

Translation: the double bind between cultural distance and cultural intimacy

An interpretation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Translating into English"

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Introduction - Distance & intimacy

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's most famous work is doubtlessly the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", first delivered as a lecture in 1983 and subsequently published as an essay in 1988. Her main argument is that the subaltern person (usually a woman) is situated in a social space that is too far from hegemony (or: the center of society where power is embodied by an elite) to have political subjectivity, which leads to the impossibility of her to speak and be heard by the "first world", or in other words: the privileged. The term subaltern has led to a great number of scholarly work attempting to understand the concept and how Spivak defines it. De Jong & Mascot refer to several major interpretations of the concept of the subaltern, shortly phrased as "the subaltern cannot be heard; the subaltern cannot speak; the subaltern is being silenced and the subaltern escapes us" (De Jong et. al. 719). The interpretation that perceives the subaltern as a person who cannot be heard as a result of the space she finds herself in has been the most accepted one since Spivak revised her article, De Jong & Mascot state (ibid.). The subaltern suffers under hegemony and occupies the space that is furthest from the powerful centre. These oppressed people live in "the margins of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (Spivak 1988: 283). Another scholar named Salgado elaborates on subaltern people in India, and says that while the tribals are the indigenous population of India, they are not recognised by the government. This means that they do not have basic rights and "representation both at home and abroad." He continues with: "It is almost universally acknowledged by sociologists, anthropologists and developmental economists that the condition of tribal peoples in terms of access to land and a living, health care and education has worsened in the last twenty years (...). The literacy rate of the rural tribal woman, for example, remains the lowest of all social groups in India. These are some basic 'facts' upon which analysts are agreed" (Salgado 113). Thus, the subaltern's position is marked by distance.

Further, Spivak says that "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow" (ibid. 288). This is to say that the subaltern is still not able to occupy a space where she can speak, even if the intellectual makes space for her to speak (instead of speaking for her, like other well-intentioned intellectuals attempt). Therefore, Spivak concludes that the subaltern is doubly in shadow. Maggio puts the problem of enabling the subaltern to speak as follows: "[I]t might be impossible to enable the subaltern to speak. The two traps - speaking for or pretending that they can speak 'on their own' - are always waiting for the well-intentioned intellectual" (Maggio 427). This means that we are always condemned to a representation of the subaltern, Maggio remarks. If the subaltern cannot speak and should not be

represented by the intellectual because that will cause disruption and violence, we must conclude with Spivak that the subaltern is unreachable and untranslatable.

This thesis, however, observes a change in focus in Spivak's later work about translating into English, where she underlines the ethics that are involved in translation of a text from a minority language. The cultural other is not inaccessible, in fact, Spivak calls translation the "most intimate act of reading." So, intimacy between the privileged and the subaltern or cultural other must be a possibility for her. As a translator into English, Spivak starts an intimate relationship with the other in the text in order to translate her respectfully. To this end, she elaborates on the ethics of the act of translation in her later essays such as "The Politics of Translation" and "Translating into English," both of which I will discuss in depth in this thesis.

Most scholars who write about Spivak, including Maggio, Morris, Bellamy & Shetty and Warrior, focus on her earlier work, especially the 1988 essay, attempting to interpret the subaltern, which led to various definitions of the concept within literary and postcolonial theory. My thesis, however, covers her later work, namely the essay "Translating into English" that was written in 2006 and included in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* with minor changes in 2012. I will point out how she moves towards a more optimistic view on the possibilities of proximity to the cultural other in her later essay "Translating into English."

I will argue that the desire of an English-speaking reader (or translator) to approximate the native other who is revealed within a text, can be conceptualised as a longing for cultural intimacy, but at the same time involves ethical responsibilities, for translation is mediation. The encounter between a global reader and a text from a minority language is always mediated by a translator, who plays a responsible role, Spivak indicates. Every mediator makes choices based on his/her cultural background and exerts power over the culturally different text. Spivak also says that "translation is the most intimate act of reading" (Spivak 2006: 2). Following her suggestion of an almost physically intimate bond between writer and reader (or translator), I argue that Spivak regards cultural intimacy and the ethical responsibilities that are connected to it, as a way of bringing the cultural other (that could be, but is not necessarily, the subaltern) out from under foreclosure.

Academic texts, just like fiction, are written in a certain style and never communicate unambiguously. In *Portable Monuments*, Ann Rigney states that historiography is part of literary practice, for it is verbal art and goes through discursive procedures attempting to make sense of a situation in the past (Rigney 363). This is also true for academic texts like Spivak's essay. Through an arranged collection of words, containing stories, paradoxes, theoretical associations and linguistic analyses of for instance Bengali words, Spivak examines the concept of translation and the ethics that are involved in the encounter with the other. Following Ann Rigney's argument, one could argue that Spivak's scholarly texts contribute to a literary practice. The reality of the 'native other' is mediated

through Spivak's academic narrative in which she uses verbal art and discursive procedures. The formal aspects of Spivak's writing help constitute her theory on the ethics of translation. Therefore I will specifically attend to formal aspects of her writing throughout my thesis. Several theorists have touched upon her abstract and rich language, like Campbell Jones, who points out that "Spivak's writing can be frustrating, and sometimes one senses that things could be put more clearly," but also admits that "[i]n this chapter I do not have the space to do justice to the complexity of her arguments or her writing, which often require considerable work reading and rereading" (Jones, 237). This is what I consistently did while working on this thesis: reading, more reading, and most importantly, rereading Spivak's texts.

It will be my argument that Spivak shows that, only if there is cultural intimacy on several levels - exemplified in the knowledge of the rhetoricity of the language, its speakers' cultural history and politics, and the notion of the trace - will the translator into English be able to create a responsible, non-violent translation of a text from a minority language. Following my investigation of Spivak's ethics of translation, I will analyse how she brings her own theory on the ethics of translation into practice through her English translation of Farhad Mazhar's poetry and Mahasweta Devi's short stories. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will elaborate on translation studies and the meaning of cultural translation, for Spivak can be situated in this particular field with her theory on the ethics of translation. I will briefly discuss Susan Bassnett and Lawrence Venuti, scholars within translation studies who distinguish between different translation strategies and point out how power is exercised over the translated culture. Subsequently, I will position Spivak within the field of translation studies.

Spivak's thinking is deeply rooted in deconstructivist thought as it is introduced by Derrida. I will introduce concepts such as the trace, presence, *différance* and the double bind in the second chapter. Only with the knowledge of Derrida's main thoughts and concepts, it is possible to understand what Spivak calls the ethics of translation into English. But perhaps even more importantly, the difficulty of cultural translation lies in the fact that the trace cannot be translated, as it marks both presence and absence. There is never such a thing as achieved translation, or achieved intimacy with the subaltern, because there will always be unreachable or unknowable parts of the other. So, distance and intimacy work together, just like presence and absence act reciprocally in the notion of the trace. Therefore, I will address Derrida's theory of deconstruction and the trace in the second chapter. The trace further refers to a play of presence and absence on a second level. Distance and intimacy are never completely separated in Spivak's academic thinking throughout the years. Her theory presents the subaltern as a figure that cannot speak and be heard and thus finds herself in a space marked by distance. The role of the academic could be regarded as an attempt to disclose the oppressed position of the subaltern, that could lead to an increase of global awareness of the subaltern's situation, and subsequently give rise to "unlearning one's privileges" (Spivak 1988: 295).

This brings the privileged or First World person closer to the subaltern, though there will and must be an awareness of the impossibility of intimacy with the subaltern at the same time. Just as Derrida does in the theory of deconstruction, Spivak points at the presence of one term into the supposedly opposite term in her academic work. She shows that the notion of intimacy also involves distance and the term distance does not mean the absence of intimacy.

In the third chapter, I will discuss Sara Ahmed's theory on intimacy and read Spivak's essay about translating into English through Ahmed's theory as it is illustrated in *Strange Encounters*. Ahmed argues that any reader starts an intimate relationship with the stranger in the text, through which meaning is produced. The encounter with strangers involves approximating them, and at the same time to experience that "going native" is impossible. I will demonstrate that Spivak's theory and practice of translation are encounters with strangers. Further, through an in-depth reading of the essay "Translating into English", I will analyse that Spivak refers to the cultural, historical, linguistic and religious premises of the author when she speaks of the translator's responsibility to grasp the writer's presuppositions. In the fourth chapter, I look at several translations of Bengal literature that Spivak made, analysing how she handled the impossibilities of translation in Mahasweta Devi's and Farhad Mazhar's fiction and thus puts her own theory into practice by using her ethics of translation as a translator herself.

