)

Bhabha acknowledges the need to protect the "self" against alterity through acts of resistance – an idea he elaborates on the basis of Walter Benjamin (1997; see Bhabha 1994, 224).[1] Yet, negotiating contradictions rather than simply reconciling them entails, in his view, a process of self-alienation and renunciation of "the sovereignty of the self" (Bhabha 1990, 213). Judith Butler describes such a renunciation as "ceding ground":

> […] translation cannot be a simply [*sic*] assimilation of what is foreign into what is familiar; it must be an opening to the unfamiliar, a dispossession from prior ground, and even a

> willingness to cede ground to what is not immediately knowable within established epistemological fields. (Butler 2012, 2)

The outcome of this process, according to Bhabha, is hybridity – the emergence of "something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (1990, 211).

The experience of cultural translation can be articulated in many ways, all the more so today when we are exposed to an unprecedented variety of media. The present article focuses on art – which is not usually the subject matter of discussions of cultural translation – and explores its distinctness as an arena of tensions and unresolved conflicts. Our case study comprises contemporary works by the Israeli artist Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi,[2] whose artistic creation revolves around the experience of immigrants from the former Soviet Union like herself, and the lives of labor workers, refugees and sex workers in Israel. While examining her art through the prism of cultural translation, we explore several issues: the resistance to otherness through the creation of stereotypes (Bhabha 1994, 66–84) and Cherkassky-Nnadi's manipulation of this practice; the transformation of people and how it relates to immigration; the involuntary sharing of space; and hybridity.

Notwithstanding its broad circulation, the concept of cultural translation is "fraught with ambiguity" (Conway 2013, 16). Bhabha himself complains that he has been misunderstood. His notion of hybridity, originally referring to the ruptures in the existence of a society or an individual, has been inappropriately translated into "a ubiquitous form of cultural universalism, the proper name of a homogenizing pluralism" (Bhabha 2015, x). By applying his abstract (and some would say: vague) ideas to concrete artifacts we hope to overcome some of the difficulties that they pose.

Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi's biography in its cultural context

Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi was born in Kyiv, Ukraine in 1976 and immigrated to Israel in 1991, at the beginning of the mass wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU). Motivated mainly by the political turmoil and economic hardship that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, it continued throughout the 1990s. Approximately one million immigrants of Jewish descent arrived in Israel, which was the most accessible destination. The immigration of Jewish people to Israel was established by the Law of Return of 1950, which grants Jews from anywhere in the world the right to immigrate to Israel. Another law, the Citizenship Law of 1952, awards automatic citizenship to anyone who immigrates under the Law of Return (Galnoor and Blander 2018).

The 1990s immigrants (in contrast to the former wave of immigration that took place in the 1970s) retained their ties with their culture of origin and former homeland, in part because one-third of them were actually married to Jews or of mixed ethnicity and had family members in the FSU (Remennick 2009). As mentioned, immigration to Israel is regulated by the Law of Return and the Citizenship Law. But to be recognized as a Jew by the Israeli Rabbinate – which is necessary, for instance, in order to marry a Jew in Israel or be buried in a Jewish cemetery – one must convert to Judaism according to Orthodox Jewish law and pass strict tests to prove compliance with Rabbinic standards

(Ben-Porat 2013). Thus, people who always regarded themselves as Jews, and suffered from anti-Semitism in their countries of origin, often discovered upon arriving in Israel that they were now considered non-Jews and rejected as such.

The immigrants on their part were not always eager to integrate into Israeli society. They established a subculture of their own, which encompassed diverse areas of life, from food stores to newspapers, radio stations and literary activities where Russian was the predominant language (Remennick 2002; Remennick and Prashizky 2019). At the same time, interactions with Hebrew culture increased, creating a Bhabha-like third space of negotiation between Israelis and the newcomers. For instance, the Gesher theater, founded by Moscow director Yevgeny Arye, performed in both Russian and Hebrew. Israeli culture, for its part, was greatly influenced by the immigrants in areas such as theater, music and academia.