I. Cultural translation

In the introduction, I pointed out that the relationship with the cultural other is marked by distance and proximity. The difficulty of the seemingly paradoxical interdependency of the notions of distance and intimacy concerning other cultures is also a topic in translation studies. In this chapter, I will return to the idea of the subaltern, that I have touched upon in my introduction, and discuss the concept of cultural translation, as Spivak wrote about the ethics of cultural translation and works as a translator of the cultural other herself. I am hesitant to use 'subaltern' and 'cultural other' as interchangeable terms, for the culturally different text is accessible for the reader that speaks the minority language and the translator, whereas the subaltern is most likely not to be heard, read and translated. Texts from minority languages *could* deal with subalternity, but are not necessarily a subaltern account. Hence, I will use the term (cultural) 'other' or 'stranger' rather than subaltern when I discuss the process of translation of a literary text from a minority language into English. However, it is necessary to know the concept in order to understand Spivak's theory on the ethics of translation.

The subaltern as a term is coined by Gramsci, but Spivak developed it into a larger phenomenon. What would be an accurate definition of the subaltern? In his article on tracking the native informant, Henry Staten speaks of the subaltern as "the existence of a real, if inaccessible, subject position behind the concocted ideological figure" (Staten 112). The existing subaltern person differs from the figure that is represented by theorists in an attempt to bring the real subaltern to a space where she can speak, Staten says, and he emphasises the inherent inaccessibility of the subaltern. The desire of the theorist to give the subaltern a voice is problematic, although it is a benevolent attempt. Rosalind Morris brings up a great number of (mis)conceptions of the notion of the subaltern in a reflection on Spivak's essay, twenty-seven years after its first delivery. She addresses the misconception that the subaltern will be able to speak, only if power relations were different. Arguing against this, she explains that the cultural one cannot be "brought" into the other" (...) "because the subaltern (as woman) describes a relation between subject and object status (under imperialism and then globalization) that is not one of silence - to be overcome by representational heroism - but aporia" (Morris, 13). In other words: the theorist's attempt to represent the subaltern is problematic because the subject and object of knowledge will never be equal.

Even though the subaltern cannot speak, I strongly agree with Morris who calls attention to the compelling question that also underlies Spivak essay about translation into English and her work as a translator, namely: "How can we learn to listen?" (Morris 16). Every attempt to bring a "native informant" or subaltern out from under occlusion could be better than the previous one. Staten formulates the ultimate goal of the postcolonial literary critic very eloquently:

The literate, institutionally empowered critic or theorist seeks to articulate in writing the heretofore unheard experience, perspective, and interests located at subject positions that have not previously had access to such articulation; and the pursuit of this articulation, while it has obvious political overtones, is fundamentally an ethical task. (3)

He relates this to Spivak's attention for cultural translation, pointing at the field of literary translation of non-European languages and cultures into receiving Western languages, mostly English. The problem with cultural translation and translation in general has been "the ethnographer's confidence in the possibility of knowing the other in its otherness", an idea that started to falter and collapse after Derrida's *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* was published (Staten 113). Translation has always been regarded as cultural translation and thus has always dealt with differences across cultures, Staten explains. However, since translation studies only looked at translation across European languages, the ethnographic problems attached to cultural translation never received serious attention. Derrida referred to ethnology, because it studied non-European cultures, though from a Eurocentric perspective. Through his critique on the conviction that "knowing the other in its otherness" is possible and the anthology *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus, the academics' confidence in the possibility of knowing the other decreased drastically within anthropology and translation studies. So, the cultural other seemed to be less accessible than translators and ethnographers assumed. Despite the attempts to approximate the cultural other, this shows that her position in the world is still marked by distance.

The tension between distance and intimacy is also present in recent theories of translation. Lawrence Venuti, a prominent scholar in translation studies, is aware of the possibility of violence in the interpretation of the cultural other in the practice of cultural translation. He suggests a hermeneutic understanding of translation, and distinguishes two translation strategies: "domesticating" and "foreignizing" translation. The translator who translates domestically adapts the original text to the receiving culture and ensures that foreign readers will understand the text or even identify with it. A foreignizing translation focuses on the cultural and linguistic differences, and preferably shows these instead of transferring it into a familiar story. This distinction has been first introduced by Schleiermacher, who influenced a large number of scholars within translation studies (Munday 48). Venuti argues that translating in a foreignizing way is a "highly desirable (...) strategic cultural intervention" in which the reader will be aware of the linguistic and cultural differences that come with the foreign text (Munday 226). Venuti favours the foreignizing strategy and regards it as "a policy of 'resistance' to the dominant 'ethnocentrically violent' values of publishers and literary reviewers," Munday explains (Munday 246). As a result of foreignizing translation, the translator's intervention becomes visible for readers of the receiving culture. A foreignizing translation is

characterised by its non-fluency, and the estranging or heterogeneous style that highlights the foreign identity of the text, Munday says. This is a strategic practice that strives for equality among cultures to counter the violence and domination that came with colonialism, which is not only politically but also linguistically visible (Munday 226). In my analysis of her translations from Bengali into English, I will observe that Spivak's translation strategy is a foreignizing one. She is not afraid to make the reader aware of the translator's intervention, even if that leads to non-fluency and adds complexity to the text. That is why some critics argue that Spivak overcomplicates her translations and even changes the initial meaning of texts due to her belief in the impossibility of translation and her foreignizing translation strategy, a critique I will elaborate on in the fourth chapter.

Venuti's theory on translation corresponds with Susan Bassnett's ideas, another prominent scholar in translation studies with attention for cultural boundaries. She remarks the following about the work of a translator:

“[T]ranslation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but it is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems.” (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 2)

Precisely this inequality is present in texts from a minority language into the English language, especially in the case of Bengal, because of the colonial past with the British imperialist rule over India. To express the totality of the other's consciousness in an empathetic way without letting the Eurocentric view influence the translation is severely difficult, Staten argues, but Spivak is an example of a cultural translator who is aware of the complexities of the practice (Staten 114).

Concerning the question whether the subaltern can speak, Staten declares that Spivak, for instance with her translation of Mahasweta Devi, makes “an attempt to bring a ‘native informant’ out from under her occlusion or foreclosure” (Staten 115). Staten phrases Spivak's attitude towards the subaltern very eloquently, saying that the sensitive call to surrender to the text that Spivak makes does not lead to the “ultimate ethical encounter, which as such is in principle impossible.” He continues by saying that “the experience of this surrender seems to serve as at least an intimation of the encounter that can itself, as such, never be” (Staten 114). Hence my emphasis on Spivak's shift of focus from the subaltern as a distant figure, to the cultural other as a figure that has to be approached despite her inaccessibility. This latter interpretation is visible in her work as a translator from Bengal to English, but also in her later academic texts on the ethics of translation. Yet, every attempt at bringing someone out is another foreclosure. To put it in Derridean words: the real disclosure is forever deferred. So, intimacy is still inextricably linked with the notion of distance, just like the Derridean notion of the

trace is a play of absence and presence, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. One of the biggest paradoxes in Spivak's theory is the impossible necessity of translation. This is a paradox whose solution is forever deferred, and that is why Spivak forces theorists of translation studies, literary critics and translators to constantly return to it.

II. Derrida and deconstruction

Before analysing Spivak's theory about cultural intimacy, it is important to discuss the most prominent ideas of Derrida on deconstruction, since his thinking has highly influenced Spivak's academic position. Further, distance and intimacy work together, just as the notion of the trace is a play of presence and absence. Cultural intimacy is possible, but under the condition of recognition of the other's difference. Distance should be kept in mind in order to deal with the other culture in an ethical way. The impossibility of translation (especially from a minority language into a global culture) lies in the fact that the trace cannot be transferred. Therefore, there is always something that gets lost in translation.

The editors of the book *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation* which includes Spivak's essay about translation into English, regard her contribution as a reminder of the translator's responsibility and the ethics that are involved in the practice of translation, especially regarding non-European texts. They remark Spivak's demand from the translator to inscribe the "trace of the other, the trace of history, and even cultural traces" in which trace is understood as a "marker of anterior presence" (Bermann et. al. 91). Since the trace is a term that comes from Derrida and his theory of deconstruction, it is necessary to elaborate on the deconstructionist meaning of the concept. First we have to understand what Derrida says about language. Lisa Foran, writer of *Derrida, the Subject and the Other* adequately explains: "Each person speaks a 'version' of a so-called language, an idiom of sorts that reflects numerous historical and political traces" and "language, religion and the state are intimately entwined. There is (...) a loss of presumed origin which must be recreated as a false memory; a prosthesis of origin" (Foran 180-181). The origin of language is effaced and unknown to the subject that uses it. Words and names refer to unique things through language, but these names fail to point at the thing in all its uniqueness. Instead, they always also point at the trace, the memory of origin that is not present in the word anymore. There are always meanings connected to a sign that cannot be conveyed in translation, because they are not there anymore or are not present yet. Foran explains: "A translation makes present a trace of the original not as fully present but as a memory of what was once the 'original'". It should also be kept in mind that all texts are 'translations' of other texts, in other words: they repeat words that were used before in a different context. Further, they contain their own future translations (Foran 203). Leonard Lawlor explains this in a more abstract and universally applicable way, saying that repeatability, through which our use of language works, "contains what has passed away and is no longer present and what is about to come and is not yet present. The present therefore is always complicated by non-presence. Derrida calls this minimal repeatability found in every experience 'the trace'" (Lawlor 3). In her preface to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak explains Derrida's understanding of meaning-making while at the same time

demonstrating the meaning of the trace: “The sign cannot be taken as a homogeneous unit bridging an origin (referent) and an end (meaning), as ‘semiology,’ the study of signs, would have it. The sign must be studied ‘under erasure,’ always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such” (ibid. xxxix). Spivak opposes deconstruction to structuralism that aims to give objective descriptions. She explains: “To repeat our catechism: for Derrida, by contrast to all this, the signifier and signified are interchangeable; one is the *différance* of the other; the concept of the sign itself is no more than a legible yet effaced, unavoidable tool.” (lxv) So, the sign points to something that is not there anymore, but it still bears the trace of an anterior presence.

Another crucial deconstructionist term is *différance*. Derrida’s change in spelling of the word ‘difference’ results in a double or extra connotation: it refers not only to a distinction, but also to a temporal delay. The word points at “the precondition of conceptual thinking, of thought in distinct terms, and the possibility of speaking in an articulated manner” (Lüdemann 42). Claire Colebrook’s use of the terms “trace” and “*différance*” within one sentence explicates them further: “The linguistic unit, ‘*différance*,’ is indiscernible at the level of sound from the word ‘difference,’ and is marked as different only through an inscriptive trace which is not present in the voice” (Colebrook 66). The trace of the term *différance* is its origin, the word difference, that is not present but is nonetheless referred to.

Next to the meaning of *différance*, we have to consider its worth and function within the theory of deconstruction. Spivak summarises the aim of deconstruction in her preface to *Of Grammatology*: “*Différance* invites us to undo the need for balanced equations, to see if each term in an opposition is not after all an accomplice of the other” (ibid. lix). Jones puts it the following way: “Deconstruction is not a matter of imposing something from outside, but of demonstrating that it was always already there” (Jones 230). In other words: deconstruction means revisiting former binary oppositions and disclose the involvement of one element in the supposedly opposite element. Other signs are present in the supposed meaning of a single sign through the working of the trace.

Now, I want to point at deconstructionist ideas in Spivak’s theory on cultural translation. One of the important ideas Spivak advocates is that a translation is never successful or achieved. She says: “If we are thinking definitions, I should suggest the thinking of trace rather than of achieved translation: trace of the other, trace of history, even cultural traces” (Spivak 2006: 107). A translated text is not an independent source of meaning, but points at the presence of certain traces, without fully disclosing these, because that is impossible.

The trace also influences the meaning that a text has to the foreign reader. An achieved translation would ignore or even deny associations the text potentially triggers for some people, whereas the trace marks the unsaid dimension of language. A translation could be called a “forever deferred arrival into the performative of the other, in order not to transcode but to draw a response,”

using Spivak's words from her critique of the discipline of Comparative Literature in *Death of a Discipline* (Spivak 389). Here, her influence by deconstruction and her deconstructionist approach of texts are disclosed. Spivak discards the idea of translation as transfer and rather regards it as an endeavour to move closer to the cultural other and to communicate, to create an environment where the reader is encouraged to respond to the other. In the preface to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak declares the following about the trace: "For Derrida (...) a text, as we recall, whether literary, psychic, anthropological or otherwise, is a play of presence and absence, a place of the effaced trace. And textuality is not only true of the object of study but also true of the subject that studies. It effaces the neat distinction between subject and object" (Spivak lvii). Any given text contains the presence of words, but also the absent dimension that underlies the words as they are composed into a specific text. The trace is effaced, but is nonetheless a crucial aspect that colours the text.

Moreover, the interplay of presence and absence is inherent to the subject as well, meaning that the reading subject does not have a fixed original identity. If an individual reads the cultural other's text for the second time several years after the first encounter, (s)he will have experienced things that slightly changed his identity or outlook on the world. The statement that the reader also does not have a stable identity corresponds with the word surrender, a term that Spivak uses to mark the responsible translator's attitude. To surrender to the text involves accepting your own unstable identity and accepting the text's provisional and contingent authority over you as a reader. There is a constant interplay between presence and absence at work, a phenomenon that Derrida calls textuality, both within the object and subject of study. No reader is able to rely on a definite self, every reading is different, hence the necessary surrender to the text that enables interpretation of or interaction with the text. Surrender is the condition of an intimate encounter with the text. Spivak speaks of the relationship between language, text and reader in her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

"From the understanding of language-as-writing offered in the first part of *Grammatology*, it follows that the play of signifiers cannot be completely mastered or controlled by an author: The writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce" (14)

Here, she points out that the author's text implies a relationship with the language he uses, which requires a surrender to the laws of the language. Similarly, the reader forms a relationship with the text, and together with the associations he receives as a result of the author's use of language, meaning is produced. The author does not have control over the process of meaning-making that comes with the reading of his text by a subject, the moment the reader starts a relationship with the text.

I have shown that the translator has to demonstrate the text's traces, but at the same time, this is impossible to achieve because the trace is a play of presence and absence. Thus, creating a definite translation is an impossible task. Spivak says: "The impossibility of translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind. It is an active site of conflict, not an irreducible guarantee" (Spivak 2012: 14). This coincides with the discussion of deconstruction in her translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, where she also mentions the double bind:

"The tool for [deconstruction] is our desire, itself a deconstructive and grammatological structure that forever differs from (...) and defers (...) the text of our selves. Deconstruction can therefore never be a positive science. For we are in a bind, in a "double (read abyssal) bind (...), We must do a thing and its opposite, and indeed we desire to do both, and so on indefinitely." (lxxviii)

Through the depiction of deconstruction as a double bind because of the impossibility and necessity of translation, Spivak implies that translation is both a blessing and a curse. It needs to be done, in order to do justice to texts from the periphery that otherwise would be denied access to the center only because they are written in a minority language.. However, the translation will never leave the original untouched and unharmed. This is a paradox of (un)translatability that will and should not be solved but needs to be constantly remembered in translation studies. As Spivak states plainly: "We transfer content because we must, knowing it cannot be done" (Spivak 2006: 102).

We have seen that Spivak's theory about cultural intimacy is fundamentally influenced by Derrida. However, a striking part in her essay is the point where she says "I myself prepare my translations in the distant and unlikely hope that my texts will fall into the hands of a teacher who knows Bengali well enough to love it, so that the students will know that the best way to read this text is to push through to the original." (Spivak 2006: 97). On the one hand, Spivak follows Derrida who argues that "the text has no stable origin" and "the authority of the text is provisional, the origin is a trace" (Spivak, xii, xviii). But on the other hand, she states that the translator should approach the *original* as intimately as possible to bring about a translation in an attempt to let the cultural other speak (Spivak 2006: 97). The idea that the text has no stable origin seems to contradict the translator's necessary endeavour to grasp the author's presuppositions and to approach the original as

intimately as possible. How is it possible to investigate and interpret the effaced trace? It is impossible, but necessary, Spivak argues. In that light, it is interesting to note her addition in the 2012 version of the essay, saying that “a translator should make an attempt to grasp the writer’s presuppositions, *pray to be haunted by the project of the original*” (Spivak 2012: 256). Both the translation and the original (if there is such a thing) resist each other’s existence, but this impossibility forces translators to return to their translations and the original, with the idea in mind that no translation is definite.

III. The theory of cultural intimacy

In the previous chapter, I discussed Spivak's influence by Derrida and positioned her as a deconstructivist theorist and cultural translator. Now, I want to zoom in on her theory on cultural intimacy as it is written in "The Politics of Translation" and "Translating into English". In this chapter, I will read Spivak's essay on translating into English through Ahmed's theory of intimacy and affect. I am aware of the fact that Ahmed's ideas are clearly influenced by Spivak's theory on subalternity. I will, however, use Ahmed's theory to read Spivak because she offers a refreshing view on intimate encounters with strangers and the production of meaning in a shared space. I will clarify Ahmed's theory about strange encounters first, and subsequently connect her theory to Spivak's argument about the cultural other who is present in a text and can be approximated by the reader. In the second subchapter, I will zoom in on two important aspects that the translator should consider in order to achieve cultural intimacy, according to Spivak. The translator should pay attention to the cultural, political and historical background of the language and its users in the first place, and the rhetoricity of the language should be investigated in the second place. This refers to the invisible dimension of the text, for instance, the history of a certain term and its connotations. In the third subchapter, I will discuss Spivak's metaphorical comparison of cultural intimacy with a rag that starts to fray and her encounter with a stranger in love poems dedicated to her, both of which are two personal examples of cultural intimacy.

3.1 Strange encounters

In her book *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed writes about affect theory and intimacy, especially concerning intimacy with "strangers," an encounter between people that do not belong to the same social group. But the concept of the encounter does not necessarily require the meeting of two human beings (Ahmed 6). One of the examples of an encounter other than a physical one between human beings is the encounter between reader and text. Spivak states the following in her Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*: "Although we customarily say that the text is autonomous and self-sufficient, there would be no justification for our activity if we did not feel that the text needed interpretation" (Spivak 1997: lxxiv). The text requires a reading and interpreting subject. I will read this statement about the nature of the text and its relationship with the reader through Ahmed's argument about the strange encounter between reader and text.