More specifically, Cherkassky-Nnadi belongs to the so-called "Generation 1.5", a label given to Israelis who were born in the FSU and immigrated to Israel with their families as children or young adults (Remennick and Prashizky 2019). They are characterized by their constant navigation between their Israeli, Jewish and previous identities (Russian, Ukrainian etc.) which often clash with each other; their claim for visibility and belonging and, at times, social and political activism; and the prominence of women among them. The latter may be the result of the strong reaction by female immigrants to their stereotypical depiction as "sluts" and the sexual harassment they often experienced in Israel (Remennick and Prashizky 2019).

Many members of this generation express themselves, like Cherkassky-Nnadi, in art and literature (Moshkin 2019). Cherkassky-Nnadi began her art studies as a child in Ukraine and continued her career as a painter in Israel. Since 2010 she has been associated with the New Barbizon group of painters (Dashevski 2020; Guilat 2017). The group which includes five female painters, all born in the FSU, is named after a mid-nineteenth century French school of art centered in the village of Barbizon. Its members used to go out to nature to paint *en plein air*, thus manifesting their rebellion against Romantic and Neoclassic painting. This approach did not relate to nature alone, but reflected a social stand: by choosing subjects such as toiling peasants, it opened the door to twentieth-century Social Realism (Adams 1994). Similarly to the French school, the New Barbizon painters strove to make a social statement. To this end, they arranged outdoor drawing sessions, particularly in socially charged locations, such as the poor neighborhoods of Tel Aviv, Bedouin villages and Palestinian refugee camps, and during events such as the 2011 social protests in Tel Aviv.[3]

In similarity to other members of the New Barbizon, Cherkassky-Nnadi's drawings reveal diverse artistic influences, some of which reflect her early education in the Soviet Union and her studies at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem. In addition to their proclaimed affinity with the French Barbizon School, her works converse *inter alia* with Soviet Social Realism, German Expressionism and Jewish Symbolism (Gershenson 2019, 78). Cherkassky-Nnadi's uniqueness is nevertheless apparent in her basically realistic style which she occasionally tints with caricature-like exaggerations, humor and irony, side by side with nostalgic elements. The diversity of her art is also apparent in her use of various materials and techniques: huge oil paintings, drawings on paper and objects such as dolls all feature in her work. As we shall show, all these features are means to express the various aspects of the experience of cultural translation.

The themes are constantly changing, manifesting Cherkassky-Nnadi's social and political involvement and her protest against social injustice, which is evident not only in her art but also her active participation in social networks. While reflecting the tensions between her culture of origin and host society, she is also interested in the life of refugees, asylum seekers and sex workers who live on the margins of society. Since 2022, she has been taking part in the protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the country that still evokes her memories notwithstanding the anti-Semitism there, which she has exposed in her paintings (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021; Moshkin 2019).

The explicit content in many of her works is a shockingly blatant attack on society, carried out through an offensive and provocative use of stereotypes, which has often aroused heated reactions (Mendelsohn 2018). Yet, the audacious content is not intolerable because it is balanced by her mastery of diverse artistic styles, the abundance of allusions to artistic schools and painters, and the use of nostalgia and humor. This is possibly one of the reasons why, despite the provocative nature of her art, Cherkassky-Nnadi has been embraced by the Israeli artistic establishment, and her solo and group exhibitions are displayed in the most prestigious museums and galleries, most notably the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, which featured her exhibition "Pravda" in 2018 (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021). Today she is an internationally recognized artist, and her standing gives extra power to her unique voice.

Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi's works as an expression of cultural translation and its complexities

Constructing the "other" through stereotypes

The encounter between the immigrants and veteran Israelis is imbued with stereotypes and racist prejudices, which Cherkassky-Nnadi both introduces into her work and undermines through caricature-like exaggeration (Gershenson 2019, 75). *Itzik* (Figure 1), a painting that stirred up a good deal of turmoil, concentrates specifically on the encounter between the immigrants from the FSU and *Mizrahi* Israelis (those whose families emigrated from North Africa and the Middle East). As Eliezer Ben-Rafael (2007) has shown, the collective identities of these two groups differ drastically from each other, e.g. with respect to Jewish tradition and symbols. This is in his view one of the main divergences in Israeli multicultural society.

Derived from the name Yitzhak, Itzik is a common moniker in Israel, but it is also a derogatory epithet for Jews in the FSU (Rosenthal 2016). *Itzik* shows a *Mizrahi* man harassing a waitress, apparently an immigrant from the FSU, working in his cheap-looking falafel eatery. It uses stereotypes to depict both characters. Itzik is dark-skinned and hairy, his big nose and fleshy lips reminiscent of anti-Semitic caricatures and racist depictions of black people, respectively. He is wearing a sleeveless undershirt that covers his protruding belly, and shorts that are fake mockups of an expensive brand and hardly cover his buttocks, plastic sandals and vulgar gold jewelry. The picture of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on the wall symbolizes the view of *Mizrahi* Jews as *Masorti* (traditional). Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a spiritual leader and initiator of *Shas* – an Orthodox *Mizrahi* party – was also known for his provocative remarks regarding secular Jews and the *Ashkenazi* Rabbinate (Chen and Pepper 2004). Thus, Itzik is the emblem of both Israeliness

Figure 1. Itzik.

and *Mizrahi* masculinity. His victim, the waitress trying to avoid his grasp, is also a stereotype, identified as an immigrant from the FSU by her blonde hair and the color of her skin.[4] She is a particularly weak victim – poor, female, "Russian"[5] – and the logo "Itzik Falafel" on her shirt, exactly over her breasts, intimates that she is his property.

In reality, the encounter between the immigrants from the FSU and *Mizrahi* Israelis has led to a complex relationship. Alongside the mutual suspicion and antagonism, the young generation of immigrants is establishing contacts with Israeli *Mizrahi* culture as a means of becoming part of the local society, and draws inspiration from the *Mizrahi* social protest (Prashizky and Remennick 2017). Cherkassky-Nnadi's painting, in contrast, expresses aversion to the local *Mizrahi* culture, as conceived by some of the immigrants (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2012, 186–207). In this sense, it exemplifies the claim that ridicule serves the purpose of delegitimization and dehumanization (Hodson and MacInnis 2016). Yet, the self-conscious exaggeration, and its humorous effect, enable a different interpretation. As Laura Vitis and Fairleigh Gilmour (2016, 10) note, humor reveals the absurdities underpinning stereotypes by making them visible and laughable. Seen in this light, Cherkassky-Nnadi's painting satirizes rather than confirms the racist stereotypes, and exposes the danger embedded in any racial stereotyping. It serves as a warning against a distorted view of "others", which hinders coming to terms with them. It should be noted, however, that this moderated interpretation, according to which Cherkassky-Nnadi demonstrates a racist worldview in order to make the audience rethink it, was firmly rejected by critics who refused to see anything but sheer racism in this

painting (Ben Dayan 2012). This elusiveness in itself may have contributed to Cherkassky-Nnadi's success in Israel and beyond.

Itzik was included in the 2018 "Pravda" exhibition at the Israel Museum, which showcased the life of the immigrants from the FSU before and after coming to Israel. Due to its provocative nature, it was presented, along with other particularly provocative paintings, in a separate room; a sign at the entrance in Hebrew, English and Russian warned the public that "this part of the exhibition contains graphically explicit works" (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021).