Ahmed points at the inherent strange encounter that underlies the act of reading a text. She argues that every text, every encounter is mediated and involves "the production of meaning as a form of sociality" (Ahmed 15). So, an encounter between reader and text is required for the production of meaning. Moreover, like language itself, a text's identity is partly confined to its recipients, and the

production of meaning should be understood as a social endeavour caused by the encounter of reader and text, she argues. Connected to this argument is Ahmed's critique of the idea that a text (and the stranger in it) is an absolute entity or figure that endures investigations by a reader, a viewpoint that is called "stranger fetishism". This fetishism cuts off the object (that is turned into a singular figure) from social relations. Ahmed strongly argues against the image of the stranger that is always recognised outside the 'we'. Instead, a "gesture of getting closer to" them enables the figure to take its shape (Ahmed 4). She argues that, during the reading of the text, the reader starts an intimate relationship with the stranger and that "[t]hrough being read the text comes to life as text" (Ahmed 7). As a result of that encounter, meaning is produced. She puts it the following way: "By 'coming together' at a particular time and place, the reader and the text generate certain possibilities and foreclose others" (Ahmed 15).

Ahmed argues that stranger fetishism could be avoided by disclosure of the social relationships that are deliberately concealed, that is to say, the examination of the birth of strangers through processes of inclusion and exclusion. To this end, Ahmed uses the concept of encounter, "a meeting which involves surprise and conflict" (Ahmed 6). Spivak refers to an element of surprise in the encounter between reader and text, specifically the global audience that reads the poem "Sri Ram Paramhansa" by Farhad Mazhar in English. She remarks the following about this poem: "Today, when the great tradition of Islamic secularism is tarnished, it seems particularly important to allow poetry such as this to launch us on an imaginative journey that can be risked if reader and translator venture beyond the sanctioned ignorance that guards translation from the languages of the global South into English" (Spivak 2006: 13). This statement is a critical comment on popular translations into English, saying that these often imply ignorance, an ignorance that is rooted in Western dominant perspectives of Islam. This is exemplified in the notion of Islamic secularism that is increasingly perceived with suspicion in Western cultures. This poem challenges this notion and allows the reader to make an imaginative journey, Spivak argues. This leads to a feeling of surprise, for the text in translation shows us a notion of Islamic secularism that most likely contradicts (and particularises) our Western understanding of Islamic cultures as necessarily strictly connected to religion.

Next to surprise, encounters also involve conflict, Ahmed states. This is what Spivak means when she says: "The impossibility of translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind. It is an active site of conflict, not an irreducible guarantee" (Spivak 2006: 14) Especially the trace is what Spivak regards as a site of conflict, a concept that she as a translator always keeps in mind to achieve the opposite of an "achieved translation". It relates to a typically deconstructivist idea that there is no such thing as determination; meaning is not fixed but forever deferred. She continues by explaining that "the thought of a trace looks like the possibility of an anterior presence, without guarantees" (Spivak 2006: 14). Translation is impossible and involves conflict because the text does not allow for

reduction or change. This is specifically difficult if the text has to be transferred from a minority language (namely Bengal) into English, two language areas that bear the history of colonialism and political and cultural inequalities.

So, as a translator, Spivak finds herself in a double bind, because the text does not allow for change. Ahmed also points at this difficulty when she talks about the anthropologist's desire to get to know "the stranger" and the impossibility of acquiring an absolute and finished notion of the other. Ahmed points out that "getting to know the strangers involves both the intimacy of becoming-like-them and the distanciation of knowledge" which presupposes "the impossibility of becoming or going native" (Ahmed 72). Spivak addresses the difficulty specifically when she says: "It is my belief that unless the paleonymy of the language is felt in some rough historical or etymological way, the translator is unequal to her task" (Spivak 2006: 8). The Derridean term paleonymy refers to the use of an existing word, with the connotations and meanings it has derived throughout history, in a new context, intending to confront the memory of the old by the new. Or in other words: "maintaining an old name in order to introduce a new concept" (O'Brien 268). What is the burden of history and paleonymy, then? The problem Spivak encounters in Mazhar's poetry concerns the words *murtad* and *dorra*. She says: "Translating these two words in Mazhar, I was also suggesting that the burden of history and paleonymy are added to this double bind" (Spivak 2006: 9). I suggest that Spivak was unable to find a term that encompasses the rich meaning of the words *murtad* and *dorra*. There is no existing English word that could be used for the global audience in order to understand Mazhar's poem, that was worth the risk of losing awareness of the trace. That is why Spivak states that "[w]e transfer content because we must, knowing it cannot be done, in translation as in all communication, yet differently. We transpose level and texture of language, because we must, knowing that idiom does not go over," because "[t]ranslation is not just the stringing together of the most accurate synonyms by the most proximate syntax," as is stated at the very beginning of "Translating into English." (Spivak 1, 10). Part of the intimate encounter with the stranger is the recognition or discovery of its impossibility, which is argued and demonstrated by both Spivak and Ahmed.

The translator has to deal with extreme differences between the particular and the global audience and is thus located at a site of conflict. Spivak's statement on the impossibility of translation alludes to the complicated and always incomplete investigation of the meaning of particular language as part of a wider historical context. Ahmed also underlines that the relationships between the particular encounter and general encounters (like historical conditions of postcoloniality) are extremely complicated and will never be grasped in its totality. But there are strategies that enable the reader or translator to come closer to the stranger. In the following section, I will discuss one element Spivak mentioned that leads to an irresponsible translation and one characteristic of an ethical translation that both Ahmed and Spivak agree on.

What could be the cause for a failed encounter? At one point in “The Politics of Translation,” Spivak remarks that a bad translation is a symptom of “a lack of intimacy with the medium” (Spivak 1993: 183). In her later work, she says something similar when she addresses “the lack of translators’ sympathy” (1993: 183, 2006: 1). I state that in that case, the translator failed to keep the other’s particularity in mind. This remark is based on Ahmed’s point on the infinite nature of responsibility and the finite and particular modes of response to others (Ahmed, 146). “To be responsible *for the other* is also, at the same time, to respond to the other, to speak to her, and to have an encounter in which something takes place.” We are called to respond to the stranger, keeping in mind the particularity of the other: “We need to recognise the infinite nature of responsibility, *but the finite and particular circumstances in which I am called on to respond to others* (147).” This means that “to respond to each other as if they were other *in the same way* would be a violence.” A bad translation as a sign of a lack of intimacy is caused by ignorance concerning the responsibility to respond to the cultural other on the one side and the particular circumstances on the other.

One of the translator’s most important tasks is to ask historical questions, to consider historicity. Ahmed calls this an indispensable element in the investigation of the general relationships that enable the particular encounter. “The particular encounter (...) always carries traces of broader relationships” of power and antagonism” (Ahmed 8). To reveal social relationships that help constitute “some-body” implies the examination of its encounters with other bodies. The translator has to delve deeply into the social and political circumstances and context the stranger finds herself in. This is exactly what Spivak underlines in her academic work on the ethics of translation, where she makes clear that the underlying political and cultural assumptions of both reader and text need to be kept in mind in order to make sense of the other in a respectful way.

3.2 The textualised stranger

In this section, I will specifically pay attention to Spivak’s theory on how to achieve intimacy with the cultural other, albeit ‘distanced’ intimacy. To investigate this, I will first discuss an example of an unethical translation that she mentions. Next, I will point at three claims Spivak makes about an ethical translation of the cultural other, namely that the translator should surrender to the text, pay attention to the author’s presuppositions and attend to the rhetoricity of the text. These are three steps towards an ethical translation of the cultural other. I define the author’s presuppositions as the author’s cultural, historical, political and personal background that manifests itself in the trace, and is, therefore, not entirely visible to the reader. The rhetoricity of the text has to do with the implicit dimension of the text, the connotations and effects of the language used. These points could be regarded as preconditions for an ethical translation of the cultural other.