Cherkassky-Nnadi's insistence on the "graphically explicit" is also apparent in a series of paintings focused on the female victim. These canvases, which were displayed in the 2021 online exhibition "Women Who Work" at Fort Gansevoort Gallery in New York, show the life of sex workers and are based on films and YouTube videos, as well as the artist's impressions from her wanderings around south Tel Aviv (Riba 2021). The sex worker in Figure 2 evokes a common stereotype of the female FSU immigrants: they are sluts, if not actually prostitutes (Gershenson and Hudson 2008; Moshkin 2019; Remennick and Prashizky 2019). Here, as in "Women Who Work" in general, we do not see the caricature-like exaggeration that characterizes *Itzik* and other works included in the "Pravda" exhibition (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021). Rather, Cherkassky-

Figure 2. A sex worker (a).

Nnadi converses with the artistic traditions of representing prostitutes, for example, in the works of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, particularly his Moulin Rouge paintings (Riba 2021). The stereotyping is nevertheless evident in the appearance of the woman. Her blonde hair and hairstyle associate her with the stereotypical figure of the female immigrant, and together with the lingerie and makeup, suggest an attempt to retain European elegance. Her somewhat disdainful look is in defiance of the humiliating situation: an adult woman standing half naked in a shabby neighborhood, as indicated by the background. As Dafna Lemish (2000, 345) notes, presenting female immigrants in a stereotypical manner which reduces them to a limited number of characteristics – mainly surrounding their appearance and sexuality – removes them from the core of society. At the same time, the artist's critical exposure of the stereotype is a demonstration of solidarity, a reversal of the prevailing discourse which we find e.g. in the media (Rizzo 2017, 57–58).

It should be noted that both the sexual harassment of female immigrants displayed in *Itzik* and the importing of women from the FSU by the Israeli sex industry occurred in reality (Lemish 2000; Remennick and Prashizky 2019). Cherkassky-Nnadi's art, however, is attentive to both the facts and the way they are manipulated by prejudice. In this respect she joins forces with other artists of her generation who struggle against the stereotyping of the immigrants, for example, the poet Rita Kogan, whose poem "Atsey ashu'akh lo" ("Fir trees aren't") starts as follows:

> Our fir trees accost your eyes,
>
> Our names confuse your tongues,
>
> For you we are a Russian circus:
>
> Submissive women,
>
> Drinking men,
>
> Old men in medals,
>
> Old women with mops,
>
> Boys who excel in physics,
>
> Girls who are sluts.
>
> (English translation: Moshkin 2019, 188)

In sum, the two paintings discussed in this section confront opposite perspectives on the "other": the Israeli, and more specifically the *Mizrahi* man, from the point of view of the immigrants; and the female immigrant in the perception of Israelis. Each is "translated" by the other into a stereotypical figure. Interestingly, Bhabha himself discussed stereotypes, though not in the context of cultural translation. The stereotype according to Bhabha (1994, 75) is "an arrested, fixated form of representation" which, in the case under study, can be understood as a way to protect the "self" against alterity. Drawing on Bhabha, Derek Hook (2005) explains that stereotypes entail a paradox: on the one hand, they exaggerate the difference of the other, while on the other hand they conceive of the other as stable and fully knowable. Cherkassky-Nnadi's stereotypical figures fit this

description, but in her case, the use of stereotypes is obviously conscious, and serves a double purpose: to criticize a flawed reality and expose society's distorted way of looking at it.

Translated people

In "Pravda", Cherkassky-Nnadi turned her sarcastic gaze on both Israel and Ukraine (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021), yet some of the flashbacks to the past were nostalgic. Indeed, sentimental memories of her childhood in Ukraine became the main theme of the exhibition "Soviet Childhood" (Rosenfeld Gallery, 2018; Fort Gansevoort, New York, 2019). One of the paintings also included in "Pravda" shows a girl getting ready for school (Figure 3). Interestingly, there are elements in this canvas that can link it to another painting (Figure 4) featured in "Women Who Work", turning the later painting into a sort of intrasemiotic translation of the earlier one. Cherkassky-Nnadi was aware of this possible connection though she claimed that it was not intentional. She told the interviewer that only after starting to paint women in the sex industry did she realize that many of them were from Eastern Europe and the FSU. In fact, she recognized specific figures from the "Soviet Childhood" series in some of the paintings:

> For example, one particular painting comes to mind, "To School", which I did in 2015. A girl is getting ready for school, putting on her clothes while sitting on her bed. She is in a very similar room, and her role [*tafkid* in Hebrew] is similar to that of the anonymous sex worker. The same tapestry hangs on the wall behind them. I simply did it unconsciously! (Arttelling 2021; our translation)

Aside from the tapestry, there are other similarities, such as the desk and the objects on it – a reading lamp and writing materials. But the notebook on the girl's desk has

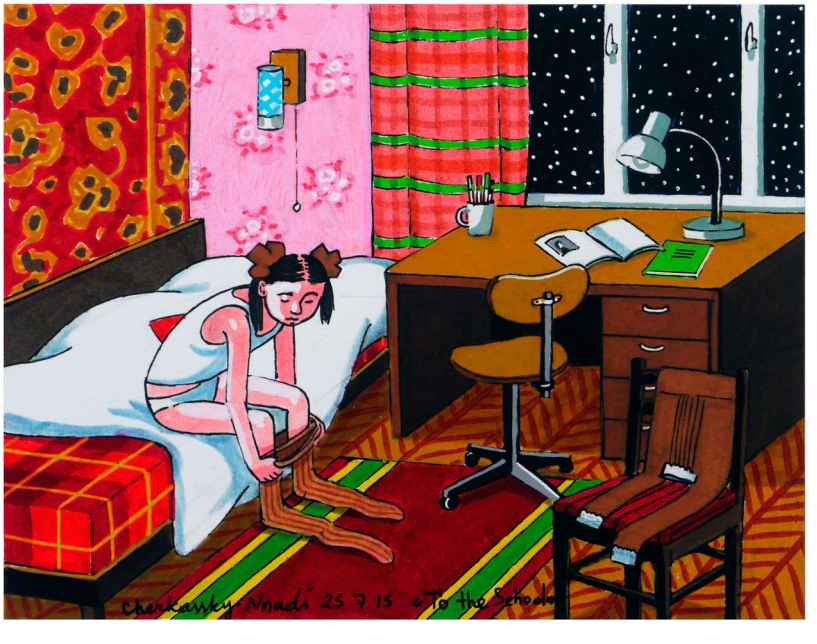

Figure 3. To school.

Figure 4. A sex worker (b).

been replaced by the banknotes that the woman in the later painting is counting. By implication, the innocent looking girl, with her girl's underwear and hair ribbons, has turned into a sex worker. The latter in particular evokes the tradition of painting women in intimate situations, which puts both the artist and the audience in the position of voyeurs. In this case, however, showing the woman in her underclothing emphasizes her vulnerability, in line with Cherkassky-Nnadi's criticism of the exploitation of women – especially migrants – by the sex industry. The implied linkage with the move to a new country turns these two paintings into a particularly disturbing realization of the idea of "translated people", and a reminder of its potential destructiveness.[6]

A reluctant sharing of space

Figure 5[7] reflects another aspect of Israeli reality: two communities that are alien to one another – immigrants from the FSU and Orthodox (especially ultra-Orthodox) Jews – sharing the same urban space. This situation – living side by side despite their incompatible ways of life and sets of values, as in this painting – is often the result of their common need for low-cost housing. In Cherkassky-Nnadi's painting, the Orthodox community is represented by the Judaica (*tashmishey kdusha*) store and the two passers-by, easily identified by their garments. In contrast, the picture's main feature is a delicatessen that sells non-kosher food. Many shops of this kind were opened in neighborhoods inhabited by the immigrants, illuminating the claim that inanimate objects, and food in particular, "serve as powerful symbols of migrant and diasporic belonging" (Karas 2022, 5). In fact, the opening of these shops triggered hostile and sometimes violent reactions, and some of them were even torched (see e.g. Ben-Zur 2007). In this painting, however, the relationship between the two communities seems to be one of mutual (though silent) acknowledgement. The passers-by ignore the delicatessen where Jewish laws and norms are being openly violated: the sausages (which are probably non-