First, I will point at one element of an unfortunate translations that Spivak mentions: the

so-called “with-it translatese.” Spivak coins this term in “The Politics of Translation”, where she criticises the suggestion of Western feminists to translate as many foreign feminist texts as possible. She believes it a fair proposal, although it may be a dangerous occupation: “In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest.” She exemplifies this by saying “so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan” (Spivak 1993: 182). With this example, she pictures the with-it translatese. Related to this critique is her remark that “the translator from a third world language should be sufficiently in touch with what is going on in literary production in that language to be capable of distinguishing between good and bad writing by women, resistant and conformist writing by women” (ibid. 188). So, the translator should have in-depth knowledge of the language and literary field in the concerning area in order to distinguish different styles, evaluate the texts’ quality and compare these to already existing works of literature. Professor of Translation Studies Luise von Flotow describes Spivak’s discussion of the with-it translatese as follows: it “serves to construct a largely misrepresentative view of third world women’s texts” and she continues saying that, however benevolent the request of Anglo-American feminists who want to translate as much women’s writing as possible, “the language of mainstream anglophone translation, obscures the differences between women of very different and differently empowered cultures, ostensibly in order to make the texts ‘accessible’” (Von Flotow 5). Here, the problem of ventriloquism occurs, a term that is used in relation to Western people who strive to speak for the ‘other’, which is a rather dangerous occupation. The question remains why Spivak chooses to employ the term with-it translatese, rather than just translatese. She is the only academic who uses this term instead of translatese, which she perhaps did to underline the negative status of side effect that could be connected to a translatese; something unwanted that comes with the translation of a text from the margins that, in itself, is a benevolent endeavour. Flotow further explains about the with-it translatese that “it deprives the texts of their individual styles, styles which are by no means homogeneous within one particular culture, let alone across third world writing.” So, the with-it translatese “disregards the rhetoricity of the source text” (Von Flotow 5). I am quoting this phrase about the rhetoricity as well because it is a term that Spivak highly values with regard to cultural translation, as we will see in the next subchapter. As a translator, to achieve cultural intimacy with the cultural other, it is required to pay close attention to the rhetoricity of the text. We could conclude that to disregard rhetoricity thus leads to an unfortunate and unethical translation.

The first step towards an ethical translation involves mastering the language of the original text. This is necessary to be able to “surrender to the text,” that will enable the translator to achieve cultural intimacy. The surrender to the text will be “an intimation of the encounter”, Staten explains (Staten 6). In “Translating into English,” Spivak says that “the translator must not only make an

attempt to grasp the presuppositions of an author but also, and of course, inhabit, even if on loan, the many mansions, and many levels of the host language” (Spivak 2006: 95). Understandingly, she states that a translator should master the receiving language preferably as good as the native speakers. But this is not an immediate guarantee for a responsible and culturally intimate translation of the foreign. As Henry Staten formulates in his work on the native informant:

“To know the language intimately will not by itself guarantee faithful translation of a given text, since the subject position of the writer will inevitably be more or less heterogeneous to the translator’s. But intimate knowledge of the language opens at least the possibility of surrender to that culturally specific heterogeneity, the surrender that would make something like translation possible. (6)

Here, Staten explains what Spivak means when she says that the translator should “surrender to the text” and “must solicit the text to show the limits of its language” (Spivak 1993: 183). Intimate knowledge of the other language is a fundamental requirement of a surrender to the text. The word surrender relates to a faithful and sensitive encounter with another language, specifically focusing on the culture’s complexities and sensitivities that are embedded in the use of certain words. In “The Politics of Translation,” Spivak states that “[u]nless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text” (ibid.). According to Spivak, to surrender to the text involves responding to its specificity. She encourages the ethical translator to accept the text’s difference and complexity and not pretend to know the other in its particularity. For the conviction that the Western translator is able to grasp and translate the cultural other leads to the danger of imposing one’s Eurocentric and imperialist premises onto the text of the cultural other.

3.2.2 The stranger’s presence in the author’s presuppositions

Spivak starts “Translating into English” by introducing an axiom. She mentions something that “should be an obvious point,” namely: “That the translator should make an attempt to grasp the writer’s presuppositions” (Spivak 2006: 94). I am encouraged to believe that this is indeed an obvious point, for a translation is never a technical or neutral transfer of words into a different language. A translator should, of course, investigate what he is translating, and look behind the words, explore what is the writer’s objective with the choice of certain words. But while reading the first sentence of the essay, I immediately have to think of the statement she makes on the next page, that “translation is the most intimate act of reading” (ibid. 95). Following Barthes in “The Death of the Author”, “the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix

writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on anyone of them” (1981: 211). So, it is impossible to grasp the writer’s presuppositions, to access the mind who ‘produced’ the writing, because nothing of his writing originated from his mind; “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” (ibid. 212). A reader cannot grasp the writer’s presuppositions, Barthes holds, and moreover, to attempt to distillate these from the text reduces the meaning potential of the text. As Barthes formulates it: “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (ibid.). So, Spivak’s axiomatic statement is far less obvious than she suggests. Perhaps Derek Attridge, also a deconstructivist, would argue against Spivak’s obvious point that a translator should approach the author as intimately as possible to grasp the writer’s presuppositions. In *The Work of Literature* he says: “The experience of otherness, singularity and inventiveness that many readers in English report is due in part to the differences between the two cultures. It is argued that this is not a reason for devaluing this response; on the contrary, it may be an important aspect of the novel’s value” (Attridge 2015). Exemplifying this with the case of Alaa al-Aswany’s novel *The Yacoubian Building*, he argues that a novel could be experienced as excellent by readers of the English translation, as a positive result of cultural distance. The reader experiences singularity and inventiveness, the two characteristics that Attridge assigns to excellent literature, due to cultural distance that resulted from the translation. So, one could also argue with Attridge that *because* (and not *although*) the translator did not grasp the writer’s presuppositions, the novel attains an excellent quality due to the experienced cultural distance.

Later on in the essay, Spivak slightly nuances her ‘obvious point’ by explaining that “[g]rasping the writer’s presuppositions as they inform his or her use of language, as they develop into a kind of singular code, is what Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher who has taught me a great deal, calls entering the protocols of a text —not the general laws of the language, but the laws specific to this text. And this is why it is my sense that translation is the most intimate act of reading” (Spivak 2006: 95). So, the writer’s presuppositions do not necessarily have to do with his individual intellectual development; the accessibility of his presuppositions is restricted to the text only. The editors of *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, describe Spivak’s concern with the writer’s presuppositions as follows: “Trace, as a ‘marker of anterior presence,’ is the operative concern here, as Spivak brilliantly translates and explicates Bengali texts (...), walking her reader carefully through the historical, linguistic, and religious presuppositions of their author, ‘translating the poet translating his language through the history of nation-states and internationality’” (Bermann et. al. 91). Here, the writer’s presuppositions are interpreted as the historical, linguistic and religious premises on which the author’s use of language is based. A translator can make an attempt to grasp the presuppositions not only by mastering the language at a native level but also by having in-depth knowledge of the

geopolitical and historical background of the language and its users. For this reason, Spivak pleaded for the incorporation of an area studies approach into the discipline of comparative literature, because of its attention for the acquisition of languages, not in an instrumentalist way, as a means to get to know other people, but as an end in itself (Spivak 2003: 391).

One does not need to learn every language in order to grasp the meaning of texts from all over the world, Spivak admits, but in the case of languages from the global South, it is not a waste of time, for these languages are likely to be dying, she argues in “Translating into English.” There is a bigger urgency for people that have the skills to access texts written in these languages than there is for speakers of the German, French, Italian and classical Greek language, Spivak argues. For, to understand Kant, Lacan, Dante and Aristotle one can consult a large amount of reading guides that are composed for non-natives. Moreover, these languages have far more speakers and are less likely to be dying (Spivak 2006: 97). Therefore, the phrase “translating the poet translating his language” means that the poet has to deal with his native language and re-frame (or translate) the words that already exist in language in order to create a new text. Following the editors’ interpretation, I would state that by ‘presuppositions,’ Spivak means the historical, cultural, linguistic and political context that words have, and the way the author plays with the underlying history and connotations of the words, that is to say, the way he favours particular words over others because they seem to fit the text better connotation-wise. Even though a translator will never be able to enter the writer’s mind, and should neither be concerned with that, the translator should be able to measure out which word with the most suitable historical connotation conveys the connotation of the word used in the original, while at the same time considering the inescapable notion of the trace as a marker of anterior presence, that inherently rules out translatability. So, following Spivak’s argument, this respectful approach of the cultural other in which the author’s premises are investigated will lead to an intimate translation of the cultural other.

3.2.3 The stranger’s presence in rhetoricity

In “Translating into English,” Spivak argues that translation is “the most intimate reading” (Spivak 2012: 94) and that it involves a surrender to the text (Spivak 1993: 183) as I have shown earlier. According to Spivak, a surrender is possible through the mastering of the other language at a nearly native level. To learn a stranger’s mother tongue is “the first obligation in understanding solidarity” or in other words: it is “preparation for the intimacy of cultural translation” (ibid. 191, 192). Under this condition, the translator can distinguish the rhetoricity of the language, which is the silent, unsaid dimension of the language, although it will never result in a definite or “achieved” translation of the foreign. The implicit or unsaid dimension of the text is what Spivak calls the “rhetoric,” in opposition to the logic of language. A mere logical translation (following a view that implies that translation is “a

matter of synonym, syntax and local color”) will disclose an unsympathetic dealing with the other (ibid. 182). Spivak refers to the rhetoricity of a language for the first time in “The Politics of Translation” after she raised the question “How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates?” (Spivak 1993: 181) She discusses how language is approached within poststructuralism, that “had shown some of us a staging of the agent within a three-tiered notion of language (as rhetoric, logic, silence). She calls for an entry of that staging “as one directs a play, as an actor interprets a script. That takes a different kind of effort from taking translation to be a matter of synonym, syntax, and local color” (ibid. 181-182). So, she pleads for a practice of translation that does not regard the practice as a transfer of words into the corresponding synonym in the second language - together with some attention for the correct grammar and typical features of the language as it is spoken in a specific area. Instead, she commands translators to dwell in the language and its speakers as if one is an actor that identifies with the character, as it were. To identify with someone implies a much more intimate and interwoven contact, for the ‘actor’ will feel to what degree identification and transference is possible. This method of translation implies a more subjective approach of the source language rather than a view on the original text as a mechanical combination of words. The rhetorical aspect of every language resists mere logical translation. Spivak points this out in the following sentence: “There is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity” (ibid. 181). Concerning the practice of translation, she adds: “If we emphasize the logical at the expense of these rhetorical interferences, we remain safe,” but she certainly does not say this to support hypercautious and hesitant translators. On the contrary, a translator should attend and try to translate the rhetorical interferences in the text, for “without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction of the non-Western scene is afoot” (ibid. 181).