Figure 5. A delicatessen selling non-kosher food.

kosher) are displayed side by side with the dairy products, an unlikely sight in most Israeli food stores, highlighted here by the contrasting colors of the two kinds of food. The large sign on the wall informs the customers that pork – camouflaged by the code name *lavan* (white) – is on sale. This is ridiculous not just because Israelis know full well what is meant by white meat, but also because the picture deciphers the code name, which is superfluous here in any event. The bottles atop the display case probably contain vodka, hinting at the drinking habits of the immigrants. Thus Cherkassky-Nnadi's painting displays a human, as well as a visual and linguistic landscape (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010), where contrasts coexist even if their coexistence is forced and involuntary – a status quo which may count as approximating Butler's idea of "ceding ground" (2012, 2). At the same time, it discloses the artist's sense of the absurd (Veatch 1998), and her humorous and ironic treatment of her subject matter.[8]

Hybridity in *Collectio Judaica*

In this section, the focus shifts from Cherkassky-Nnadi as an observer to her own navigation between contradictory positions, which results in hybridity. The works discussed are from the exhibition *Collectio Judaica*, which was first presented at the Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv (12 December 2002 – 3 March 2003)[9] and later displayed in the National Library of Israel and the Jewish Museum in New York, and then purchased by the Israel Museum (Handelman-Smith 2012).

The exhibition caused a furor because of the presentation of Jewish elements through anti-Semitic images, a provocative but not unprecedented practice in Israeli art (Dashevski 2021). One of the prominent pieces, displayed side by side with dolls and other objects imitating anti-Semitic representations of Jews, was the Aachen Haggadah. Cherkassky-Nnadi created it when she was in Aachen, Germany as part of an artist exchange program. The title of this artwork creates the impression of an authentic historic artifact (like the Trieste Haggadah of 1864, for instance). In reality, Cherkassky-Nnadi re-illustrated the Haggadah – the text read during the Passover Seder (ritual

feast). Adding illustrations to a pre-existing verbal text in a way that significantly affects its meaning is a clear example of the multimodality of her art, which we have already witnessed in other works. In her illustrations, inspired by both Jewish and Russian artistic traditions, images of birds are interwoven with stereotypical figures of *Hasidim* (Jews belonging to a specific segment of Orthodox Judaism) wearing *shtreimels* (typical fur hats), and elements from early twentieth-century Russian art. The graphics, which abound with decorative elements in red, white, black and gold, are striking, but at the same time, disturbing given the violent content of the text that celebrates the victory over the ancient Egyptians and the destruction of Pharaoh and his people.

The *Aachen Haggadah* draws from two main sources. One is the Jewish-Russian artist El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky); Cherkassky-Nnadi's *Haggadah* alludes to both his modernist art and the illustrations he created for *Had Gadya* (a poem included in the *Haggadah*).[10] The second source is the *Birds' Head Haggadah*, a thirteenth-century German manuscript in which human figures are depicted with birds' heads. It has been assumed that the figures were drawn in this manner because *Halakha* (Jewish law) prohibits the representation of human faces. In Cherkassky-Nnadi's illustrations, by contrast, birds have human heads (Figure 6); thus they allude to the original prohibition, while at the same time violating it and bringing to mind anti-Semitic images of Jews portrayed as animals.[11] By violating the prohibition Cherkassky-Nnadi expresses, in a provocative way, the resistance of non-observant Jews, including many immigrants, to the dictates of the Israeli Orthodox establishment. Interpreted symbolically, the likening of Jews to birds evokes the figure of the wandering Jew – the object of other works in the exhibition – who travels (or flies, in this case) from place to place and never settles down. For many Israelis, this figure stirs up ambivalent feelings (Schweid 2014), which reverberate in Cherkassky-Nnadi's illustrations. On the face of it, the very decision to re-

Figure 6. The Aachen Haggadah.

illustrate the Haggadah exemplifies the relationship between cultural representations and "the sense of heritage, property and belonging" (Ianniciello 2018, 2), but typically of Cherkassky-Nnadi, her illustrations reveal her complicated and subversive attitude to the canonic text.

Another noteworthy work included in *Collectio Judaica* consists of three brooches, pieces of jewelry based on the yellow badge, which Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust (Figure 7). The brooches, a demonstration of "creative hybridization" and literal "badges of identity" (Ciribuco and O'Connor 2022, 2), epitomize Cherkassky-Nnadi's complex attitude toward Jews and Judaism: the symbol of anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews, which abuses the Star of David, becomes an ornament one can wear with pride, just like the Star of David pendants worn by many Israelis. The artist's engagement with materiality exemplifies the claim that objects, too, can undergo translation when they are moved to a new context which charges them with new meanings:

> If the emotional, cultural, and personal importance of objects in the migratory experience is undeniable, looking at it from a translational point of view means looking at the various ways in which the significance of a "thing" is expanded and transformed to encompass the movement of meaning across different landscapes. (Ciribuco and O'Connor 2022, 6)

A distance in time turns the objects concerned into bearers of memory (Simon and Polezzi 2022). However, Cherkassky-Nnadi's brooches are not just reminders of the past. Rather, her manipulation of the symbolic artifacts serves as a means to articulate her controversial ideas while remaining in the safe domain of art and aesthetics.

According to Liliya Dashevski (2021), the self-contradictory attitude to Judaism in *Collectio Judaica* expresses what many immigrants from the FSU experience. As mentioned, their self-perception as Jews often clashes with the way they are perceived by Israeli society, especially by the Orthodox establishment. As a member of this group, Cherkassky-Nnadi has often sharply criticized the attitude of the Rabbinate toward the immigrants. A blatant and straightforward expression of her antagonism, which she shares with many immigrants and non-observant Israelis, can be seen in the painting *The Rabbi's Deliquium*, in which the rabbi conducting a *kashrut* test is an object of mockery (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021). In the *Aachen Haggadah* and other works

Figure 7. Brooches.

displayed in *Collectio Judaica*, she offers a more subtle view of the Orthodox Jewish world through the fabric of quotations and by refraining from the use of caricature.

In Bhabha's view, as previously presented, the confrontation between contradictory positions leads to the emergence of "something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (1990, 211). Applying his approach to *Collectio Judaica*, one can imagine the process of artistic creation as taking place in a "third space", where Jewish subject matter is confronted with anti-Semitic images, with neither annulling the other (in defiance of any attempt at "purism", according to Dashevski 2021). The result is a series of hybrid works in which the persecuted Jew, an object of hatred (despised even by some members of the Jewish people), coexists with the proud Jew, who insists on Jewish tradition and its symbols. The allusions to the *Birds' Head Haggadah* in the *Aachen Haggadah* underline this duality, while the homage to Russian art evokes another tradition that impacts Cherkassky-Nnadi and her fellow immigrants. The criticism that characterizes her art does not disappear in this exhibition, but it is less blunt when compared to *The Rabbi's Deliquium* or *Itzik*, where the picture of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on the wall completes the profile of the protagonist. Respect for Jewish history and long-standing traditions, on the one hand, and criticism of Orthodox Judaism and religious coercion, on the other hand, have led to a hybrid creation, which assimilates contradictory viewpoints without reconciling them.

A further step towards reconciliation with the Jewish world, echoing Butler's idea of "ceding ground" (2012, 2), can be discerned in two groups of works. The first, represented by Figure 8, provides a glimpse into the everyday life of Orthodox families in

Figure 8. An Orthodox family.