The notion of rhetoricity can be further clarified by pointing at Spivak’s critique of Kant’s subject as it is addressed in *The Critique of Judgement*. She argues: “The subject as such in Kant is geopolitically differentiated” (Spivak qtd in Morton 113). Stephen Morton explains that “Spivak traces the imperialist determinants that underwrite Kant’s theory of the human subject in *The Critique of Judgement*,” and he further explains that “Spivak develops de Man’s argument to show how the suppression of rhetoric in the production of truth claims can have damaging consequences in a broader social and political field” (Morton 113). The task of a deconstructivist therefore is to disclose the rhetoric of a text, and thus to show underlying “axiomatics of imperialism” (Spivak qtd in Morton 114). The problem with Kant’s discussion of the concept of the subject is that he ignores the word’s rhetoricity. He writes from an imperialist starting point while presenting truth claims about the human subject and therefore Spivak critiques his disregard for the language’s rhetoricity.

The same problem occurs in the translation of a text from a minority language into English. A

mere logical transfer of words into foreign synonyms would imply that the translator imposes its European centred implicit views on the minority language onto the translated text. A responsible translator should therefore carefully attend rhetoricity. In relation to deconstruction, the term rhetoricity points at the idea that meaning arises in connection with other texts. To attend rhetoricity is to disclose the interdependence of historical and cultural texts in the process of meaning-making. This is connected to the idea that texts cannot be reduced to one stable interpretation, but receive their meaning through intertextual associations in the act of reading.

Spivak especially pleads for a deconstructive approach of language and the occurrence of meaning in literature; that means to look for meaning between signs instead of transferring words into its foreign equivalents that presumably bear the same meaning in themselves. This view becomes visible in the following quote: “Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much” (Spivak 1993: 183). Meaning will arise in the silence between words. One does not have control over what happens in between signs; every reader will experience a different outcome of the meaning-making process that is called interpretation, due to the countless idiosyncratic relationships between signs. The deconstructive strategy of translation, therefore, does not result in an “achieved” or stable translation, but it implies a respectful treatment of the source language and its historical context. The translator should be aware of the inherent interpretation that translation is, and also consider the fact that readers will interpret the text another time, each with a different outcome of the meaning-making process. In this thesis, my point is that Spivak pleads for a respectful and intimate translation by mastering the language in the first place, but also by knowing the history of the language and the political history of the area. Further, the translator should pay attention to the rhetoricity, the unsaid dimension of the text, in order to approximate the other. A definite translation of the other is forever deferred, but this does not absolve the translator from the task. The process that Spivak commands a responsible translator should go through, is what I call cultural intimacy.

3.3 The encountered stranger

In this subsection, I will discuss two very personal examples of cultural intimacy that Spivak mentions. The first thing I want to address is that she uses haptic terms to describe the encounter between translator and cultural other or stranger, which thus becomes a very physical and intimate endeavour. I will analyse this in order to understand why she believes cultural translation to be an intimate practice. Next, I will pay attention to a special poetry collection that was dedicated to Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak uses this example to make sense of the cultural other or stranger that can be encountered in a text, and she wonders if the figure in the text could be the same as the subject in real life that the poems refer to.

In "The Politics of Translation", Spivak connects the rhetoricity of the text to the so-called fraying of language, saying that the "rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner". She continues to use the terms rhetoricity and fraying within one sentence: "By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into frayages or facilitations" (Spivak 1993: 183). In this sentence, Spivak compares the act of translation (which implies juggling the disruptive rhetoricity of words) with selvages of a rag that start to fray, the threads starting to unravel. Etymologically, the word 'text', comes from the Latin verb 'texere' which means 'to weave'. A text is a carefully woven fabric that consists of words that could be seen as separate threads. This gives the concept of text a haptic quality. Spivak refers to this as well, as is shown in her wordplay of 'language-textile', a compound word that consists of two seemingly different nouns, that are nonetheless closely linked. She says the task of the translator is "to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay" (Spivak 1993: 181). The description of the task as "a love that permits fraying," can be interpreted as an intimate encounter that nonetheless will eventually change or even disrupt the original text a little because an achieved or stable transfer of 'the other' is impossible. Spivak goes one step further in her choice of haptic words regarding the encounter between reader and text: In her preface to *Of grammatology*, she metaphorically describes the relation between interpretation and text as a sexual union forever deferred (Spivak lxvi). And in "The Politics of Translation," she says: "To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical," suggesting that every intimate encounter with the text following an honest surrender is rather motivated by affection than by correctness (Spivak 1993: 183).

Now, I want to point at a remarkable example of intimacy with the textualised stranger (Spivak 2006: 14). Spivak ends the essay about translating into English on a personal note by responding to a book of poetry that is dedicated to Gayatri Chakravorty (ibid.). She analyses her experience of an encounter with a stranger named Benoy Majumdar (who knew her from the English BA at Presidency College, although the two never talked) in his poetry. In the poems, he refers to Gayatri as "my divine mistress" and "Dream-Girl" (ibid. 17). Throughout the book, he regrets her absence and at one point dreams of spending "an eternity of shared conjugal life" (ibid.). Spivak underlines that she is not the figure the poet refers to, and says that the translator of the poetry collection makes that easy mistake to give the reader this impression because the book is dedicated to someone called Gayatri Chakravorty. It is important to note here, that the translator could be an unknown English translator of Benoy Majumdar's poems, but also Spivak herself, which means that she reflects on her own way of translating these poems. She remarks that "this book offers what the poet sees as he casts his net." This phrase should be interpreted in light of the following quote:

“It is this particular ambivalence in the poems that seems exciting for this translator to access, as she makes the mistake of thinking the named subject is she. Thus the ambivalence seems to offer a codicil to that bit in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* that she had so liked: How does the other see me? Identity’s last secret. Coetzee describes the Magistrate describing his deciphering effort thus: “So I continue to swoop and circle around the irreducible figure of the girl, casting one net of meaning after another over her... What does she see? The protecting wings of a guardian albatross or the black shape of a coward crow afraid to strike while its prey yet breathes?” (16-17)

In order to understand this Coetzee reference, without having to know the exact story, it is most important to attend the cited phrase “casting one net of meaning after another over her.” Spivak accuses the translator of reducing Spivak as a person to a definite figure in the translation of Majumdar’s poems, whether that translator be Spivak or someone else. The translator casts a net of meaning over Spivak, the irreducible figure, as it were. Spivak rightfully asks herself what it is to be an “original” of a translation. We will never fully grasp the other in the text, even if she is translated in an intimate way. The moment a translator gets excited to fill in the gaps with a definite and comprehensive equivalent of what is described in the original, a certain degree of irresponsibility and a lack of sympathy for particularity could be ascribed to the practice of the encounter. In this passage, Spivak warns every translator for giving a definite meaning to a culturally different text, not even if it is love poetry dedicated to a specific individual.

In this chapter, I have shown the importance of a surrender to the text, and the necessity to pay attention to the author’s presuppositions and the text’s rhetoricity in order to achieve cultural intimacy as a translator. I have analysed that Spivak speaks about the encounter with the cultural other in very sensitive and haptic terms, and therefore alludes to an intimate encounter with the stranger. Further, I have shown that even though the cultural other may seem very closeby, as in the case of Majumdar’s poems dedicated to Gayatri Chakravorty, the figure always resists a definite interpretation. In the following chapter, I will move to an investigation of Spivak’s own translations, and specifically of how she attempts to become culturally intimate with the stranger in the text.

IV. The practice of cultural intimacy

The work *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, written by Mahasweta Devi, could be regarded as an example of literature about the subaltern or cultural other. As Spivak remarks in her translator's foreword to Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and his Arrow*: "One of the most striking characteristics of the novel is the sustained aura of subaltern speech, without the loss of dignity of the speakers" (Spivak vii). In this chapter, I will analyse how Spivak brings her own theory about cultural intimacy with the cultural other into practice as a translator. I will not systematically analyse the entire translated texts. Instead, I will point at a few aspects of Spivak's theory on cultural intimacy that are visible in her own translated texts. First, I will discuss one example of a translator's choice in *Chotti Munda* that makes the foreign identity of the text visible, leaving a lot to the foreign reader. After that, I will turn to an example in which Spivak reaches out to the foreign reader with an explanation of certain words in the original, showing the impossibility of translation. In the second subchapter, I will pay attention to Spivak's translation of Farhad Mazhar's poetry and her struggle with untranslatability that is visible in her choice to leave some words untranslated. Then, I will show that Spivak pays attention to the author's presuppositions, meaning that she knows and explains the history of the minority language. These are all examples of Spivak's attempt to translate the cultural other as intimately as possible. In the third subchapter, I will elaborate on her translation of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*, and conclude that Spivak aims at a foreignizing translation and that she wants to underline the particularity of the tribal experience in India. I will, however, also show the limits of Spivak's academic view on the ethics of translation, using Salgado's critique of Spivak's focus on the particularity of Devi's work in her translation as it is opposed to Devi's own claim to a universal account of the tribal experience.