Figure 9. Jewish life in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

Israel. The uniform clothing of the children in the large family, the plastic grocery bags (also seen in Figure 5) and the houses in the background testify to their limited means and modest way of life. The artist's gaze is curious rather than alienated or mocking. The second is a series of paintings created during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. In these works, displayed in an online exhibition titled "Lost Time" at the Fort Ganse-voort Gallery, New York, she commemorates the life of Jews in Eastern Europe before and during the Holocaust (Figure 9). The exhibition includes a painting of her grandparents who perished in the Babi Yar massacre in 1941. Explaining this turnabout, Cherkassky-Nnadi said that the pandemic and the lockdown brought back memories of the greatest catastrophe "in the sub-conscious of all of us" (Barnea 2020; our translation).

Conclusion

Like her own life story, Cherkassky-Nnadi's art is "borne across" cultures through homages, references, materials and styles. Shifting between sharp criticism and elusiveness, attentive observation, bluntness and empathy, she rephrases her multifaceted identity as a Rushdiean "translated woman", thus exemplifying the triangular connection between translation, migration and art.

In her surprising and sometimes devious artwork, she continuously illuminates the idea that cultural translation takes place when "self" encounters alterity, particularly in a situation of domination or asymmetrical power relations. Yet she challenges the term "alterity" via her elaborate use of stereotypes, which she deliberately manipulates in a way that keeps her viewers alert to the tendency of automatically internalizing them and then being ashamed of their prejudiced spontaneous reaction.

Does she really mean to grant the suppressed minority groups that she portrays "an agency through incommensurable (not simply multiple) positions" (Bhabha 1994, 231)? Or are her artistic skills and vast cultural references the main focus of her works, which might shift the attention from the act of resistance to complicity with the artistic establishment that reacts favorably to her works?

It is hard to tell whether each of her works is hybrid in Bhabha's sense, but in an overview, her provocative exhibitions do create "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1990, 211). As we have demonstrated, Cherkassky-Nnadi shifts between her positions as a critic, observer, activist, and confrontational artist in a most cunning way, which makes it easier for the groups she criticizes to embrace her art, purchase and proudly exhibit it in both private and public venues. We might conclude by saying that in her work, Cherkassky-Nnadi redefines herself and her subjects as "translated" women and men through the contradictions and collisions she introduces into her works. Meanwhile, by lending itself to an analysis guided by the notion of cultural translation, her art facilitates our understanding of this notion and its complexities.

Notes

1. Bhabha refers to the earlier translation by Benjamin (1968).
2. The name Nnadi was added following her marriage to Hyacinth Obinna Nnadi.
3. See, for example, New Barbizon. Accessed August 27, 2023. https://newbarbizon.wixsite.com/new-barbizon/blank
4. See Lemish (2000) for the connection between the hair color and the stereotype.
5. From the point of view of the receiving country, all the immigrants from the FSU are regarded as "Russians".
6. The similarities between the immigrants' life before and after the immigration are highlighted in Cherkassky-Nnadi's diptychs which were part of the "Pravda" exhibition (Kohn and Weissbrod 2021).
7. From Yana Pevzner Bashan's blog. Accessed August 27, 2023. https://www.mako.co.il/video-blogs-weekend/Article-0cbc0be76522c71026.htm
8. Humor is created by incongruity between elements that coexist simultaneously (Veatch 1998), in this case – the two shops facing each other; while irony also involves criticism (Hirsch 2011).
9. *Collectio Judaica*, Rosenfeld Gallery. Accessed August 27, 2023. https://rg.co.il/exhibition/collectio-judaica/
10. For his artistic creation, see Perloff and Reed (2003). For his influence on Cherkassky-Nnadi's *Haggadah*, see Dashevski (2021).
11. Dashevski (2021, 96) notes that the birds in the *Aachen Haggadah* resemble ravens, and traces the sources of this anti-Semitic image.

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