4.1 Spivak's translation of Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and his arrow*

First, I want to show that Spivak's translation practice could be classified as 'foreignizing translation', as Lawrence Venuti characterises the translator's preference for showing the foreignness of the text rather than transferring it into a perfectly comprehensible text for the receiving culture. In her essay about translating into English, Spivak tells she had a conversation with Sujit Mukherjee, an Indian translator from Bengali into English about the choice of words in her translation of *Chotti Munda and his arrow*, written by Mahasweta Devi, an Indian author who writes in Bengali. She finishes her analysis of the conflicts that a translator has to deal with by saying: "The translator must play such games," referring to the recurring choice between bad and worse that a translator faces. In her discussion of several possible verbs that a translator into English could choose for the sentence "Arms and legs *in hock* to the moneylender," Spivak explicates: "mortgage [instead of "in hock", RJ] would

have been an error of level, and would have missed the pun” (Spivak 2006: 96). Hock, however, “is sufficiently confusing in its etymology to carry the promise of nuances.” To the global reader in English, *in hock* is an expression that is not so frequently used as mortgage and could therefore be confusing. From this example, I conclude that Spivak shows her preference to foreignizing translation, following Lawrence Venuti, who I discussed in the first chapter. In other words, Spivak says that a proper translation should contain words that are ‘sufficiently confusing’ to the foreign reader instead of a more comprehensible translation, oriented at the receiving language and its users.

Most readers of Spivak’s essay and the English translation of *Devi* have no choice but to accept Spivak’s word choice and justification. After all, Spivak is the only one to argue why she thinks a certain verb fits the context of the original phrase better since most readers do not know the Bengali language at all. She acknowledges that she was in doubt about her translation of the phrase “Didn’t Chotti speak of ‘rights’?” (Spivak 2006: 96). So still, foreignizing translation will not produce an ‘achieved’ translation. The reason for her hesitation lies in the fact that ‘Hok’ signifies “not rights alone but a peculiar mix of rights and responsibilities that goes beyond the individual” (ibid.). Compared to my previous example about the foreignizing translation, here, Spivak’s reaches out to the reader in English with an explanation of her struggles as a translator. The reader needs more information about the rhetoricity of some Bengali words and phrases, in order to understand her complicated and responsible task as a translator. Spivak attends the text’s rhetoricity and wants to transfer this underlying aspect for the text to the foreign readers. Spivak ends the paragraph by strongly concluding: “I have failed in this detail. Translation is as much a problem as a solution” (ibid.). Here, the typically Spivakean paradox that shapes the essay comes up again. She holds a position of authority regarding her knowledge of the Bengal language and its history; requesting the reader of the essay to trust her justification for certain translation choices. On the other hand, she shows and acknowledges her inadequacy. Translation is a necessity that requires skilled masters of the language, but at the same time, it is an impossible job, and its result is forever deferred, for no translator can seamlessly transfer one culture into the other. To become culturally intimate in order to translate the stranger in an ethical way involves attempting to approximate the cultural other while knowing your attempt will not suffice, and this is what Spivak realises every time she encounters the other in a text.

4.2 Spivak’s translation of Farhad Mazhar’s poetry

In this section, I will look at a translated poetry collection written by Farhad Mazhar and zoom in on specific points that show how Spivak puts the theory of cultural intimacy into practice. After her discussion of *Chotti Munda and his Arrow*, Spivak reflects on her translation of Farhad Mazhar’s poems, who is an activist-poet from Bangladesh (Spivak 2006: 97). She points at the translation’s limits and says the following about her translation of Mazhar’s *Untimely Notebook*: “I am unable to access *murtad*

and *dorra* because they are *tatshomo* words from Arabic. I add an explanation of this word and the companion word *tadbhabo*, words that were known to every Bengali schoolchild when I went to high school in the early fifties. I am not a Bengalist, merely a translator in love with the language. What I am about to give you is a generalist's sense of things" (ibid.). Here, Spivak becomes a whole different scholar who approaches her subjects of study practically and pragmatically, compared to her complex theoretical contemplations in her earlier texts. Her view on untranslatability is put into practice; through the addition of an explanation instead of a translation of a term. The appearance of *murtad* and *dorra* in Spivak's English translation of Mazhar's poetry is a sign of untranslatability, that I would also characterise as a sign of foreignizing translation, following Lawrence Venuti. The non-fluency of the text caused by the use of words from different languages or 'awkward' language use makes the foreign identity of the text visible. This translation strategy shows her belief that there is no such thing as an 'achieved translation', but that the translator should nonetheless try to become as intimate as possible with the cultural other.

Spivak also shows the interconnectedness of languages, especially Bengali, that includes a lot of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian loan-words. She explains the history of the minority language to the foreign reader. Here, the meaning of the author's presuppositions she referred to in the very first sentence of the essay becomes a lot clearer and more practical. A translator has to be familiar with the historical, linguistic and religious premises the author had when he wrote the text, in an attempt to approach and ultimately transfer the text as intimately as possible. She explains how she treated the loan-words in the additional explanation to her translation of Mazhar's *Untimely Notebook*: "Tat in these two words signifies 'that' or 'it' and refers to Sanskrit, one of the classical languages of India, claimed by the Hindu majority. They are descriptive of two different kinds of words. Tadbhabo means 'born of it.' Tatshomo means 'just like it.' I am using these words by shifting the shifter tat - that or it - to refer to Arabic as an important loan-source" (Spivak 2006: 99). A complete history underlies the manifestation of the Bengal language and Spivak makes the reader of the English translation aware of this. The Sanskritized Bengali, after it was purged from everything Arabic-Persian, "became the vehicle of Bengali nationalism and subsequently of that brand of Indian nationalism that was expressed in Bengali" (ibid.). Here, Spivak extends the historical presuppositions of the author's use of language by adding the political context of the Bengali. Especially the Partition of India in 1947 made a huge impact on the Bengal language and gave rise to a movement of purging the Hindi language of the Arabic and Persian elements, because of the political burden of certain words. Spivak zooms in on the attitude of the translator towards the purged languages, that are still present in some texts that the translator wants to translate. Spivak says she "encounter[s] them as part of a general movement in Bangladesh to restore these components" and: "there can be no question of transforming the Sanskrit base of Bengali" (ibid.). She interprets Mazhar's use of Arabic vocabulary as "an attempt persistently

to mend the breach of a partition that started (...) long before the named Partition of India in 1947. It is to restore a word-hoard that went underground” (ibid. 100). In other words, Spivak states that Mazhar restores the hidden Arabic-Persian heritage of the Bengal language.

She also says: “In this case as elsewhere, I am interested in the political mode of production of the collectively accepted existence of named places, whose “other names” linger on as archaic or residual, emergent as local alternative or opposition, always ready to emerge (ibid. 101). From this, it appears that Spivak regards the reintroduction of hidden languages like Mazhar does in his poetry as a form of opposition. She pleads for the visibility of these signs of resistance in translation, although they “linger on as archaic or residual”, and are not as visible as “the collectively accepted existence” of the contemporary Bengali daily language. The trace needs to be translated, to put it in Derridean words. This attitude corresponds with Spivak’s statement in her foreword to *Of Grammatology* that the text “must be studied ‘under erasure,’ always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such” (Spivak xxxix). Spivak pleads for cultural intimacy through a translation of the trace. This involves an in-depth investigation into the history of the language and its users. However, following Derrida, a text is a place of the effaced trace, a play of presence and absence (Spivak lvii). Precisely this places the translator in a double bind and makes the translation forever deferred.

So, considerable knowledge of the political history of a country and its effect on the language belonging to that area is crucial in the creation of an intimate translation. Spivak shows her knowledge through her discussion of the history of the independence of Bangladesh, the name and history of the province and its transition from language area into a nation-state. Even though Spivak grew up during the political changes and the related linguistic adjustments, she considers her knowledge too little to translate *murtad* and *dorra*, but enough to translate *ashamoyer noteboi* with “untimely notebook” thanks to Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations*. She says: “It is my belief that unless the paleonymy of the language is felt in some rough historical or etymological way, the translator is unequal to her task” (Spivak 2006: 101). In this subsection, I have shown that the translator should experience something of the inherent impossibility of translation, and know the history of the use of certain words, to be capable of translating ethically.

4.3 Spivak’s translation of Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast stories*

Mahasweta Devi grew up in a middle-class family with both parents being writers, but she mostly writes about the tribal people of India, based on oral narratives, experiencing that they are “an endless source of ingredients for writing’ (qtd. in Salgado 132). Her books are not the easiest to translate; according to Salgado, the language varies from “a mixture of folk dialects and urbane Bengali, slang and Shakespeare,” to “Hindu mythology and quotations from Marx” (Salgado 132). Spivak has translated four of Devi’s novels and short story collections into English. She thrives to make linguistic

and cultural differences visible, for instance by italicizing the English officialese words, in order to 'defamiliarize' Devi's work. Salgado regards this as "a move which serves to legitimize Spivak's own claim that Mahasweta's work creates an alternative, subaltern discourse that undermines the authority of nationalist constructions of a unified, democratic India abroad" (Salgado 134). At the same time, Devi herself remarks about one short story that "[i]f read carefully, [it] will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalised people all over the world", suggesting that her stories reflect a more universal picture of the tribal experience (qtd. in Salgado 135). Salgado therefore critically wonders: "Is Mahasweta indeed such a radical writer, altering the shape of current discursive and theoretical practice as Spivak claims, or is Spivak using her work as literary fodder to boost her antiessentialist enterprise?" (Salgado 134). In other words, Salgado asks if Spivak's interpretation of Devi's work as radically showing cultural difference and countering nationalist authority corresponds to Devi's own approach to the subaltern experience of the tribals. Salgado further explains her critique of Spivak's interpretation and translation of Devi's work, saying:

While Spivak, the translator, is busy advocating the need to address cultural difference and disjunction in Mahasweta's texts, the author herself is keen to focus on the generalized tribal experience in her work and posit the need for the tribal people's insertion into the Indian mainstream – a need, of course, which undermines Spivak's claim that Mahasweta's work punctures nationalist discourse. (135)

Salgado points out that this is a contest over the ownership of the texts, placing Mahasweta as a re-teller of tribal tales opposite to Spivak as the advocate of the cultural particularity and disjunction that is present in Devi's text. This difference between the original and its culturally transferred counterpart could be problematic, for the original is increasingly replaced by translations, Salgado argues, so that people will never discover how the translation differs from the original. She depicts how Spivak translated "Breast Giver" in a significantly different way, already visible in the title that another translator Ella Dutt translated as "The Wet Nurse" (Salgado 140). Salgado argues that Dutt mainly translates in a domesticating way, aimed at a British-based audience, whereas Spivak "chooses to defamiliarize" (Salgado 141). She backs this statement with an example from the story "Breast Giver", where Spivak accentuates a traditional song, in an attempt "to bring out the varieties of cadence and social inflection in spoken speech" (ibid.). Salgado remains critical and says that "there are times when Spivak's attempt to defamiliarize - or to use her words to perform an "intimate act of reading" - involves a shift in signification which is troubling," backing this statement with examples of Dutt and Spivak's substantially differing translations of a story by Devi (ibid.). She continues her argument with another example, where "Spivak's desire to surrender to the text has obviously led her

to lose sight of the reader's need for sense" (Salgado 142). She points at the incomprehensible translation of a phrase in *Breast Giver*: "Jashoda received a portfolio when she heard her proposal" - to become a wet-nurse (ibid.). Indeed, this phrase conveys nothing to me. Salgado continues and says that perhaps the translator becomes visible in these kind of incomprehensible sentences: "The absurd semantic shift results in the inscription of the very act of translating into the text, revealing not only the elusiveness of language and the multiplicity of potential meanings embedded in the written words, but also the intervention and active manipulation of the translator herself" (ibid.). Salgado concludes her article by saying that Spivak's "translations are marked by discontinuity, self-reflexivity, discordant dialogicality and the overt inscription of cultural borders which collectively work to reveal the very resistance to interpretation that the act of translation conventionally obscures" (ibid.). Salgado thus argues that Spivak foregrounds and celebrates the particular, the peculiar, the unique, whereas Devi tends to emphasize the national and universal when she speaks about her stories.

Spivak's celebration of the pluriformity of language as it is invoked by a diversity of cultures becomes visible in her translations. This corresponds with the point I addressed earlier in my discussion of Spivak's theory about cultural intimacy, namely that Spivak calls for entry of language as an actor who interprets a script. To do this, it is necessary for a translator to empathise with the character she will represent, or rather: embody in a new text. Therefore, an intimate relationship is demanded. However, this does not mean that every reader will have the same culturally intimate encounter with the other in the text. Every interpretation is different, so every translation will be different as well, demanding from the author of the original to let readers freely engage with the cultural other in the text.

Rosalind Morris is also mildly critical of deconstructionist literary criticism in the introduction to *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*: "[I]t is not tendentious to note the degree to which deconstructionist (and other) literary criticism in the Anglo-American academy tends to attribute to the third world literary text an irreducible particularity, to withhold from it the capacity to signify the general (...) and to demand, instead, that it signify itself as, precisely, "third world" literature. This gesture constitutes the inverse and displacement of the desire that subalternity be given a voice" (Morris 14). Her critique involves the attribution of particularity to third world literature, in an attempt to prevent it to signify the general, a quality that the Anglo-American academy, for instance, grants Charlotte Brontë and Mary Shelley. This mark demands every work to fit into the genre of third world literature, resulting in the impediment of the goal to let the subaltern speak. Salgado remarks something similar and ends her article on a critical note about Spivak's approach, because "her grand narrative purporting to present difference in fact works to consolidate a single perspective of the tribals" (Salgado 142). Here, Salgado argues that through Spivak's specific approach to minority language literature, characterised by discontinuity, exemplified

by dialogues in slang and the use of idiom that is foreign to a Western audience, Spivak depicts the tribals in a way that affirms a single perspective, just like Morris notices that deconstructionist literary criticism in the Anglo-American academy (so not particularly Spivak) explicitly abstains from attributing universality to third world literature and thus limits the text in its abilities.

In the preface to *Breast Stories*, Spivak puts forward an important argument why she believes attending the particular in third world literature is so important. She says: “For the rest of the world’s women, the sense of whose personal micrology is difficult (though not impossible) for us to acquire, we fall back on a colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval” (Spivak 2). Because of the tendency of Western critics to interpret non-Western stories through a colonialist lens, the particularity of non-Western lives requires careful attention. Only with this close attention for specificity is the Western literary critic or translator able to approximate the lives of strangers. Cultural intimacy involves establishing some kind of relationship with the text, knowing that it will be a provisional and unequal one. It means to listen to the subaltern in an *attempt* to grasp and, eventually, translate her. Precisely the many differences between interpretations and translations of the same original, exemplified in the case of translations of Devi’s stories, show the impossibility and provisionality of the practice of translation.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown that Spivak, both as an academic and a translator, aspires to become culturally intimate with the other in a literary text from a minority language. Her claims about the translation of the cultural other are influenced by Derrida, which I showed by demonstrating the trace in the culturally different text, which is a play of presence and absence and therefore cannot be transferred into a definite translation. Following Sara Ahmed's theory, I have stated that Spivak's theory and practice of translation are encounters with strangers. These encounters involve approximating the cultural other, and at the same time experiencing that "going native" is impossible. Through an investigation of Spivak's arguments about the ethics of translation, I have argued that reader and text could become culturally intimate under a few conditions: the translator should surrender to the text in the first place, requiring a respectful attitude towards the other's complexity. Second, the translator should pay attention to the political and cultural history of the language and its speakers, and to the text's rhetoricity in the third place, which I defined as the unsaid dimension of the text: the connotations and effects of the language used. Over the course of the translation process, recognition of the impossibility to translate the trace is required, as it is a play of presence and absence, meaning that the cultural other cannot be transferred in an all-encompassing way. Only if these aspects are taken into consideration, an ethical translation of the culturally other could be made. Spivak herself advocates and shows the theory of cultural intimacy in her own translations of Farhad Mazhar and Mahasweta Devi, texts that I characterised as foreignizing translations because of its non-fluency to a global readership. The fact that Spivak's translations correspond with her academic position, in spite of Mahasweta Devi's claim for a universal story of the Indian tribals, led, however, to some critique. Minoli Salgado wonders if Spivak's translations function as a justification for her academic argument in favour of cultural pluriformity and particularity, or if they are an accurate transfer of Mahasweta Devi's radical story of the particular tribal subaltern. I have concluded, without considering which translation is the 'correct' one, that the fact that every translator interprets and translates stories about the cultural other in a different way, shows the impossibility and provisionality of translation.

Since we live in a globalized world where English is the new *lingua franca*, more and more translations from minority languages into English are produced. However, the English history of coloniality makes this retelling of stories through translation a sensitive issue, for the translator has the ability to exert power over the minority culture and reinforce colonial power relations by changing the original text. And since most translators work on their own, literary theorists should critically examine the translators' motives and the actual outcome of their process of cultural intimacy. I am

convinced that future research of the practice and ethics of translation is needed to receive acknowledgement from the entire literary world, regarding the translator's crucial and powerful role.

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